JYVÄSKYLÄ STUDIES IN EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL RESEARCH
361

Teppo Eskelinen

# Putting Global Poverty in Context

## A Philosophical Essay on Power, Justice and Economy

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis studies the ethical problem of global poverty from a point of view of political philosophy. The main problem is to establish, what poverty as an ethical concept means, and how it is brought about by social injustice. The main argument is, that poverty even in its most degrading forms is a social arrangement rather than something ethically resembling an accident or an ”original” mode of existence. Thus the ethical responsibility of alleviating poverty-related suffering in distant countries has to be discussed in terms of social justice, and refraining from contributing to harm on others, rather than in terms of charity.

Yet critical points are made about the notion of poverty alleviation via development, by arguing that development as a process allows for the appearance of new forms of poverty, rather than its abolishment. In addition, development is argued to be an always conflictual process, and thus a problem of distribution of goods and burdens. Thus development cannot be seen as a sufficient criterion for poverty abolishment, even though in the ethical significance of the concept derives from exactly supposing this.

Poverty is defined as fundamentally a matter of unacceptably unequal distribution of power both on local and international level. Locally, power relations affect several aspects of poverty, such as vulnerability, as well as the matter, who is in the position to define, what counts as development, and who can benefit from processes labelled as development. Internationally, power relations manifest in how rules are formed. Basically, any institutional virtue becomes suspect from a point of view of justice, as it is noted that overlapping institutions can be used by the most powerful agents for their self-maximising purposes.

In the discussion of harming, it is argued that living in poverty can be seen as state in which individual's negative rights are breached, although also other forms of harming do take place. This viewpoint is supported by an empirical understanding of people struggling for meeting their basic needs, rather than historical wrongdoings.

Keywords: Poverty, development, ethics, political philosophy, globalisation, harm, global justice.

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I dedicate this book to my daughter Usva, who began her life during the final phase of this work. This dedication is made in the hope that she will live her life in a world where the topic of this work, global justice, is better realized than it has been so far.

## CONTENTS

# FOREWORD

## Poverty and justice in the globalised economy

Most informed citizens of the world are familiar with the statistics describing global poverty. 34,000 children die each day due to poverty. That is about 210,000 children a week, or just under 11 million children under the age of five years every year[1]. Some 1.1 billion people in developing countries have inadequate access to water, and 2.6 billion lack basic sanitation[2]. Every sixth member of humanity is undernourished[3]. The figures alone create a feeling that the present state of affairs is wrong indeed. And yet, these are only figures, impersonal statistics that say nothing about the actual suffering that the individual human beings behind these figures are forced to face.

What makes these figures deeply disturbing is that there is no reason why the situation could not be different. Further, the situation does not tend to be significantly changing for the better, even though it has been exhaustively debated. Curiously, there does not appear to be lack of goodwill by the rich, or a dearth of international consensus that the problem is important and urgent. Awareness of the problem is far from recent. International poverty reduction efforts have been part of the modern world order since the just after the Second World War, and in various forms of missionary activity for centuries before. There thus seems to be a strange gap between motivation and outcome.

Recent developments in political philosophy seem to be providing some keys to this apparent paradox. For decades, the problem of global poverty was seen almost exclusively in the context of charitable giving. Thus the ethical problem was formulated as: how much money and on what ethical grounds ought I give to charities working on the problem of global poverty, and how much I am ethically permitted to keep to myself? This way of discussing the

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1 Pogge 2002; 2

2 UN millennium project 2005

3 Ibid.

problem goes back to Peter Singer's seminal essay on the topic[4], in which he argued that as long as some individuals are incapable of meeting their basic needs, others have the responsibility of charitable giving up to the point that only the bare basic needs of the donors are met. Others have found ways to argue for less demanding positions on the subject, with better or worse success.

While the concern for world poverty has been mostly manifest in discussion on charitable giving, theories of justice have been surprisingly silent on the issue, even though degrading poverty would seem to be a question of justice, if anything. Theories of justice have been traditionally mostly concerned with domestic policies, i.e. the just distribution of goods within given national boundaries, performed by domestic institutions. Thus poverty reduction has been seen as the sole responsibility of the particular governments, with some positive responsibilities by charity for outsiders. This thinking has also been manifested in theories of global justice, such as that of John Rawls. For Rawls global justice is merely a matter of intergovernmental conduct, mainly diplomacy and matters of war and peace – with an additional responsibility of assisting "burdened peoples".[5]

This distinction between the domestic duty of justice and the global (or general) duty of charity has distracted the discussion from the topic of global justice. It needs to be asked, what can charity do – would any of the rich countries have ever become rich by relying on charity? Indeed, Singer's theory with its focus on individual morality is fully compatible with *any* theory of justice. This should be enough to show the problems of his approach.

In more recent discussions, though, the notion of global social justice has surfaced[6]. Cosmopolitan philosophers and political theorists have argued that national boundaries ought not restrict the demands of justice, just as Singer argued concerning charity, especially in a world so economically globalised that the outcomes of patterns of production and consumption, and political and consumer choices, are typically experienced by a considerably larger number of people than those living within a given national boundary. This notion leaves a lot of analytical work to do, but it provides a starting point for seriously addressing global justice and poverty as problems of justice.

One of the features of theories of justice is the division between goods that can be claimed on the basis of merit, and goods that can be claimed on the basis of humanity itself. When we discuss the prior problem, we address such problems as equality of opportunity, fair taxation systems, and so on. In this context, some philosophers argue for non-interference in the market by highlighting the notion of merit[7], while others call for the distribution of resources for equalising opportunities[8]. When we discuss global poverty, we are dealing with the minimum claims to goods necessary for meaningful

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4 Singer 1972

5 Rawls 1999; 105-113

6 See fe. Pogge 2002, C. Barry 2005, Kuper 2004, Beitz 1979

7 A classic text on the subject is Nozick 1974

8 A classic text on the subject is Rawls 1972

human existence. It is questionable if merit of productivity can inform such an agenda. Rather, we have to ask, what is needed for decent human life, and how do people get these needed goods. Here is where the real philosophical problem starts, since we have to ask, are people deprived of these goods because of some intervention or do they simply lack them, and what goods instrumental to decent life can be claimed.

Discussing merit or desert on a global level is necessarily very complex, and probably irrelevant in the context of poverty. There are several different systems of merit, but even more importantly, comparing desert is very difficult. While a given wage might be deserved relative to the wage-level within a country, what ought to be concluded from that fact that it can nevertheless be astronomical compared to wages for similar work in another country?

All in all, the global poor in particular tend to work very hard – as they hardly have a choice if they want to survive – and for this reason it seems that any theory of desert would show that the global distribution of income ought to be (more) egalitarian. Indeed the outcomes of laissez-faire economic distribution have very little to do with the amount of work done by individuals[9]. So addressing the problem of poverty from a needs perspective seems to provide a minimum demand, which is not in contrast with the requirements based on desert.

This study is focused on the minimum requirements of justice on a global level, apart from a brief discussion on equality in general. This does not mean that answering this question suffices as a theory of global justice. Yet I will argue that even minimum requirements, which are philosophically firmly grounded, will lead to quite radical conclusions, even without proceeding with more strict demands.

The minimum argument breaks into two. The first minimum requirement is, as already mentioned that goods necessary for worthwhile human life have to be accessible for all. Political processes and patterns of distribution have to be organised according to this principle. The second minimum requirement is the negative duty to refrain from harm. If it can be shown that certain political processes or choices generate poverty in such a way that it can be seen as a contribution to harm to others, then there is a strong ethical case that these processes ought to be overturned and these agents ought to stop contributing to harming others. As an analysis of political systems, this type of argument is sometimes called the left-libertarian argument[10]. These minimum requirements are typically analysed separately, even though some philosophers, most notoriously Thomas Pogge[11], have tried to show that they would in fact fall into a single argument. Thus the failure to meet the requirements of worthwhile human life would be caused by harm by others, or even would be defined as

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9 This can be documented by looking at international statistics on income distribution and statistics on working hours.

10 Otsuka 2005, van Parijs 1995

11 Pogge 2002; 15-20, Pogge 2005a, Pogge 2005b

being harmed. This is indeed true in most cases, if not categorically or necessarily

## The structure of this work

Chapter one discusses the problem of poverty, which, as mentioned, can be seen as the ethical starting point of this study. Yet, even given the intuitive clarity and urgency of the notion of poverty, the definition of poverty is a philosophical task in itself. This chapter thus aims at answering the following problems: what does poverty mean, and why is it an ethical problem or problem of justice? Further, to move to the political implications of the notion, I will discuss the notions of absolute and relative poverty, in other words the question is freedom from poverty mainly about meeting some given existential level of command over goods, or is poverty always relative to the level of goods commanded by others. I will argue that poverty is always relative to some extent, but so that *absolute* command of goods depends on relative positions in the society. This is important since poverty seems to loose its ethical urgency when seen as an exclusively relative phenomenon.

In chapter two I proceed by discussing the broader societal context of poverty reduction. As poverty is always an outcome of social relations, as I argue in chapter one, we cannot address the problem by merely addressing individuals suffering from poverty. The concept typically used as short for larger changes promoting poverty reduction is development. Conceptually, thus, chapter two focuses on the notion of development. The concept is far from being unproblematic. Not everyone sees development as a name for positive social change. Rather it is seen as a vicious ideology making the poor countries merely suppliers of goods to the rich and installing a hierarchical system, in which those who are "developing" can only lose out – to quote Ivan Illich, "buying themselves into a system in which they only get the dregs of the market"[12]. Consequentially, the challenge is to redefine the concept of development so that these concerns will be addressed and thus the positive normative connotations of the concept can be restored. The alternative, accepting that development is necessarily an ideology in disguise, essentially standing for uneven patterns of distribution and general exploitation, would lead to such a relativist position that would disable discussion on development altogether. This leads to the necessity to redefine the concept, which will lead to some potentially radical conclusions.

In chapter three I move to the general problem of justice. As the demand of development in poverty-ridden countries has been analysed so that enough suitable definitions for development have been found, it is necessary to move on to ask, how is promoting development linked to matters of social justice. An important concept here is equality, which I argue in chapter two to be necessary

12 Illich 1973; 96

to incorporate in the development discourse. The chapter will include a brief discussion on the goal of theory of justice and the problem of equality, i.e. what is the core unit of justice to be distributed equally.

In chapter four I discuss the "global" problem of social justice. Chapters one to three set out the philosophical argument of what is wrong in contemporary world from the viewpoint of justice, creating and sustaining gross inequalities, and so in chapter four I move on to the problem of locating the sources of injustice. I will start by asking what aspects of the problem are due to failures by the global institutional structure. Even though several decisions and events affect people globally, this does not mean that all do, as some matters of justice clearly belong exclusively to the ambit of domestic justice. There needs to be a definition of what belongs to the scope of global justice in the first place.

The second problem is what is the mode of reform that a normative theory of development-promoting global change suggests. There are roughly two possible alternatives. First, the theory can point to the need to reform institutions. The coercive institutional structure is the typical scope of theories of justice. Thus the conclusion would be that as the coercive institutions guide the conduct of individual agents, reforming the institutions will lead to more just outcomes overall – or that the outcomes do not matter as such, if the institutional structure promotes equal opportunities for all. The other alternative is to locate the injustices chiefly in the conduct of individual agents, such as companies and nation-states within the frame, or the general power imbalance between different agents. I will argue that the existing power imbalances in particular systematically create loopholes to the theory of just institutions.

Following the general discussion of the problem of global justice, and including the general notion of equality and its institutional implications, I will turn in chapter five to the specific notions of harm. Harm is discussed first since, as mentioned, refraining from harming others or contributing to harm can be seen as the first minimum requirement of justice. Being harmed is defined here as "a baseline definition", meaning that an incapability to meet a minimum material standard needed for decent life can constitute being harmed, even though one is not comparably worse off than before. This understanding of harm is contrasted with the definition of harm as seeing one's material position worsen illegitimately.

In chapter six I examine the general problem of distributing duties. Here, several theories for grounds of duties to alleviate poverty can be argued for. I will specifically discuss theories that promote the idea of duties on the grounds of the capability to be an agent of change and theory promoting the idea of duties on the ground of contribution to harm. I will argue that the practical remedies following from these different duties vary, and therefore have to be analysed separately.

## Starting points

There are a few philosophical convictions or starting points that form the background to this work. First, this study results from a personal background of activism, and so world poverty is granted to be a serious problem that demands action – this is not a hypothesis to be proven. A theory of justice is to the author of this work always a theory calling for political action, as it points out injustices of the present order. Theorising justice has to be "critical" or "emancipatory"[13]. The unnecessary suffering caused by global poverty has to be alleviated; political philosophy gives only one perspective, an analytical one, on the issue.

The realisation of an activist is the starting point not only my work, but to several other pieces of scholarship. This realisation is the understanding that practically any subject living in a wealthy market economy today is deeply involved with the problem of poverty abroad. Only an outsider can be seen as exclusively having positive duties towards the impoverished; for an active participant in the process of impoverishment, the moral role is more complicated – and more demanding.

The idea that people living in poverty ought not to be treated as passive objects of aid, is related to the role of moral duties. The good intentions of charity fail when they form and enforce the idea – the false idea, I believe – that impoverished people are ethically to be seen as only objects to be potentially assisted[14]. Quite the contrary, typically these people make a hard effort for survival, often in quite ingenious ways. Seeing them as active subjects leads to the question, what kinds of political mechanisms make their life so difficult *despite* all their activity. This starting point has important implications for political philosophy, as will be shown.

The last starting point I want to mention here is the conviction that what are portrayed as neutral social sciences, are penetrated by ideology and political power. In this I refer particularly to the discourse on economics. The tendency to confuse economic growth with development is a strong ideology that needs to be analysed critically. Further, I argue that economy is always about power and politics, and that there is no such thing as free trade with no political intervention, for example.

With these starting points, I start the enquiry from the analysis of the main problem of this work: global poverty. In other words, what do people lack if they are poor?

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13 see fe Tyson 2006

14 Jackson 1982; 93

# I POVERTY AS A PROBLEM FOR ETHICS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

## 1.1 The problem of poverty

I began the preface by quoting some statistics on global poverty. Yet merely noting that widespread, degrading poverty exists and that it is a serious problem, is far from enough when it comes to answering the definitional question ("what do people essentially lack if they are poor?"), or the causal question ("what makes people poor?"), let alone remedial question ("who ought to do what to alleviate poverty?"). Indeed, answering these questions is likely to cause serious disagreement. Thus the matter of extreme poverty breaks into two questions, one concerning the essence of poverty, its causes and relevant remedies, the other concerning its moral implications.

So we have to be aware of what poverty actually means. If we for example take a paddy worker in China, a member of an indigenous tribe in Brazil, a factory worker in Bangladesh, and an orphaned child in Malawi, what is the common thing of moral significance they lack? One can suffer mainly from hard physical labour, one from tree logging in nearby areas, one from hazardous chemicals in the working environment, and one from lack of support. They can all suffer from indecent nutrition, no access to proper health care or such. They can have very different amounts of money in comparison to each other. If they all belong to the category of the "global poor", they must have some morally relevant characteristic in common.

We have to be aware too of what causes this morally bad characteristic, if it is to be overcome. This is a question to which there is no answer about which consensus could be reached. Yet the risk of misinterpreting the essence and causes of poverty is a serious one, since it easily leads to prescribing incorrect remedies. For example there is the risk of confusing poverty with its appearances, or things merely brought about by poverty. For example hunger might be the most typical implication of poverty, yet simply bringing food to people has often had catastrophic consequences. "Food aid" has often caused

the local small farmers to go bankrupt, as they have become unable to sell their produce on local markets when competing with free food[15]. The causal problem, what brings about poverty, is a controversial issue, yet necessary to answer in order to intelligibly discuss the remedial implications of poverty.

The matter of moral implications is no easier, even though the idea of poverty bringing about ethical duties is very old in western thought, going back at least to the medieval practice of alms-giving. Arguing that poverty is morally bad and imposes responsibilities on others to act is not to say much. We have to establish what kind of action is expected and from whom. We have to have an idea about the role of the local nation-state, the global order, other nation-states, and individuals in bringing about poverty, along with general "positive duties" unrelated to causal matters, in order to discuss the remedial responsibilities. The question is necessarily difficult since "we" (the residents of the first world, the "middle class", the globally privileged etc) do not encounter the poor as individuals typically encounter each other in everyday life. The interaction between the globally rich and the globally poor is mediated by political and economic institutions and structures. The other significant problem is, how to define the "normal" existential state of affairs that anyone can legitimately expect to meet, so that the failure of meeting this state brings responsibilities to others, no matter what their causal role in bringing about poverty. This problem also relates to outside intervention as a source of poverty. Are people poor because life in certain areas has always been like that, or did some political mechanism cause the prevailing poverty? Different answers to this question imply very different conclusions when it comes to duties of others.

The problem of the distribution of duties to alleviate global poverty will be discussed in detail in chapter six. At this point, I will focus on the definitional side of the problem. In other words, what poverty essentially is and what makes it a problem. Answering these questions helps us to find out what kinds of remedies are relevant for poverty eradication.

## 1.2 Definitions of poverty

Next, I will in some length try to define the phenomenon of poverty and why is poverty morally bad. When doing such a definitional enterprise, it is useful to start from a preliminary definition. As poverty most typically is defined using economic concepts and definitions, along with the concept of basic needs, I will start from the definition "poverty is a state in which a person has low enough purchasing power to fail to meet the minimum level of decent life". I will later show problems of this definition, but for now, I believe that this is an intuitively good starting point.

The first addition we have to make to the preliminary definition emerges from the fact that such an economic definition says nothing about choice related

15 Hancock 1989; 14-15

to the situation. In other words, in order to be a genuine ethical problem, poverty ought not be chosen by the subject living in poverty. As is known, in several religious and moral traditions, poverty has been a chosen state, so that pride and even social status has been associated with this choice. Thus it was possible for prophet Mohammed to declare in the Qur'an: "poverty is by pride"[16]. Here, poverty does not seem to denote a state with moral implications, rather it is merely a descriptive concept, the content of which the speaker chooses to value. Thus, for poverty to be an issue for normative analysis, i.e. morally bad, we have to add to the definition that it is not a state chosen freely by the agent. It has to be highlighted that this is a choice made here: one could as well discuss poverty in purely descriptive terms, but this is not how the concept is used here.

Another definitional matter is the seriousness of poverty. The figures I referred to at the beginning are often discussed under the notion of "extreme poverty". The implicit idea is that a definition can be made when poverty can be labelled extreme. Logically, falling into this state of being is a more serious ethical problem. But what makes poverty extreme? Extreme poverty is a strong and frequently used concept but one that is seldom defined. I discuss two definitions of extreme poverty to illustrate a few of the ways the concept has been used.

The first is the purchasing power definition of extreme poverty. This refers to the methodology employed chiefly by World Bank economists, as they calculate the amount of people living in poverty globally. In these calculations, extreme poverty is defined as living under the purchasing power parity of $1.08 US dollars a day. This is thought to roughly correspond to the sum that is needed to see that a person's most pressing needs are met. I will return to the problems of this methodology at a later point.

The second definition is one that uses the notion of deprivation. Accordingly, extreme poverty is defined as a state in which people are deprived of not only one, but several essential goods. Being deprived of health care would thus not yet make poverty extreme, but being deprived of health care and adequate nutrition and shelter perhaps would. Thomas Pogge goes even further and defines "pervasive inequality" as inequality that concerns not just some, but *all* aspects of life[17]. By the concept of "pervasive inequality" Pogge means something that comes close to pervasive extreme poverty. Yet Pogge's argument is mainly an attempt to find a basis for an overlapping moral consensus or a "kernel of political morality"[18] on the demands of poverty reduction, and therefore perhaps not an adequately analytical tool for defining the problem of poverty. Pogge refers to obvious cases of extreme poverty[19], but there might be other less obvious ones, which still ought to pass as extreme

16 Rahnema 1992; 160
17 Pogge 2002;198
18 Pogge 1989; 214-216
19 Pogge 2002; 2-3

poverty.[20] If inequality has to concern all aspects of life to warrant moral concern, it seems that the definition is too narrow.

Another way of looking for a definition of extreme poverty would be to start by asking, what are the reasons why extreme poverty is morally bad, in other words, what are the moral qualities of extreme poverty. Nigel Dower argues that there are three principal reasons why extreme poverty is morally bad. First, extreme poverty is significantly life shortening. This implies that there is a level of expectation for the length of life, a baseline which in itself is difficult to define. But definitional problems aside, in most cases avoidable deaths are clear cases, taken human life's centrality in ethics. For example, death from preventable deceases that could be cured with cheap but locally inaccessible medicines is clearly such a case. Second, extreme poverty involves great suffering and pain. Here the key word is "involve". Pain and suffering can have several causes, such as a disease or being involved in an accident. But when they are caused by poverty, the situation fits Dower's argument. Third, extreme poverty undermines the essential dignity and decency of life. This is the part of the definition that is most open to interpretation, or at least is highly subjective by nature, as different individuals have very different ideas about dignity.[21]

A problem with Dower's argument is that it does not really touch on the definition of poverty itself. What distinguishes significant life shortening caused by poverty from other cases of significant life shortening? What distinguishes great suffering and pain caused by poverty from other instances of great suffering and pain? Say that person A falls off her bike when riding very fast, and because of her resulting injuries her life is significantly shortened. Obviously, she suffers great pain. The essential dignity of her life can be compromised by having to move around in a wheelchair. This accident is of course a very unfortunate, but it is hardly an ethical failure by others. Therefore, merely noting that the bads Dower relates to extreme poverty take place, does not mean that we are necessarily dealing with extreme poverty, nor with an ethical problem generally, or that cases with similar features would be morally identical.

Thus the definition of extreme poverty risks becoming circular, as one is tempted to answer that the distinguishing feature is that in cases of extreme poverty premature death and suffering together with the other harm are caused by extreme poverty, rather than something else. Thus Dower's definition ought to be complemented by an adjunct about political structures: extreme poverty exists when these three conditions are fulfilled, *and this is brought about by political structures or social arrangements (or a lack of these).* This comes closer to being a definition, and as the two definitions of extreme poverty discussed earlier were found to be unsatisfactory, this can be accepted as a definition.

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20 See also Singer's quote of the former World Bank leader Robert McNamara in Singer 1979; 158

21 Dower 1991; 277-278

But is this definition counter-intuitive? We only need to consider the counter-example of a starving hermit, in order to see the potential problems related to highlighting political arrangements. Is the starving hermit not poor? To answer the question, one first has to note the difference between access to goods and the actual possession of goods[22]. The hermit might have had access to sufficient nutrition, but has chosen a life of solitude, aware of the risks involved. Thus, he would have had access to nutrition, had he so chosen. Again, we have to remember that poverty as a concept with ethical significance means involuntary poverty. In a case devoid of choice has been involved, as in a classic Robinson Crusoe case, the situation is naturally different. But here, some reflection on the intuitive ideas related to poverty is needed. Is the starving Robinson Crusoe on his deserted island *poor*, or is he suffering from a deprivation of another sort? It seems safe to say that while the starving Robinson Crusoe undeniably suffers on account of his situation, his predicament is not exactly that of poverty. This is not only because there is no loss of dignity involved. Rather, his case resembles an accident.

Any case of poverty-related suffering one chooses to investigate will end up showing at least some aspects of relevance of social arrangements, be they colonial history, present patterns of enforced land-ownership, rights, distributive institutions or some other aspect. Poverty is always an outcome of social arrangements. Poverty is by definition social. Yet of course the nature and complexity of these social arrangements, and the nature of the relevant players involved, varies from case to case. In some cases, the social arrangements generating poverty may be merely village-level arrangements, in other cases, global mechanisms and institutions are involved. But having said this, I will stick to the definition that poverty is always caused by a *broadly defined distributive mechanism*. In cases of extreme poverty, the distributive mechanisms are particularly unjust or dysfunctional. By a broad definition of a distributive mechanism I mean that this mechanism does not need to be institutionally legitimised, such as a tax system or a legal property-right enforcement system. Distributive mechanisms can also involve for example social customs, the ongoing effects of historical incidents, intra-family arrangements etc.

This starting point has important implications. The first implication is the rejection of the "myth of the individual", already analysed by Marx[23]. The myth refers to the belief that human beings are subjects without a history or social context – and the rejection, on the other hand, subscribing to the Marxist idea that poverty cannot be detached from the particular social setting. Often, in public discourse, extreme suffering like that caused by a famine has been seen as a merely natural phenomenon, caused by unpredictable forces of nature. Alternatively, or additionally, it is typical to view hunger and famines as merely a sign of backwardness, or rather, of "original poverty". According to a

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22 Sen, 1992; 31-34

23 Marx 1993, chap.1, part 1

persistent myth that can be traced back at least to Hobbes[24], it is because of the original human predicament and lack of progress that people go hungry.

At this point, I will not discuss further the "original poverty" thesis, as this will be done in chapter two. However a few remarks are needed about distinguishing natural disasters that are genuine "accidents" by their moral status from cases of suffering that are politically caused, at least to some extent. Namely, contrary to conventional wisdom, most cases that seem like purely natural disasters are not, and for at least two separate reasons. First, the lack of means of meeting one's basic needs typically has other causes. In modern times, hunger has been most common and famines most frequent not in countries and areas that lack food, but in areas that are net *exporters* of agricultural products[25]. As Amartya Sen has famously shown, hunger is not caused by a lack of available food, but a lack of access to food (or entitlement to food)[26]. In other words, there is food available, but some people have too little purchasing power to buy it, or there are other distributive arrangements with similar outcomes. Typically, such reasons are behind instances of hunger, even though, for instance, a flood occurred.

Second, social arrangements and positions within a society have an effect on who is likely to suffer from unexpected natural conditions. For example, if a homeless person dies because of sudden cold weather, the imminent causal reason for his death, the weather, would not have had such a lethal outcome, if adequate arrangements had been in place (ie the person would have had a shelter)[27]. Also, in the cases of accidents, it is necessary to distinguish between what was accidental and what were the external causes that contributed to the accidents. For example, would there be no speed limits for cars, people responsible for traffic rules could be justifiably seen as partially responsible for some of the accidents. Even in apparently "purely natural" cases such as earthquakes, some people have been forced to live in more hazardous areas than others, and in some cases experts have even argued that earthquakes have been caused partially by the human activity of building large dams, which has distorted the geophysical balance[28].

Naturally, this point is not put in order to argue that disasters with no contributing social and political factors could not take place. Like genuine accidents, they do. In such cases, others have ethical duties to help the victims who may be impoverished because of the disaster, or because of others reasons unrelated to the helpers' conduct. While these duties are discussed in several books on ethics[29], such duties are not the topic of this study.Here it suffices to say that disasters with "purely natural" outcomes are very uncommon.

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24 Achterhuis 1993; 108-110

25 Moore Lappe et al 1998; 9-10

26 Sen 1981; 1-3, 45-51

27 Moore Lappe et al 1998; 15

28 The daily telegraph 3 feb 2009. Malcolm Moore: Chinese earthquake may have been man-made, say scientists.

29 Unger 1996, Cullity 2004, Chatterjee 2004.

## 1.3 Avoiding suffering versus social justice

Extreme poverty generally breeds responses of two kinds. One school of thought focuses on demanding funding specifically allocated for alleviating poverty and poverty-related suffering. This has been the mainstream response of some of the institutions of development aid and private development-oriented charities. The grounding idea has been that suffering can be targeted directly, for example by providing basic services and such in poor countries. Here it suffices to note that the approach taken as a starting point is that poverty can be targeted with no reference to the social positions and actions of people who are not poor, or to the broader political framework.

On the basis of this approach, poverty alleviation is seen as a duty of individuals, who accordingly have the duty to give money to charities. In support of this argument, we find strange bedfellows: libertarians who emphasise individual charity as a positive alternative to the "morally corrupting" effect of redistribution by the government, and ethicists such as Peter Singer, who thinks that the moral demands on wealthy individuals to redistribute their property go as far as living on subsistence level oneself. If reacting to extreme poverty is seen as exclusively a duty of individuals to give to charities, politics in seen as having no morally significant role in the process.

Believing in charity as the tool for poverty alleviation is at least questionable. Poverty alleviation is unlikely to take place without changes in institutions at both national and global levels. Empirically, it is hard to think of a case when this has happened. So, the notion of social justice starts creeping in. This brings us to the second possible response to the problem of extreme poverty: people are poor ultimately because they are in disadvantaged positions in their society. Hunger takes place in areas where there is abundant food[30], people lack basic goods since they cannot voice their concerns and demands. This seems quite straightforward. All social systems are systems of distribution of goods, and all – or at least nearly all – existing societies possess enough goods and wealth for everyone to avoid extreme poverty. Indeed, as Amartya Sen has argued, a democratic culture is one of the best tools against famine[31]. It seems that everywhere where poor people have been able to claim their rights, poverty has been alleviated. This notion of power is absent from the poverty discourse (some ideas of empowerment aside). I will get back to the issue of rights in chapter five.

As an intermediating position between these two, there are charity approaches focusing on the idea of development – that more effective production and related progress will eventually wipe away the most extreme forms of poverty, and this progress can be caused or accelerated by suitable interventions. Here it is admitted that social change is needed, but the problem is confined to locating "development obstacles" within poor countries, and

30 Moore Lappe et al 1998; 9-10, 15

31 Sen 2000; 170-171

trying to avoid political interventions (whatever this means in practice). I will get back to the notion of development and the need to redefine the concept in chapter two.

So are the concerns about extreme poverty and social justice separate questions? Are we concerned about alleviating extreme poverty *and* bringing about social justice on local and global level? Or is it a single problem? The problem for philosophy is that traditionally ethics and political philosophy have been conceived as two separate fields of study. The result is that it is tempting to think that there are two separate problems resulting from and in separate sets of causes and remedies, causing two separate kinds of duties, and unavoidably, duties that are exacting at different levels. Thus there would be demanding (ethical) duties on alleviation of extreme poverty, and duties of justice related to alleviation of other forms of poverty.

One way to test one's intuition concerning the problem is to ask whether life in extreme poverty can be deserved. From the viewpoint of especially libertarian theories of justice, this may indeed be the case (and even some more redistribution-oriented theories would argue that it can be deserved, if not just or humane). Here, the emphasis is less on what human beings need and more on what individuals deserve as the fruits of their efforts So is it a different case from the viewpoint of normative theory, given that A is starving and ill with no possibility of purchasing medicines, if A works hard to gain money when he can of if he does not? From the perspective of human needs there is no moral difference. From the perspective of what is deserved, there is at least a potential difference. If A has worked hard, his condition is surely undeserved, which is not necessarily the case in the scenario in which he does not work. Having pointed out this difference, we have to go back to the reality of world poverty, namely the situation of those suffering from extreme poverty[32]. Is there any reason to doubt that these people would feed themselves orderly, if they had the chance? Nearly all people living in extreme poverty work extremely hard to earn their living, since not doing so would quite likely spell death. Only those too young, old or sick to work constitute an exception – sometimes. So what is crucial for normative theory is that extreme poverty is a state that is wrong both from the viewpoint of human needs and the viewpoint of desert. This does not mean to say, of course that meeting basic human needs is not be a high priority issue. What is important is that the charity discourse tends to portray everyone living in poverty as the passive objects of aid, which is far from the truth. While typically world poverty brings about cries for more charity, we are essentially in need of institutional reforms, as we are dealing with a problem of social justice. There are at least two reasons for this. First, extreme poverty is the gravest existing insult to the notions of just deserts and equality, and not only human needs, as discussed above. Extremely hardworking people do not gain even enough to secure their existence, and there is no way to justify this. Second, institutional changes are the most effective means of bringing about poverty eradication. If we take the "humanitarian" perspective of basic needs,

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32 Wilska 2007; 14-17

we have to be concerned about how to most effectively assure that the basic needs of human beings are met. Taking this seriously, it is quite hard to argue against the need for institutional redistributive measures, noting that most experts on the issue argue that "humanitarian" aid interventions do not guarantee sustained poverty reduction – assuming they are even intended to[33]. Thus poverty alleviation measures cannot be separated from matters of justice. To counter this position, one have to show either that there are groups which deserve nothing, so that if they meeting their basic needs ought to be dependent on the goodwill of others, or that social change is ineffective in poverty reduction in comparison to charity. Both cases, I believe, would be impossible to make.

It therefore has to be made clear what is the concern is of the theory. Much literature published under headings related to global social justice is mostly concerned with extreme poverty, without clearly discussing whether problems of global justice would be overcome if there was no extreme poverty. Take for example Thomas Pogge, one of the most insightful and committed philosophers who writes on the subject. Discussing global poverty, Pogge argues that "[...] the inequality is avoidable: the better-off can improve the circumstances of the worst-off without becoming badly off themselves"[34]. How ought we to interpret this? Does it mean that inequality ceases to exist when the conditions of the worst-off have "improved"? Does it mean that global economic justice is possible, while the global North still lives on the present, or even higher, level of consumption? Pogge is unclear on the issue.

If we discuss poverty, we are necessarily also dealing with inequality. The relation of poverty to inequality has to be made clear. While a world with less poverty would most likely also be a world with less inequality, it could yet be quite far from an optimally equal world. When third world critics argue that poverty alleviation is discussed today with no reference to justice generally they have a point. Sometimes such concepts as "welfare imperialism"[35] are coined, to highlight the tendency to focus on meeting bare survival level in poor countries, but nothing more related to social justice.

As mentioned, typically the "ethical" problem of extreme poverty and the problem of poverty generally as a problem of justice are considered separate problems. I have argued that this is problematic. But in what kinds of theories has this "separate problems" view been supported? For the sake of fairness of argument, I will next discuss such theories.

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33 See for example Hancock 1989; 3-7, Jamieson 2005

34 Pogge 2002; 198

35 For example Yash Tandon has referred to this concept in several, yet not literally documented speeches

## 1.4 Separate problems?

The demand for poverty alleviation and the demand for social justice have often been seen as separate problems for at least two distinct reasons. First, it can be argued that we are talking about remedies to two different *kinds* of poverty: people living in extreme, desperate poverty need specific poverty alleviation measures in addition to social justice, whereas the not-so-desperately-poor merely need social justice. Second, poverty alleviation can be seen as a kind of emergency measure, whereas social justice is a matter of institutional change.

The problem with the latter idea is that such different kinds of poverty and the corresponding remedies are not overlapping. Extreme poverty is typically not caused by an emergency; rather it is "business as usual". Extreme and other kinds of poverty do not have categorically different causes, while individuals of course do have a wide variety of reasons for being poor. Even when this is not the case, features relating to a wider framework of justice cause some people to be highly more vulnerable to emergencies than others, as previously discussed[36]. Famines affect those with little money worst. Drought affects those forced to cultivate barren lands and those with low food security worst, and floods affect those forced to live in shacks on the river-banks worst.

The economist Jeffrey Sachs, who heads the UN Millennium project, categorises these two types of poverty in his book *The End of Poverty*. "If economic development is a ladder with higher rungs representing steps up the path to economic wellbeing, there are roughly one billion people around the world, who are too ill, hungry and destitute to even get a foot on the first rung of the development ladder. These people are the 'poorest of the poor' or the 'extreme poor' of the planet. [...] A few rungs up the development ladder is the upper end of the low-income world, where roughly another 1,5 billion people face problems like those of the young women in Bangladesh [mentioned earlier by Sachs]. These people are 'the poor'. [...] Although daily survival is pretty much assured, they struggle in the cities and countryside to make ends meet"[37]. Here, Sachs manages to give another possible way of defining extreme poverty, as a state in which people are unable to help themselves.

Sachs' picture of the lower-end of what he calls the "global family portrait" is problematic. Where, for example, are people supposed to ascend by climbing the "development ladder", and is there any role for a notion of distributive justice involved? (Again, I will return to problems of development more specifically in chapter two.) It is interesting that in Sachs' categorisation it is implied that development as an automatic process will start as people get their hold of the first steps of the "development ladder" - or at least this is the implication of the "ladder" metaphor. Thus, development aid would mostly be needed to enable the "poorest of the poor" to make their first steps. It seems

36 See also Simms 2005

37 Sachs 2006; 18

that Sachs simplifies development as an automation that will get on the way as the “first step” in climbed, the subsequent process being unrelated to distributive patterns.

This “global family portrait” also unavoidably simplifies the issue of poverty. As there are different kinds of deprivations human beings can suffer, it is unclear how relevant Sachs' categories are. As human beings can be deprived from freedom, functional capabilities, safe environment, education, or any such social goods, it is a fact that these deprivations do not necessarily occur as a bundle imposed on the same people. Remember that this was precisely the problem with Pogge's definition of extreme poverty. Ascending the first rung on the ladder of development is no cure: people in such a state can suffer from seriously life-threatening poisonous substances in their working environment, for example, and thus be in an unjust and very dangerous situation. Additionally, these people can be, and often are, quite unable to “climb the development ladder”, i.e. to progress away from poverty as the “ladder” metaphor implies. For such a categorisation to be relevant the distinction would need to be clearer and subtler. Even though “extreme poverty” would be defined as the simultaneous appearance of these evils in a person's life, it is only the most extreme form of poverty, and any of these evils are such that they call for action and spell an ethical problem in themselves. Thus the poor and extremely poor suffer from the same problems.

Whatever the phenomena categorised as poverty that we face, the highly important question concerns the right remedies for the problem. Lacking medicines for a life-threatening disease or suffering from unhealthy working environment without a possibility to work elsewhere, are both signs of being poor. In both cases the subject has no choice but to suffer ill health. Yet the remedies to these ills are very different (strengthening the health sector, or creating better labour standards). Lumping all these problems in the same category too easily suggests that a uniform set of remedies would help people suffering from these ills, regardless of their particular situation. Social justice as a discourse is more fine-tuned for discussing different, only partially overlapping problems, such as medication as a basic need and right to obviate the effects of hazardous working environments.

As logically follows from the definition of poverty provided above, which is always a political and social problem, and thus to some extent always relational, we are always discussing social justice when discussing poverty alleviation. While poverty alleviation does require context-sensitive approaches, there is no moral reason for distinguishing the problem of poverty from the problem of social justice. People suffering from severe deprivation need justice, even more than others. While there might be cases where emergency aid is needed, such cases form only a fraction of the problem of poverty. Such cases are exceptional and unrelated to extreme poverty as a phenomenon.

We find here that the analysis is getting further from the preliminary definition. As poverty has been analysed as chiefly a political problem, it

becomes more difficult to analyse the moral core of poverty in terms of purchasing power. So, while the purchasing power indeed can be an appearance of poverty, it seems that the underlying moral core is one that ought to be stated in terms of power relations. This is an argument already familiar from Karl Marx' analysis of money. Marx argued exactly that money is simply "materialised power", i.e. the visible appearance of an underlying problem. He understood money as chiefly an indicator – it is a way of observing the prevalent social relations.

Yet the analysis of the social nature of poverty vis-à-vis its absolute definition needs further analysis. I will therefore now look more closely at the nature of poverty by asking to what extent poverty can be defined in absolute terms (i.e. failing to meet en existential baseline), and to what extent it is a relational concept.

## 1.5 Absolute poverty I: Definitions

The concept of poverty denotes a range of meanings with a family resemblance rather than a common core of meaning. For example the use of the concept in economics is very different from the use of the concept in ethical theory, as moral concepts such as suffering or loss of dignity do not translate into money. Even the "basic goods" vocabulary is different from the economic vocabulary: some people can be able to meet their basic needs, and yet be quite outside market exchange patterns (although some economic theories see money sums as a tool for giving good enough approximations rather than describing the absolute essence of poverty). Here, my focus is on moral vocabulary: what do people lack when they are poor? The practical problem of answering the moral question is to what extent we see a lack of components of good life being part of what is called poverty. The antithesis of the economic approach can be seen as the Aristotelian theory in which elements of good life rather than command of basic goods are highlighted[38]. Practically, these theories are typically combined.

Let us start from a typology of poverty by C. Douglas Lummis. Lummis categorises four forms of poverty, namely relative poverty, absolute poverty, poverty caused by failure to acquire social necessities, and poverty observed by an outsider[39]. The last category is significant from a cultural point of view. In several cases in history, Europeans have classified peoples as poor, even though these people have not regarded themselves as poor, and have been able to quite comfortably meet their material needs. Take, for example, the bushmen of Kalahari, who have been treated as one of the most "backward" of peoples by Europeans, yet they traditionally have only had to spend three hours a day

38 Nussbaum 2000; 245-252
39 Lummis 1996; 72-74

doing anything which could be called work, devoting the remaining time for play and leisure[40].

Even today, similar problems are faced when discussing for example the poverty of indigenous peoples, some of which, if not all, are quite well above material poverty lines, outside intervention (often in the form of investment) being the biggest threat to their subsistence. In such cases, what is called poverty quite clearly is not a matter of suffering or loosing one's dignity, but merely a deviation from the assessing subject's understanding of wealth. This leads one to suspect whether such cases are genuine instances of poverty, rather than merely mistaken observation. On the basis of the definitions given above, there is no reason why the state of such people should be called poverty in the ethical sense. A mistaken observation says little about the phenomenon itself, and the point is reduced to the reminder of the importance of empirical accuracy. Thus we are left with the categories of relative poverty, absolute poverty and poverty based on the failure to acquire social necessities.

Other scholars have offered similar categorisations with some slight differences. Typically, the categories of absolute and relative poverty dominate the discussion. Sometimes, dimensions with a more qualitative nature are included in the analysis, such as vulnerability, lack of political power and so forth. Theoretically, these elements can be seen as part of the categories of absolute or relative poverty. But it is difficult to tell whether such dimensions of poverty can be assessed by an absolute metric, or whether they are necessarily relative. The category of poverty as a failure to acquire social necessities is quite particular to Lummis, and is often seen as part of the category of relative poverty.

Absolute poverty is by far the most typical way of discussing poverty, and when it comes to global statistics deeply integrated in the development discourse. For example the statistics I referred to at the beginning of the preface are exactly such: lists of the amount of people suffering from certain shortcomings. This view of poverty is of course credible to some extent, and if understood correctly, will provide some kind of minimum criterion for not being poor. Most likely this minimum criterion is not a sufficient criterion, but can be intrinsically useful. Minimum criteria can also be useful for the Rawlsian task of finding an overlapping moral consensus[41]; notions of absolute poverty might provide a picture of poverty that would yield consensual agreement that no person ought to live in such conditions. Pogge, in particular, has sought such an overlapping moral consensus[42], or the "kernel" of morality.

Absolute poverty is poverty as defined by a universal standard of goods (or "primary social goods" as Rawls does[43]), without which one is considered poor. Ethically, these goods themselves are not of great significance. What is significant is the notion of basic human needs. The very justification of the

40 Sahlins 2005; 7-10
41 Rawls 2001; 32-38
42 Pogge 1989
43 Rawls 1972; 90-95

relevance of basic goods rests on the notion of basic needs (although in Rawls, basic goods are understood in a broader sense, including for example basic liberties). Poverty in the absolute sense is almost always defined by reference to the concept of basic needs, so that the incapacity to meet these needs makes a person extremely poor. The concept of basic needs, even though it calls for further definitions, allows for discussing poverty as a phenomenon without reference to cultural or other particularities, but rather with reference to universal human characteristics.

There are two questions to be asked here. First, what are the basic needs of a human being, meaning the needs that anyone can anyone legitimately expect to be able to meet? Second, how do you observe when these basic needs are being met acceptably? So we have a definitional question and a methodological question.

Let us start from the methodological question. There are different methodologies for defining and calculating "poverty lines". Some are based on possession of a set of goods, or of money, yet others on purchasing power. The most commonly used poverty line contemporarily is the already mentioned World Bank's purchasing power parity[44] 1,08$ a day international poverty line for extreme poverty[45]. The World Bank has received criticism for the poverty line and its underlying methodology for several reasons. Thomas Pogge and Sanjay Reddy argue that the poverty line is too low, thus downplaying the persistence of poverty and thereby presenting misinformation about recent global trends in poverty eradication[46]. They also point out that such a poverty line ought to be suited to particular local contexts. What purchasing power does not tell is how much purchasing power one needs, in other words the threshold of a society's market-penetration. A member of an indigenous tribe may live outside the market economy, while a resident of an urban slum might need a relatively high amount of purchasing power for meeting even elementary basic needs. Jaya Mehta calls for attention to be paid to the underlying methodological problems in poverty measurements[47]. All in all, needs do not translate to the money metric unproblematically, and such methodology for calculating poverty lines can never be totally satisfactory. This has also been World Bank's reply, and the debate practically is about whether the current methodology is yet accurate enough[48].

While these criticisms are most likely accurate and at least reflect the difficulty of calculating such universal poverty lines by purchasing power metric, they are targeted at the methodology of calculating such a poverty line, rather than the underlying idea of poverty as a failure to meet some absolute

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44 PPP = purchasing power parity

45 The methodology is thorouhgly explained fe in World Bank's povertynet site, http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTPA/0,,contentMDK:20202198~menuPK:435055~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:430367,00.html

46 Pogge & Reddy 2005

47 Mehta 2005

48 Ravallion 2008

level of possession of goods. In other words, it is possible to agree that poverty ought to be understood by the notion of absolute poverty, and agree that it ought to be defined as a failure to meet one's basic needs, while disagreeing on the actual methodology of finding out, which human beings actually fall to this category. One can even argue that such a methodology is impossible to work out, but that the underlying notion of poverty holds. Critics of the World Bank's universal poverty line argue that poverty lines should be locally sensitive and variable in order to reflect people's true capacities to meet their basic needs[49]. Thus such criticism still accepts the idea of absolute poverty and the possibility of its measurement, given a correct methodology.

The second question, of the definition of basic needs, is perhaps more philosophical. To start with, basic needs have to be distinguished from other needs. Basic needs can be understood to mean those needs that are morally more important than other needs, and universal in the sense that one's personal valuations or preferences are of no significance in determining them. Basic needs are distinguished from other needs by the idea that they make no reference to our personal goals, tastes, interests etc., whereas other needs can refer to things we need as means to achieve the things we value. Basic needs neither refer to the particularities of the social setting or its context. Needs are generally not a sub-class of desires, since they create moral claims which mere desires do not create.[50] A need spells a claim on others. Alternatively, basic needs can be defined as part of a "needs hierarchy", which generally make little reference to subjective valuations, as more fundamental and having priority. ("The need for nutrition is more fundamental than the need for self-expression").

But how are we to make the distinction between basic needs and other needs? This might prove difficult. Although it is easy to refer to such basic needs as food and water – everyone agrees that we need these biologically – the question becomes more difficult when discussing basic needs that cannot be derived directly from human biology, the typical discourse of justification of basic needs. These include for example health care and education, which are very important for human life and generally agreed to be basic needs. Without adequate health care, one has a high risk of dying prematurely. Without education, one's intelligence will atrophy[51]. But as there is nothing in human essence or biology to derive the baselines for meeting these basic needs from (indeed, biologically human beings tend to die younger than without health care), we have to rely on more debatable definitions. It has to be answered, how much education and how extensive health care is a "basic need", given the two meanings of the concept – basis of a decent life and moral claim on others. Literacy and basic vaccinations? Secondary education and easy access to a doctor?[52] At the end of the day, it is quite impossible to avoid discussing

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49 Pogge & Reddy 2005
50 Griffin 1986; 41-42
51 Griffin 1986; 42-43
52 Griffin 1986; 42-44

culturally variable matters, at least if discussion is to be kept on an appropriately general level. "Education" can imply a basic need, the meeting of which everyone is entitled to, but in practice different countries and cultures have different levels and forms of education, which are seen to be appropriate in the context. Practically, universalisability is only possible if the minimum requirements of basic needs are spelled out. Another way of putting the problem is to say that education is the only means to meeting the need (which could be, for instance, the need for intellectual development).

It seems that there are changing and locally variable elements in the ideas about basic needs and whether this particular concept is used or not. To use Michael Walzer's example, in the Middle Ages it was seen as the responsibility of the political system to ensure that everyone had access to a church[53]. The church was thought to be necessary for healing the soul, which was seen as a basic need (though there was not a concept of basic needs). On the other hand, healing one's body, i.e. visiting a doctor, was seen as something people did at will, but it was by no means as important as healing one's soul, and did not imply such a degree of political responsibility.[54] By this example, Walzer suggests that even health care is not such a necessarily universal basic need as we might think. Even though Walzer does not seem to be too concerned about the most relevant counter-argument, namely that a visit to a doctor was unlikely to significantly improve one's bodily health in the Middle Ages[55], and health care would have most likely had quite a different role would it have truly affected one's health, he does have a point in showing cultural difficulties of the concept. Yet as the concept of basic needs draws its justification from the idea of a minimum of decent life, we are in risk of ending up with the conclusion that during the Middle Ages no one had the guarantee of meeting this minimum standard, and met it only by chance (by being lucky enough not to suffer from serious diseases). This conclusion sounds intuitively false, as the people of the Middle Age would quite likely have not seen their situation as such. (Even though belief does not of course lead to normative conclusions).

Another point to show similar difficulties is related to how we conceive the actual reference point of a basic need. Take food, perhaps the most obvious candidate to fit the category of basic need. On closer examination, is it really food we need biologically, or is it rather nutrition? Food is necessarily a category with cultural connotations – food is of different kind in different regions, and so forth. The basic need for nutrition can be met by receiving injections, for example. There is no biological reason why we would need some specific kind of food, even though some specific kind of food might be culturally important and have significance far beyond the survival function.

So in order to define basic needs, a correct level of generality is needed. Is "food" general enough, or ought we talk merely about nutrition? Is "healing"

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53 Of course the church in itself was central in the political system, yet it was thought to be a genuine duty of the system to make sure that everyone had access to a church.

54 Walzer 2006; 28-29

55 See for example Illich 2000

general enough, or ought we talk about physical healing by modern medicine (which is what is practically meant by "health care")? Finding the vocabulary on the correct level of generality is important for the definition of basic needs itself, and is likely to lead to further difficulties in defining the scope of basic needs. If poverty in its absolute sense means only a failure to meet basic needs in the most general level which can be reduced to biological survival, poverty in the absolute sense spells such a minimum that it will not have a great matter of significance when it comes to understanding poverty more generally. In other words, meeting general basic needs does not necessarily mean that one is not desperately poor; rather, it means that one lives biologically. Concretely, even when getting enough calories one can be desperately poor, if the food you are getting does not match the minimum social standards. One can get enough calories from collecting eatable rubbish, for example, which in any culture is a sign of degrading poverty.

On the other hand, the problem of generality also arises in the opposite side of the spectrum. There is hardly a limit in by how expensive and luxurious goods can basic needs be met. The basic need for food can be met by eating caviar, the basic need for shelter by purchasing a mansion. It was actually the notion of "expensive taste" which led John Rawls to argue for taking basic goods rather than utilities understood as preference-satisfaction as the focus of distributive justice[56]. But does Rawls really get over the problem? Even when discussing basic goods, the problem seems to remain. It is clear that a person without access to caviar is not poor because of this, even though someone with a very expensive taste might feel deprived without it. And on the other hand, simply having access to any nutrition hardly guarantees freedom from poverty. How are we to draw the lines of relevant expectations?

These complexities of the notion of basic needs can lead to two possible conclusions. One would be to stick to biologically definable basic needs. But this would limit the notion of absolute poverty too much. Do not illiteracy, or lack of basic vaccines, or lack of schooling spell poverty in the absolute sense? At least these issues appear to have a high priority in poverty alleviation programmes and targets[57]. We can of course limit the notion to a general level, which includes a multitude of plausible interpretations. But this hardly informs the practical agenda.

The other option is to admit that there always are culture-specific and context-specific elements in the definition of basic needs, or at least elements subject to change, and that these elements can also change over time. This does not mean that defining basic needs is not useful. But it means admitting that basic needs cannot be derived from human nature or human essence, and therefore the demarcation between basic needs and other needs is always open to normative disagreement[58]. Practically, basic needs and relative needs

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56 Rawls, 1972; 90-92

57 http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/reports.shtml; UNDP 2005

58 On demarcating between absolute and non-absolute needs see Feinberg 1973; 111-112

intermingle, and we have to admit that no "poverty line" can be based on a universal and constant set of needs.

Another problem with the notion of constant basic needs is also that people practically need different things in order to fulfil their basic needs. If one grows one's own food, the matter is simple. But quite often discussions of basic needs have to be spelled out by the formula of basic needs, as described by Baybrooke: A needs B in order to C[59]. Practically, the case could for example be: A needs money in order to buy food. While C might represent the actual morally relevant needs, the political implications would be to secure A's access to B. Further, typically A can achieve C by a set of alternative means (B1, B2 ... Bn). Some of these represent expensive tastes while others are signs of degrading poverty, in addition to the fact that some of these means are substitutable without great problems (for example eating maize versus eating rice). So absolute poverty cannot in practical terms be discussed only by referring to the actual basic needs, but also to the social and economic mechanisms of attaining the goods vital for fulfilling these needs. This is reflected by the fact that quite often poverty lines tend to be based on purchasing power, and yet access to public services and goods can also be important. Thus any policy of alleviating poverty in the absolute sense will turn out to be a broader political programme.

An additional difficulty with the basic needs approach is the disagreement between the school of thought that emphasises basic needs as such and the one that emphasises the capability of meeting these needs. Amartya Sen, the most acclaimed proponent of the so-called capability approach, uses the example of a fasting man to highlight the issue. A fasting man is not getting enough food, and nutrition is surely a basic need with high priority. But if someone is fasting, it means that he is voluntarily not getting enough food, and would meet his basic need if he would simply wish to do so. There has to be a moral difference between the fasting man and the involuntarily starving man. For this reason, Sen and others argue that it is not the actual intake of food we ought to be concerned about, but rather the capability of getting food. Though Sen's point is important when it comes to the logic and ultimate aims of distribution of goods and social justice, one might be excused for regarding this issue irrelevant when it comes to basic needs. Genuine basic needs, even given some contextual variation, are exactly those that justifiably pass the generalisation that each person seeks them. Indeed, Rawls defined basic goods as those goods which a rational person can be expected to value, whatever else he values[60]. Even fasting is a temporary activity, and does not really affect the notion of food as a basic need.

So it seems that it is difficult to define a set of basic needs that would help to define the notion of poverty in absolute sense. It is possible to define basic needs narrowly, so that the incapacity to meet these needs means that one is undoubtedly poor. But being such a narrow definition, it does not mean that if

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59 Braybrooke 1987; 30-31

60 Rawls 1972; 92

someone were capable of meeting these needs would necessarily be free from poverty. In logical terms, being able to meet these needs is a necessary, but not yet sufficient condition for not being poor.

Absolute poverty can be discussed also by other metrics than the most popular metric of basic needs. Basically any theory of political philosophy with an idea about what are the most relevant goods to be distributed by a society provides an answer to this matter. But for example welfare as a metric is one that will be hard to measure, thus leaving the idea of poverty in absolute terms a theoretical notion rather than something quantifiable. Additionally, welfare necessarily includes elements that do not intuitively belong to the field of poverty. In another of Sen's examples, an extremely rich man who is unsatisfied with his life since no-one likes his poetry, seems as being both rich and on a low level of welfare[61]. Thus low welfare does not necessitate being poor in the sense that poverty creates ethical responsibilities to others, or at least demands for justice.

## 1.6 Relative poverty

Defining poverty by the level of income or access to certain pre-defined goods omits the matter of poverty as a relative phenomenon. There are indeed those who prefer omitting the whole notion or at least regarding it as secondary in importance, arguing that if poverty is to be seen as an ethical problem, we ought to focus on absolute extreme poverty. Accordingly, poverty as observed in "developed countries" is, though real, "only" relative in nature. This means that such poverty can cause loss of dignity, envy and social exclusion, but hardly loss of life. Others argue that all poverty exists within a social context, and cannot be wholly understood without discussing the distribution of material goods in that particular context, i.e. the notion of relative poverty.

Even though the moral urgency of extreme poverty needs to be taken seriously, there are dimensions of relative poverty that need to be analysed carefully before anything conclusive about the moral status of relative poverty can be said. Relative poverty is too often seen as only a feeling of injustice or envy, as it is seen as poverty only relative to the surrounding society's standards. I will discuss here more profound ideas about relative poverty. By and large, it seems to me that poverty ought to be seen as having at least some relative aspects if it is to be defined meaningfully. Therefore, the argument for making the distinction between absolute extreme poverty (which is an ethical problem) and relative poverty (which is "only" a problem of distributive justice) cannot be sustained, as already discussed. Additionally, as concluded above, "absolute" basic needs also include context-relative elements. Relative elements of poverty therefore deserve a thorough discussion – they can be relevant to extreme poverty as well.

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61 Sen 1998; 288-289

### 1.6.1 Marxist notion

Most ideas about relative poverty go at some way or another back Karl Marx's theories. There is no reason why this has to be so, as will be discussed below. Yet it was Marx who first vocally criticised tendencies in emerging social sciences and economics focusing on absolute command of goods rather than persons' relative positions in a society. Marx also criticised speaking about averages (of income, for instance), which leaves unattended the problem of relative positions in a society. In a famous passage from *Economic-philosophical manuscripts 1844* Marx seems to argue that *only* relative aspects of poverty matter:

> "But even if it were as true as it is false that the average income of *every* class of society has increased, the income-differences and relative income-distances may nevertheless have become greater and the contrasts between wealth and poverty accordingly stand out more sharply. For just become total production rises — and in the same measure as it rises — needs, desires and claims also multiply and thus relative poverty can increase whilst absolute poverty diminishes. The Samoyed living on fish oil and rancid fish is not poor because in his secluded society all have the same needs. But in *a state that is forging ahead*, which in the course of a decade, say, increased by a third its total production in proportion to the population, the worker who is getting as much at the end of ten years as at the beginning has not remained as well off, but has become poorer by a third."[62]

To Marx, the absolute understanding of poverty was mistaken for the reason that there was no such thing as poverty outside the social structures of society. As part of this theory of exploitation, Marx argued that it is in the interest of capitalists to merely keep the workers alive. This means allowing the workers a living which enables them just to get the biological minimum for food, shelter etc. At least this mere survival is the point to which the logic of capitalism ultimately leads to. Marx called this ultimate state the state of "simple humanity"[63]. Marx' idea of simple humanity can be thought to be an expression of the minimum for not being poor in the absolute sense. "The political economy knows the worker only as a working-animal – as a beast reduced to the strictest bodily needs"[64]. This for Marx did not mean a state in which a person is not poor, quite the contrary. It is noteworthy that it is exactly "bodily needs" that Marx refers to, the notion quite often employed as the basis for forming poverty lines with the logic of absolute poverty.

But Marx was perhaps optimistic on this issue, as he thought that a minimum of meeting one's "bodily needs" is already a state of exploitation – and therefore, cannot inform an ethical claim (why would we call for a state of exploitation?). Yet, globally speaking, the world is quite far from such a state, and it is exactly the claim for "simple humanity" which dominates the discourse on poverty alleviation.

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62 Marx 1988, chap 1

63 Marx 1988, chap 1

64 Marx 1988; 29

Marx has been criticised for failing to distinguish between needs, wants and necessities. In the passage quoted above he refers to multiplying "needs, desires and claims", practically referring to one single category. This seems analytically incorrect. One's basic needs might be constant, but social necessities increase, as do wants as more and more complex goods become available. Thus the question is not, if needs multiply, but rather, what is the relation between wants, necessities and needs, and how the multiplication of the former two affect the capacity to meet one's needs. So perhaps Marx ought to be saying that while all human beings have the constant and unchanging need for food, the Samoyed in his society finds fish oil and rancid fish totally acceptable means of serving this basic need. This comes back to the analysis of problems of relativity of absolute needs. Such reformation of the argument would not change Marx' underlying idea, since Marx' point was that we cannot conclude anything from biological basic needs as such.

Marx' analytical failure can be a reflection of the fact that he was not very concerned about ethical claims or normative problems generally. The reason "need" is typically distinguished from mere want is that "need" has more ethical force. Need implies a claim on others, which mere want does not. Marx does not seem to see it as relevant to make such a distinction. For him, social relations dictate both.

It is also possible to understand Marx in the context that he thought of everything as a social product. In other words, "need" is also something produced by the society, rather than inherent in human beings. As argued above, need in the strictest biological sense does not inform a meaningful agenda for serving need generally. Marx' rejection of traditional ethical concepts helps to draw this conclusion. A society in Marxist thought forms the material base, which also determines subjectivities. This idea has been very explicit in later Marxist thought. To quote Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri:

> "The great industrial and financial powers thus produce not only commodities but also subjectivities [...] they produce needs [sic], social relations, bodies and minds.[65]"

Yet want (in the sense of expectations) also affect one's ideas of being poor. If we note that poverty is not only a matter of meeting one's basic needs or other absolute criterion, but also a matter of societal factors, then we will have to conclude that subjective expectations affect the sense of being poor or not. Therefore, such "forging ahead" will have an effect on the means of avoiding poverty. From a global point of view it is of interest what we understand to be the society of reference here. For example the scope of the effects of global financial systems, and the scope of movement of information about (and thus expectations for) consumer objects and such symbols of development, are highly different issues. There are people who are severely affected by the global order but are not aware that they could demand more for themselves, and also people who become grimly aware of the symbols of development but have no

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65 Hardt & Negri 2001; 32

means to acquire such objects. Think of the Samoyed living happily on his rancid fish-diet, until one day he finds out that his diet is more meagre than it could be since other peoples are over fishing the same waters. This awareness must have some effect on the perception of poverty by the Samoyed, and therefore can have implication for justice too.

Expectations have to be kept in the correct moral compartment; bearing in mind that expectations themselves have less moral force than needs. As noted, mere expectations cannot inform claims, or we are again facing the problem of expensive taste. In any case, according to the Marxist viewpoint, which perhaps fails to make the distinction between needs and wants, expectations derive from interaction and are thus a social product like needs.

A thought experiment helpful for discussing the difference between relative and absolute poverty is the question of whether everyone could be rich or at least free from poverty? If poverty is only understood as absolute, the answer is clearly yes. For Marx, as noted, the only way of intelligibly discussing poverty is via the relative aspect of the matter, and therefore the richness of all would be an impossibility (in the present capitalist social order). Globally, there is a certain rationale behind this Marxist thought. To paraphrase C. Douglas Lummis, any image one can attach to being rich, implicitly assumes that someone else is poor. Even the very concept "rich", originally, means someone who has power over others – a dual meaning which is still visible for example in the German word *reich* and the Swedish *rik*, meaning both *rich* and *kingdom*.[66]

Thus owning any product, or having access any service which can be associated with being rich, implies that somewhere people are correspondingly poor. If the person growing my coffee were rich, I would be able to afford a lot less coffee. If the waiter in my favourite restaurant were rich, I would not be able to afford to eat there so often. And so on. A claim for all being rich, or at least all being free from poverty, is perhaps not as reasonable as it might seem, especially if the strategy is to end poverty while accepting the accumulating wealth by others. Rather, it may be that it is the logic of distribution, which needs to be discussed here. This, of course, leads to the conclusion that if poverty is an ethical problem, then overt richness is an ethical problem also, or at least the reason for the existence of an ethical problem.

An example might highlight the rationale behind the Marxist notion, or more generally the idea that poverty is always relative in nature. Consider the fact that there are over 800 million people in the world who are constantly hungry. To remedy the problem new agricultural technologies have been invented over the decades, such as better seeds, fertilisers and irrigation systems, which have undeniably increased the production of food globally. But this has had little impact on the numbers of hungry people, which have remained constant, even though there is now enough food globally to feed everyone, even excess food. Distribution systems are technically quite functional in most places – there is no difficulty with getting the food to the poor – far from that, usually it is effectively exported away from the areas

66 Lummis 1996; 70

where they live. This might seem odd for the reason that our need for food is very constant. If I get rich, I am unlikely to *substantially* increase my calorie intake (highlighting the word "substantially", since some variation of course takes place). For this reason, it might seem that relative poverty has little to do with the problem of getting food to everyone. Theoretically, an increased amount of available food should solve the hunger problem.

Yet in reality there are several ways by which food consumption indirectly increases as living standards arise. For example meat consumption typically increases with rising living standard. This is a way of consuming more food indirectly, since producing a kilo of meat roughly takes ten kilos of edible vegetation in animal feed[67]. With higher purchasing power, food is more likely to be bought for pets, thrown away uneaten etc. Lately, there have been initiatives to use edible vegetables, such as maize, to produce ethanol for use as fuel. In each of these cases, people with less purchasing power are left with no food in the process, when those with grossly more income compete for such indirect use of food. Solving the hunger problem is very much a case of levelling relative positions in the money economy globally. Only by achieving better positions relative to the well-off in the global economy, could the poor get food for their nutritional priority needs, before food is used for richer peoples' secondary needs. As hunger is such a clear example, it raises a suspicion that other goods in which the actual consumption is less constant, will include similar, or even worse, patterns of indirect consumption of scarce goods unavailable to others as a result.

### 1.6.2 Standards of society

Another classic philosopher who has inspired the discussion on relative poverty is, maybe somewhat surprisingly, Adam Smith. While Smith was mostly interested in the division of labour, trade, and such issues, and eagerly dwelt of the means of economic expansion, he was aware of the relative aspects of income and wealth. In a frequently-quoted phrase of *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith argues as follows:

> "A linen shirt, for example, is, strictly speaking, not a necessary of life. The Greeks and Romans lived, I suppose, very comfortably, though they had no linen. But in the present times, through the greater part of Europe, a creditable day-labourer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt, the want of which would be supposed to denote that disgraceful degree of poverty which, it is presumed, no body can well fall into without extremely bad conduct"[68].

In this quote, and in several other passages of *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith comes strikingly close to Marx' argument. The difference between these two is that Smith does not discuss relative power positions as such, nor does he discuss distributive justice in detail. He does not argue that the rising incomes

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67 Waggoner 1998; 71-76

68 Smith 1994 [1776], 939

of the wealthiest would impoverish the poorest in the same degree; there is no straightforward causal connection. Yet he does note that customs of societies do change, and although he does not say it explicitly, the customs might make it more income-consuming to act in such a manner to meet the minimal standards of a society, without "being ashamed to appear in public". It is, of course, difficult to point out conclusively, what are such minimal requirements in each society, and what ought to count as a society (a village? an urban neighbourhood with a strong identity?). Yet Smith's argument reminds us that the minimal standard of material goods in social life seldom equates with the minimal standard of biological life. Even in the poorest of countries, anyone who could not afford clothing and thus would be forced to appear naked would be seen as living in disgraceful poverty, although especially in tropical zones clothing is hardly necessary for biological survival. It also seems that as societies grow materially more opulent, the socially expected standard of material wealth increases. Anyone living just above the international poverty line would be seen as desperately poor in a northern European country. This is the basis of seeing relative poverty psychologically.

The tendency of societies to create ideas of "appropriate" consumption levels and patterns is not merely a structural, but also a psychological matter. People have a tendency to "consume because others consume", as Judith Lichtenberg has argued. According to Lichtenberg, consumption of certain goods is also communication, and such communication codes are relative to the social context[69]. Therefore, to express certain social position in one's society, even not a distinctly high one, one needs to acquire goods with which to communicate this relative position. Lichtenberg's analysis contains an element of Thomas Hobbes, who argued that people's desires are not directed at objects themselves, but at other people's desires for objects[70].

Yet, again, it is "only" loss of dignity and not the other bads related to extreme poverty that is discussed here. The notion of socially necessary material goods does not necessarily lead to specific normative conclusions because of the individual psychological aspect of appearing without shame, and it is difficult to see how could such a notion would not lead to a justification of the unequal distribution of material goods globally. If a minimum standard of material goods needed for a social life without shame is taken as context-specific and demanding in the distributive sense, the conclusion seems to be a demand for unequal distribution. A wealthy person could see a place for a major claim for goods here. A possible answer to this problem could be derived from Amartya Sen's argument. Sen argues that what ought to be distributed equally are not material goods but capabilities. He points out that *absolute* deprivation in terms of capabilities can follow from a *relative* deprivation in terms of commodities[71]. Thus, appearing in public without shame can be seen as highly valued capability, and one can be

69 Lichtenberg 1998; 161-163
70 Hobbes 1994; 50-60
71 Sen 1998; 292

absolutely deprived of this capability if one suffers from a relative deprivation of material goods.

It is highly important whether we think of capabilities, rather than material goods or income, as the "currency" of justice, namely the good to be distributed equally. If so, we can promote an egalitarian agenda and yet accept some material inequality, if such material goods are of differing relevance to capabilities for different persons. Yet the notion of capabilities suffers from the same problems as the notion of needs, when it comes to problems of generality. To appear in public without shame can be a relevant capability, but what this practically means in different settings, is a highly context-dependent and subjective issue. Additionally, we are back to similar problems as the problem of expensive taste, when we discuss such capabilities. For example different social classes, especially in highly stratified societies, have different expectations when it comes to appearing without shame, and other capabilities too. So instead of expectations, it would be ethically more suitable to discuss "justified expectations", meaning that there have to be some criteria to legitimate claims, other than merely the existence of expectations. It can be expected from the overtly rich that they level down their expectations of what is needed for the capability to appear in public without shame.

This leads us to the dual nature of the task of social justice. First, theories of social justice ought to react to different expectations and contexts and to be culturally sensitive. Even recognising the problem of expensive tastes, such sensitive theory will to some extent have to refer to different expectations by different people. If A can appear in public without shame only in sandals and B only in leather shoes, it seems that their situation would be equal from the viewpoint of this capability if A possesses sandals and B possesses leather shoes, even though B's possession would be more expensive. Yet, on the other hand, the task of social justice is to equalise such expectations, as highly differing expectations are themselves often a product of social injustice, as different strata of society get accustomed to a certain living standard. High stratification is unjust, and therefore expectations created by it are a product of injustice too.

## 1.7 Absolute poverty II: Meeting basic needs

Relative poverty can mean more than simply the capability of appearing without shame or similar psychological concerns. Namely, relative deprivation of commodities can lead to absolute deprivation in terms of capabilities, as noted, but also in terms of needs. Thus, while needs remain constant, ways of meeting needs change. This is caused by the above-mentioned fact that in different social contexts there are different commodities to serve one's needs, and by the process of economic growth, these commodities necessary for meeting one's needs tend to become more complex and more expensive. While

the formula "A needs B in order to C" might seem simple, in real life it is far from that. This is because even if C (the need) remains constant, B (the means for achieving this need) can change in quantity and quality. Here, I will call these means of meeting needs "necessities", even though everyday vocabulary is confusing as the word "need" is used also to mean "necessities", such as in "I need money in order to buy food".

Take the need for transport. Most human beings have at least some need to move from a place to another, in order to earn one's living and keep up social bonds. This need is more sporadic for others, yet almost without exception transport is a genuine need. As some societies get wealthier, more complex and more urbanised, the need for transport tends to increase. People have to travel longer distances than before to serve the same needs. Thus meeting the same need requires more money – or at least more physical effort. Similarly, the available means of transport change. In extreme cases the need for transport can be served only by owning a private car[72]. Further, transport may be necessary in order to get to work, which may be necessary for getting paid, which may be necessary for buying food. Cars and bicycles can be equal from the viewpoint of need, if they are necessities in two different contexts for meeting the same need.

Such cases are quite different from the Marxist notion of expanding expectations (or needs). As expectations are psychological matters, social necessities are means for meeting basic needs. If such means become more complex, or expensive, the actual living standard has not arisen from the viewpoint of basic needs. Marx's, and especially Smith's, notion of needs can be understood as "Hobbesian": it is the "want to other people's wants", which causes needs to multiply. Yet this is psychological mechanism is quite different from actual necessities, which leave no practical room for choice. If I need a private car to get to work, and to be thus able to buy food, this need is analytically quite independent of the fact that not owning a car would make one feel ashamed. Therefore this phenomenon has to be kept analytically separate from expectations, although often these phenomena are interlinked, as both tend to rise along with the living standard. (Although Marx' point can also be understood in the context of increasing social necessities).

Ivan Illich has called this phenomenon the emergence of "radical monopoly". By the concept Illich means that a certain product, rather than a certain brand, has taken over the market to such an extent that people have no choice but to use that product. For example, if Coca-cola has a monopoly of the soft drinks market, it is a monopoly. Yet, in such a case, I always have the choice of drinking water or beer instead to ease my thirst. In the case in which the only way for me to ease my thirst would be to drink soft drinks, soft drinks would have a radical monopoly – they have become essential for meeting a vital basic need.[73] According to Illich, the market system has a tendency to create such radical monopolies, which are far stronger and more extreme kinds

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72 Illich 1973; 52

73 Illich 1973; 52

of monopolies than monopolies of a brand[74]. "Radical monopoly" is another way of saying that a product has become essentially a necessity for functioning in a particular society. The existence and strength of radical monopolies are a reason for life in itself to require certain minimum amount of income. If economic growth bases itself on the creation of radical monopolies, as it often does, this minimum will necessarily increase.

A more analytical concept describing the same phenomenon is the NRI (need-required income), proposed by Jerome Segal[75]. Segal argues that people in affluent societies feel that they are economically hard-pressed not only because of being accustomed to goods which would count as luxuries by global comparison, but also for genuine reasons. Segal's claim is based on the argument that need-required income in rich countries is presently very high[76]. He takes the "core needs" of housing, transportation, food, health care, clothing, education and economic security, and points out that in the US, the income needed to meet these needs has significantly risen during recent decades, with the exception of food[77]. Noting the general rise of the NRI, Segal argues that this forms "a new picture of the affluent society". "Affluence" might thus be needed just to assess the ever more expensive necessities.

It is thus important to distinguish between a need and a means to meeting the need. Even though some basic needs might be constant for biological reasons, the practically available means for meeting these constant needs are far from constant. Meeting the need for housing is dependent on the kinds of housing available. The need for transportation is dependent on the transportation systems: if there is a cheap and reliable system of public transport available, for example. The need for transportation also varies as the key places to which one has the need to travel move from a place to place: how far from one's place of work one is one able to reside, for example. Thus the notion of need-required income is not an argument about the nature of needs themselves, but about the available means for meeting them. For this reason, it has to be highlighted again that it is absolute rather than relative poverty that is being discussed here.[78]

These analyses do not lead to the argument that the high and environmentally unsustainable consumption levels of the affluent countries, or a globally very unequal distribution of goods, would be justified, although they might create a risk for promoting such conclusions. One could take a social microcosm from a rich country and argue that in order to avoid a failure to meet the society's standards and expectations, or a failure to meet the need-required income, the people living inside this microcosm ought to have a high level of income. Such microcosm could be an area in Florida reserved for wealthy pensioners, for example. Living in such an excluded society would

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74 Illich 1973; 55-57

75 Segal 1998:; 177

76 Segal 1998, 182-191

77 Presently, also the price of food is rising.

78 See also Goodin's discussion on "relative needs" (Goodin 1995; 244-261)

require vast amounts of money, and the structural capacity to use natural resources to a high extent. Perhaps the only available shelter would be a mansion and the only available water would be imported from abroad in bottles.

Yet, this is not where the analysis of relative necessities for meeting constant needs inevitably leads. Rather, Illich and Segal point out, the analysis calls for a new approach in the policies of the rich countries. Rather than making the effort of creating more income, or in addition to it, policies ought to be focused on finding ways to reduce the NRI, or dismantling radical monopolies. Moreover, global redistribution measures will be significantly more difficult, if need-required income in wealthy countries is not reduced and radical monopolies are not dismantled. Note that such measures are not matters of lower income. Rather, they are merely a matter of meeting core needs and functioning in one's society with less income required.

This approach is relevant to poor countries too. Since the amount of income needed in order to meet one's basic needs is rising – or is at least potentially subject to change – in poor countries also it is highly relevant with respect to poverty. If the means for meeting certain needs are transferred into the market realm, or become more expensive, large segments of population may become impoverished even though the general level of income rises. Therefore, the availability of cheap or free means of meeting basic needs is at least as important as a poverty reduction strategy as is rising income – especially since the processes that increase incomes might also be such that they also increase the NRI. The income of the poor might increase slower than the NRI, causing impoverishment and possibly increasing poverty in the absolute sense. Practically, focusing merely on incomes generates the risk of misinterpreting global poverty trends.

It is important to note that social necessities, or radical monopolies, can be totally disconnected from underlying needs. It is one thing to note that the basic need for food can be served on either rancid fish or fine caviar, and quite another that getting food might be a process needing things unrelated to food. In order to serve my basic food needs, I need a bank account, for example, since I can't get my salary in cash, and I can only obtain food by using money. Thus a bank account is a requirement for getting food, although by itself it has nothing to do with food.

We can quite easily conceive of a society, in which one would need some technological object to get anything done. Imagine that for obtaining an apartment, buying anything, communicating with friends and working, everyone in a given society would need a thing called the Gadget. Thus the Gadget would be of very high priority to anyone and a social necessity of high importance. The Gadget would be also, of course, something which has strictly nothing to do with basic needs. You don't eat the Gadget, you don't drink the Gadget, you don't sleep in the Gadget etc. You don't even trade the Gadget for these things. Yet obviously anyone in such a society lacking a Gadget would be extremely poor and marginalised and have great difficulties meeting their basic

needs, and it would be fair to say that in order to prevent citizens falling into desperate poverty the government should see that everyone has a Gadget. Alternatively, the government could work out such societal solution by which people could live their lives without deprivations even if they do not possess a Gadget. Such an alternative solution would not necessarily mean that the living standard would fall – just that acquiring goods necessary for meeting needs is organised differently.

When answering the question, what do people need in order not to be poor, it is thus not enough to show what goods are needed for directly meeting basic needs[79]. Rather, it has to be pointed out how these goods are acquired, and what kinds of social necessities are needed in this process. We also need a specified theory of what kind of goods ethical claims may concern. As noted, "food" can mean any means to nutrition, but expensive tastes inform fewer, if any, ethical claims. Also, in order to be relevant, ethical claims ought to concern the actual means of attaining such goods, i.e. social necessities.

Yet when discussing social necessities, it should be noted that such issues are not necessarily matters of relative poverty. Expanding social necessities, their rising costs, new radical monopolies and such will affect the whole of society, thus creating new practical needs for each member. While these processes often are most difficult for the poorest members of such societies, technically the issue is different from that of relative poverty. As Douglas Lummis suggests, poverty created by increasing social necessities ought to be recognised as its own category. Yet such phenomena, as argued here, can also be seen from the viewpoint of absolute poverty. Since most objects are wanted not for their own sake but as means to some other good, it is of little importance what these objects are. Rather, we ought to focus on the actual goods acquired.

## 1.8 Relative poverty and poverty alleviation

On the basis on the discussion on relative poverty and the relative dimensions of absolute poverty, it seems that development endeavours with a trickle-down approach, aimed at reducing poverty, can end up actually deepening it. If there are more material goods available in a given society, they are likely to be desired by the members of that society. It is also likely that new social necessities will be created, and thus the poverty situation will potentially worsen. Will the material standard of living for the poor remain stable while the overall standard of living rises, the poor will be further impoverished, as Marx noted, although this process in unlikely to be as straight-forward as Marx presumed. But it is has been precisely the overall rise of economic activity and GDP that has been the most commonly used means to posit poverty reduction. As Marx argued, the poor can even be impoverished while their standard of

[79] By "goods" I mean here objects rather than needed things, i.e. the commodity meaning of "goods" rather than its ethical meaning.

living rises, if this rise is very small and the price of necessities grows fast. The notions of relative poverty and social necessities, therefore pose a serious challenge to the very idea of trickle-down development.

The aspect of relative poverty as expectations should also be discussed here. I mentioned above that preferences could be informed by societal positions. Martha Nussbaum has argued that people have to become aware of what they can possibly claim and what they ought to be entitled to[80] – quite correctly, I believe. She argues that varying preferences can also be caused by injustice, apart from being genuine subjective differences of preference[81]. Not only cases in which preferences are not justly met are unjust, but also cases in which preferences are malformed. Oppressed groups often assume the identity of b-class citizens as part of their identity, which affects their preferences. Nussbaum grounds her theory on an objective theory of wellbeing, arguing that an objective account of good human life can inform, whether actual expressed preferences are reflections of the subjects' lack of knowledge of alternatives or justified claims. Similarly, expensive tastes can be judged by the same objective criteria, which point that such tastes are not important for human wellbeing.

But does Nussbaum's theory include a similar risk of expanding social necessities, as do the trickle-down growth strategies? In Nussbaum's examples, Indian women become aware that they can get electricity if they organise themselves to demand it. One could imagine cases in which such creation of wants could lead to problems of relative poverty. If one thinks of electricity as something one can legitimately claim, several electronic appliances are likely to be claimed in the future. This could lead to increased experienced or real poverty by some, while certainly also leading to emancipation and empowerment. Becoming aware of possible claims can both create more equal starting points for preferences and increase wants. So an increase of relative poverty is not necessarily bad, at least in ideal cases where the knowledge of one's legitimate means to needs fulfilment can be detached from mere increased wants.

Yet Nussbaum's view of people becoming aware of what they can claim may be too optimistic in some cases. Becoming aware of a right does not spell achieving this right. It has correctly been noted that people become aware of what they could possess by such things as global means of communication and advertising, while they practically cannot acquire such goods. Thus even such awareness can merely create frustration caused by an ever-larger awareness of existing inequalities. It is easy to compare Nussbaum's heroes, the Indian women who organise themselves into self-help groups to claim their rights, with other people who have no chance of attaining similar goods, while being aware of other's possession of them.

When we talk about relative poverty the question is what is it relative to? Obviously we are discussing positions and acquisitions relative to others in the society. But what counts as society? Although economic processes and

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80 Nussbaum 2000; 31-33

81 See also Griffin 1986; 40-41

information flows are nearly global in nature, it would seem misguided to regard the world as a single society in this sense. Do changes in living standards really deepen relative poverty in faraway places? To some extent they do, if relative poverty is understood psychologically. There is also a push for technological changes etc., but these can be discussed within the context of one society. If someone in the computer business gets rich in Europe, it does not really relatively impoverish people in Africa. Yet the computerisation of social and working life in Africa can do this.

The distinctions between needs, wants, necessities, tastes, means to needs fulfilment and such can seem as merely analytical exercises, but the issue of relative poverty shows that such distinctions are highly important. Creating newly experienced needs corresponding with legitimate claims is very different from creating new necessities or more expensive means for needs fulfilment. Nussbaum correctly argues that these claims are relevant for theories of justice. Here Nussbaum seems to go beyond the distinctions of Marx and Smith. Marx' mistake was that he did not differentiate between needs, wants, necessities and mere tastes, instead putting all of them under the concept of "needs". Smith, on the other hand, merely referred to expectations in society and social standards. Following Nussbaum's argument, we have to differentiate between needs and mere tastes.

Where absolute notions of poverty have an argument on their side is in the problem of mere tastes. As individual tastes differ, it seems irrelevant regarding the moral aspects of poverty whether all tastes are satisfied. Someone might really enjoy caviar, but it is no reason to regard the person poor if she fails to have caviar and only has fish. Tastes belong to the realm of mere subjective preferences, which ought not to inform discussions on poverty. Yet the problem is how are we to distinguish between mere tastes and the standards of society. Is the linen shirt mentioned by Smith a matter of mere taste or of social expectation? The distinction is hard to make.

The need for money can, and often does, increase, while this has nothing to do with relative poverty, but instead people's command of basic goods. First, the value of money can change and cheaper products can be harder to obtain. These problems have been thoroughly discussed by economists in their search for reliable ways of measuring purchasing power. Second, goods can become marketised. If someone has lived on subsistence farming and starts selling her goods on the market, the income level rises, while the command of basic goods can remain stable. In this case, would income from other sources decline, it could be possible scenario that the subsistence farmer's income would remain stable while her command of basic goods would deteriorate. But, as noted, these cases can be discussed within the framework of absolute poverty, since there is a stable baseline of command of basic goods, which is the reference point in these cases.

## 1.9 Aspects of poverty

Poverty, if it is to be understood ethically, means that a person lacks something of ethical significance. So far I have discussed poverty as an absolute and relative phenomenon, from the viewpoint of need. Some kind of listing of "basic needs" is typical in arguments about what the ethically relevant things someone lacks are, if she is poor in the ethically significant sense of the term. (When discussing "basic needs", "needs" are understood differently from how I have used the concept, namely meaning goods of ethical significance as such rather than meaning merely commodities). Basic goods can be appropriated by money (as food often, but not always, is), or distributed by government (as health care typically is). Apart from basic goods, the candidates for ethically relevant goods are such things as capabilities, opportunities, and the whole Aristotelian discourse on elements of good life. But apart from these already discussed, there are other possible candidates, such as the answers to the question: "what does one essentially lack if one is poor?" These answers have arisen in the contemporary literature on development and poverty. They will be discussed next.

### 1.9.1 Risks and vulnerability

The most common of these is the concept of risk. Thus the answer to the question, what one lacks if one is poor, would be personal security. The academic discussion of risk got fully underway with Ulrich Beck's "*The risk society*", in which Beck argued that contemporary societies systematically generate risks that they cannot control, and that the distribution of risk has become one of highly relevant aspects of the problem of just distribution[82]. Such risk includes environmental risks (the likelihood of being the victim of a natural disaster, or the likelihood of suffering from health problems because of poisons), and economic risks (likelihood to lose one's means of livelihood). Practically, risks ought to be minimised, but to the extent they cannot, they ought to be distributed equally or according to a genuine willingness to take risks. Also if someone if forced to take severe risks regarding one's health, one ought to be compensated by others who avoid such risks. Risks are, indeed, ever more unequally distributed on a global scale.

A plausible baseline for avoiding risk might also be necessary for determining who is poor in the contemporary world. Imaginea relatively poor resident of an urban slum in a developing country. She receives enough income not to fall beyond a poverty line corresponding with meeting basic needs, even though her income is meagre. She might have access to public services, perhaps provided by an NGO, such as schooling or health care, and have adequate shelter. She might enjoy decent capabilities to function according to her personal preferences. Yet as it turns out, the slum area has been built in an area

82 Beck 1992

where radioactive waste has been dumped earlier, which makes certain cancerous tumours 100 times more likely among the population of the area. If the dwellers were better off, they would be able to avoid being exposed to such risks by moving elsewhere. Being a slum setting, the dwellers also suffer from low physical security and low economic security. The risks may never materialise, but we would yet say that the dwellers suffer poverty – even though no other criterion for poverty was actually fulfilled.

This scenario does not require much imagination, since similar cases are easy to find. As toxic substances spread, many people become exposed to them and consequentially face health risks. Also, working conditions can generate health risks, such as in factories where workers are exposed to dangerous chemicals. Vulnerability to natural disaster is also a signifier of poverty and thus an element of social justice, as noted above[83]. If for example trees are cut down close to coastal areas, bringing economic profit to some people, floods are more likely to destroy dwellings close to the coastline. This is clearly an unjust distribution of social goods and bads. The notion of risk may also include economic risk. Part of a person's economic position, in addition to income alone, concerns how likely one is to suffer severe deprivation in an event of an economic crisis. Similarly, and perhaps most notoriously, environmental risks have spawned a whole discourse on environmental justice, also concerned with environmental risks and their just distribution[84].

But to talk about risk and security is to deal with baselines that are difficult to define. What is a suitable measure of avoiding risks? The problem is that, firstly, all human life involves risk. Even though exposure to some toxic substances might make it more likely to get a lethal tumour, each person has this risk to some degree. An acceptable level of a certain risk always has to be defined. Some risks are taken willingly and indeed seen as side-effects of welfare-generating choices – although risks are not typically valued as such, but rather seen as less bad compared to the good to be gained in the same process, as exemplified in the slogan "a risk worth taking". Second, risks are very difficult to quantify. Even experts often disagree about risks. Such difficulty of quantification, in addition to the fact that not all risks can be known in advance, makes it difficult to intelligibly discuss a just distribution of risks, as this should be based on a solid knowledge of what is being distributed. Third, any attempt at this discussion implies that there is a certain state of health and lifespan that one can expect. But life expectancy is a statistical generalisation, and not a right. Referring to risk as a basic good means taking as a basic good something that cannot be easily distributed, and which is always a matter of approximation rather than a commodity. For this reason, even though the importance of avoiding risks would make it seem a basic good, this would lead to practical problems. What would be a sufficient level of avoidance of risks, while not all risks to human life are, or can be, known? Indeed, these difficulties make one wonder if risk belongs to the scope of distributive justice at all.

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83 Moore Lappe et al 1998; 15-16

84 Waters & Bullard 2005

But the practical difficulties do not mean that in principle risks are not a distributive problem. At least what can be said is that certain minimum baseline of not being poor is something people have the right to. It is possible to qualify the situations in which people are exposed to gross risks without compensation, and note that these are matters of poverty, because social conditions make it impossible to avoid such risks. In this sense of basic good, avoiding risks can be seen like any good to which human beings are entitled sufficiently.

Avoiding risks could be understood as a *scarce good*. Since environmental, economic and such risks can never be avoided, the possibility to avoid these is something that can be distributed, but only to some degree. Distribution, overall, becomes an issue in cases where goods are scarce. For example air for breathing is not a distributive problem, even though lack of oxygen does create serious risks to human health. Most cases of avoiding environmental risks are ones in which both these conditions apply. Such possibilities have to be distributed, but their distribution is more a matter of distributing scarce goods than distributing basic goods.

Cases in which people are forced to live in polluted areas fit the intuition of unnecessary risks quite well. Things get more complicated when economic risk is discussed. Typically, people taking part in economic everyday activity have little control over their economic security. Security is also a privilege, manifest in the form of such things as savings accounts, insurance and other buffers. As prices shift and capital and jobs relocate, people on low incomes, especially, have very little control over their economic situation, and thus very little economic security. They might be doing the only job available, and there might be no security for unemployment. But even though economic security is hard to distribute, this is not impossible. On the contrary, it is something that the market and social security systems distribute to people constantly[85]. Also, avoiding economic risk can be seen as a good to be distributed, and also a scarce benefit by nature, since people tend to thrive on the vulnerability of others, for example by getting cheap products, because cheapness is often caused by the "flexibility", or disposability, of the labour force.

So risk has to be discussed to a certain extent when we discuss poverty. The distribution of goods can be based on probabilistic distributions. The likelihood of dying in an environmental disaster is an example of a "probabilistic burden". By analogy, more familiar cases could be the likelihood of repression by officials. If the majority of the population has a likelihood of 0,001% of being beaten up by the police and a minority (say, gypsies in Finland) have a considerably higher likelihood say, 1% of suffering this fate, we are dealing with a case of injustice. This injustice would prevail even if we point to someone from the majority population who has been beaten up by the police and someone from the minority who has not. Similarly, severely increased vulnerability is an aspect of being poor, even though one might never actually experience the harm inherent in exposure to risk.[86]

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85 See for example Goodin 1986

86 See Pogge 2002; 38, for an example of this problem.

Yet the causal problem remains. Namely, does poverty generate increased risk and vulnerability, or does it involve heightened risk, along with other bads? Merely noting the co-appearance of these phenomena does not answer this question. My answer is that poverty generates risks, but risks do not intrinsically constitute poverty. The causal connection of these phenomena provides us with yet another reason for regarding poverty an ethical problem.

### 1.9.2 A mental state

The post-structuralist – or post-modernist – trend has been to regard poverty as merely (or chiefly) a construction or a mental state[87]. Thus, assuming that one is not living in materially totally desperate conditions, poverty is seen mainly as a socio-psychological construction (or sometimes only as such a construction). Poverty is understood as a mindset enforced by the capitalist economy, which runs on omnipresent want. This has interesting implications for ethical theory. If the loss of dignity and the suffering related to poverty are caused mainly by the expectations, or standards, of the society, it would be a deconstruction of ideas that would be needed (rather than political changes) for poverty to decrease. Indeed poverty is a state of lacking something, and the mere understanding of lacking something can cause people to perceive themselves as poor. There is little that ethics or the theory of justice can say about psychological change. The idea of poverty as a mental state does not fit the idea of poverty as a social (institutional) arrangement very well.

The idea of poverty as a mental state is common in many non-western cultures, as shown in the old African proverb quoted by Gilbert Rist: "You are poor because you look at what you do not have. See what you possess, see what you are, and you will discover you are astonishingly rich"[88]. Such an approach calls for a radical redefinition of the concept of poverty itself. If we understand poverty as a necessarily relational concept, then an active refusal of relational comparisons can indeed change the position. Yet one can doubt how well a change in attitude will do this, as it is not sufficient for changing all the patterns of distribution one is involved in, and it does little to change the cultural setting either. In addition, this is not necessarily a case of relational comparison or refusal of it, but merely an attitude towards one's personal possessions. The point of such theories is not to focus on ancient wisdoms, but rather to aim at a deconstruction of the notion of poverty. If poverty (and wealth) were understood differently, we would not aim at such destructive modes of material growth, so the argument goes.

These constructivist ideas have drawn much criticism, because of their allegedly cynical attitude to the evils of poverty. For example Richard Peet states, referring to the passage quoted by Rist that "postmodern ethical advocacy in a cruel hoax: it amounts to telling those who are about to expire that they are (astonishingly!) rich that they should die with 'dignity' rather than

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87 Peet, 1999; 142-145

88 Rist 1997, 244

struggle for life."[89] It is indeed true that changes of attitude have little effect on life expectancy. Peet's focusing of his critique onto Rist is somewhat unfair, since Rist seems to share Peet's view to a certain extent. In the very same text he criticises the views that justify poverty in the South as "a part of local cultures". No one claims that suffering would be praised as part of any culture (some religious rituals aside), but many are critical of the urge to "develop". Nevertheless, or regardless of individual scholars' exact views, some are keen to accept the constructivist argument.

Martha Nussbaum's ideas come to close to this mental state approach, although they are more normative in nature. Nussbaum notes that people have to become aware of their rights in order to claim them, and therefore overcoming poverty requires some specific states of mental awareness. A major obstacle for overcoming poverty is thus a willingness to accept one's unjust situation (the refusal to accept it is not a sufficient condition for overcoming poverty). This is contrary to the post-developmental argument in conclusions. It is not a matter of giving up the pursuit of material goods, but rather of becoming aware of one's claim to them. Although Nussbaum emphasises freedoms and capabilities rather than mere material goods, her examples of women's groups in India emphasise an awareness of claims to material goods[90].

Both Nussbaum's view and the post-developmentalist view seem optimistic when it comes to the problem of justice. Do societies really become more just, and less poverty-generating, if one merely changes one's attitude to poverty? Whether this change of attitude is a change of definition or understanding that poverty does not have to be accepted, it seems unlikely that poverty could be eradicated without any significant change in the institutions and power structures of (the global) society. Additionally, the post-developmentalist view encounters the very problem Nussbaum criticises in traditional "liberal" ideas of development: not seeing as unjust a tendency to accept less. Seeing oneself as "astonishingly rich" in a poverty-ridden situation can only mean that injustice has become part of one's self-understanding, as Nussbaum shows.

So the problem with the mental state approach to poverty is that it too easily leads to the justification of situations in which people suffer from deprivation, by declaring want to be only a result of distorted ideas. Yet the idea can be useful when we approach the motivational problem, in other words by asking how could the globally rich be satisfied with a lower material standard of living. Whether an approach to poverty can be differently applied in different contexts is uncertain, though, and all in all the mental state approach fails to catch some essential political elements of poverty.

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89 Peet 1999, 203

90 Nussbaum 2000; 15-24

### 1.9.3 Domination

As discussed, because of the social nature of poverty, it is necessary to address power positions order to understand poverty. Yet the problem is, do we see unequal positions of power as creating unequal material positions, material positions shown by money being only a reflection of the underlying power structure. Thus material inequality would only be a reflection of power positions, and not vice versa. This idea goes back to Hobbes' political philosophy, in which this starting point was central[91]. Power positions are never equal, but extreme poverty can be understood as a state in which they are unacceptably unequal. In this case we can speak of the problem of domination.

If someone is under domination, she is essentially unfree and below a relevant standard of wellbeing. Domination is usually discussed in the context of for example the oppression of women or the political oppression of minorities. Yet domination can also be manifest in cases of, say, labour relations. If someone has practically no choice but to work in a factory, she has to accept any working conditions and has no possibility to protest against the misuses of power by factory managers. Freedom from domination is a negative way of putting what Sen refers to by the positive concept of capabilities. The case for freedom as non-domination has been extensively discussed by Philip Pettit, who nevertheless does not apply it to the context of poverty.[92] While Pettit's discussion focuses on the notion of "discursive control", the idea of non-domination is applicable to social structures without the concept of discourse.

Market relations are always based on interdependence. As such, there is nothing morally questionable about the interdependence of human beings. On the contrary, it can for a good reason be seen as a positive thing. Yet interdependence always generates the risk of domination – the deeper the interdependence, the higher the risk. One aspect of interdependence is that human beings, corporations and other organisations are not equally and mutually interdependent. Very imbalanced interdependence can be seen as an indicator of unjustified positions of domination. For example my possibilities to affect people's lives in the Indian Himalayas are far greater than a Himalayan's possibilities to affect my life. This is, though, is still not a sufficiently gross example to pass as domination. But for example decisions by the very rich heads of corporations, bankers and investors can have such significant effects on people's lives that we can reasonably discuss domination.

Seeing domination as an aspect or outcome of poverty is important, since typical economic theories do not discuss this aspect (perhaps monopoly theory aside). Economic theories tend to portray economic relations as mutually consensual agreements, while the point of seeing poverty as being under domination is exactly a matter of assessing when they are not. But domination as an aspect or outcome of poverty means exactly seeing it as a potential

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91 Hobbes 2008, chap 11

92 Pettit 2001; 138-139

problem of theoretically consensual agreements. Thus the practical alternatives of a subject, rather than the choice of given alternatives, have to be analysed.

As it can be taken for granted that slavery is a case of unjustified domination over other human beings, it is interesting to note a point made by for example John McMurtry. McMurtry argues that the abolishment of slavery can, apart from being a development of morality, also be seen as having been a business-rational choice for slaveholder-turned-property owners, as there is no need to look after the low-paid workers' subsistence, contrary to the situation of slave ownership. Workers, in contrast to slaves, need only to be bought for their effective working period. McMurtry is not merely being cynical in suggesting that the change from slavery to modern low-paid work in developing countries can be seen as a reconfiguration of the relationship based on domination, rather than the abolishment of domination[93]. Basically, hundreds of millions of people work in situations in which they have practically only one choice of employment.

But not all positions of domination are necessarily bad. The key word here is "legitimacy" – close to all political philosophy (some anarchist theories aside) admits that political leadership can have legitimate power, under certain conditions. For this reason, it is typically power related to economic relations that tends to produce unjust positions of domination. Allessandro Pinzani suggests that the legitimation of power should always be based on the potential effects on people's lives of the use of power[94]. Pinzani notes that the use of economic power can have as potentially grave effects on people's lives as the use of political power. Although we are very aware of the problems related to the misuse of political power, there are no great efforts involved in placing checks on economic power. He concludes that the underlying problem is the presently dominant distinction between political power (which needs to be legitimised) and economic power (which does not need to be legitimised). Pinzani's notion of the need to legitimise power whenever it has potentially destructive effects on people's lives is a reflection of the idea of poverty as being in a dominated position[95].

So what do these aspects of the discussion on poverty say about the definition of the phenomenon? First, it has to be said that attitudinal states are somewhat different from what is meant by poverty here. One can have different attitudes towards one's social standing or position in the financial economy, but these attitudes are different from the position itself. When it comes to the other aspects discussed there are a few alternatives available. The state of poverty cannot be defined by referring to either overt risks and being under domination, as these are seen rather as likely effects of poverty. This means that being free of poverty does not guarantee even minimal justice, for one can be free from poverty and yet suffer from these bads. Or, it can be argued that poverty includes all these negative aspects, and the task of social justice is

93 McMurtry 1998; 93-97
94 Pinzani 2005; 175
95 Pinzani 2005; 196-197

precisely to free people from poverty. This would be intuitively plausible, if we accept that poverty is not a problem analytically separable from social relations in general. If unjust social relations cause poverty, then a social relationship such as domination can easily be seen as a part of the same phenomenon. We could define poverty as essentially a power relation, breeding such bads as low income, risks etc.

What, then, do we distribute when creating socially just mechanisms? According to my argument, what are fundamentally distributed are minimally equal power positions, which guarantee that people are not under domination. These power positions can take the form of relative standing in the economy and the possibilities to make choices by which overt risks can be avoided. Distributing power is not distribution in traditional sense of the term, and indeed it can take many forms, from personal empowerment to labour laws that give workers bargaining space.

## 1.10 Summary and conclusions to chapter one

At the beginning of the chapter I outlined why and how extreme poverty is an ethical problem. The related suffering, premature deaths and loss of human dignity form a morally relevant framework for discussing poverty is an ethical problem. While there are some contentions with the view of problems related to extreme poverty, it is possible to define the moral problem of poverty by ethical features of poverty suggested by Nigel Dower, adding the notion that poverty is brought about by social arrangements. This definition shows that poverty is a special kind of ethical problem, since it is always connected to the problem of social justice. Therefore the distinction between poverty as an ethical problem and poverty as a problem of social justice does not seem to properly capture the trouble with (extreme) poverty.

Being poor can in absolute terms be defined as suffering the incapacity to meet basic human needs. In order to function and live at least a minimally decent life, human beings need a certain intake of calories, for example. The corresponding understanding of power is thus such that human beings cease to be poor when they are able to meet their basic needs. Yet these kinds of absolute "poverty lines" suffer from a high level of abstraction, in addition to their methodological shortcomings. Calorie intake, for example, says very little about how and in what form calories are taken. Practically, any clinical mode of mere survival suffices as meeting "poverty lines" defined this way. Needs cannot be derived from biology, at least not from biology alone, and for this reason there are always cultural differences and normative disputes about what needs count as basic.

Even though a language of absolute "poverty lines" is necessary, if poverty is to be defined so that it has genuine ethical significance, the means of attaining the essentials for human life is always relative to the social context

and one's social status and is open to normative definitions. The notion of relative poverty can be understood in several ways. We can refer to positions within a society relative to others. This can mean material standards, or the expectations of a society. While these might indeed increase experienced poverty, and cause "loss of human dignity", these aspects of poverty yet lack the other qualities of extreme poverty as defined earlier. To some extent, poverty is always relative.

Sometimes the demarcation between absolute and relative poverty has been seen as synonymous with the demarcation between extreme poverty and poverty generally. Thus in order to be extremely poor, one has to be in such a situation where there are no means to meet one's constant and absolute basic needs. Yet given the generality of the notion of absolute needs, this view seems to allow for very degrading and definitely ethically problematic situations not to qualify as extreme poverty. One only has to think of people eating rubbish, rats etc for survival. Even if one's calorie intake would be sufficient in this situation, it would be intuitively false to deny that such persons are living in extreme poverty.

These additions to absolute poverty lines have to be kept distinct from mere taste or habit. As noted by the critics of utilitarianism, tastes can be unnecessarily expensive, and the failure to serve one's need for food by eating caviar is very different from failure to meet one's need for food by eating anything but rats. Similarly, the abstractness of economic poverty lines is defended by referring to the substitutability of some goods: from the viewpoint of the need for food, there is little difference if one eats maize or rice, for example.

Also it has to be noted that different social processes create different and often increasing practical necessities for meeting one's basic needs and living in a society in general. To illustrate this, I have referred to Illich' concept "radical monopolies" and Segal's concept "need-required income" (NRI). This means that certain objects tend to become necessities, not only for showing social status or getting accustomed to luxuries, but concretely being able to meet one's basic needs. Therefore, poverty has to be seen it its relevant social context. This means not only asking, how can basic needs be practically met in a given society, but also making the normative point that poverty reduction often means enabling more and cheaper choices for attaining basic goods. This normative idea is potentially, but not necessarily, opposite to the general demand for economic growth. Complexities arise from the fact that people seldom need the objects to meet the basic needs directly, but rather the means to acquire these objects (i.e. money to buy food rather than food itself). The latter problem leads to the need of context-specific "poverty lines", contrary to the present practise, even though the list of basic needs to be met would be universal in nature.

I have also included in the discussion on poverty some aspects seldom discussed within the economic framework, i.e. risks and insecurity. I have argued that minimum security in terms of power and economic security has to

be part of a meaningful definition of poverty, meaning that one is able to obtain basic goods necessary for life without being subject to domination, or being constantly insecure about whether these basic goods can also be obtained tomorrow. Indeed, the very situation of poverty can be seen as a power relation, in which one is suppressed by the prevailing economic power structures.

Thus, poverty could be defined as a failure to attain basic goods by an ethically suitable and context-relevant standard sensitive to necessities, or a condition in which this failure can be expected at any time without power to alter the condition. This definition, I believe, shows the relevant aspects of poverty as both an empirical phenomenon and an ethical problem.

# II DEVELOPMENT: THE CLASSIC IDEOLOGY AND REDEFINITIONS

In the first chapter I argued that global poverty, even given all the complexities of the concept, is an ethical problem that calls for action. But how poverty is to be alleviated, is a highly complex question, as is evident after noting the complexities of the problem of poverty itself. Referring to "action" says very little, if anything, about the remedial implications.

Typical suggestions to remedy poverty in the domestic sphere are redistribution policies, and there are some arguments for universalising these practices. For example Thomas Pogge calculates that 1% of global income redistributed to the poorest of humanity would be enough to close their shortfall from the World Bank $2 PPP[96] a day poverty line[97]. While this is indeed true, and while Pogge does note that this calculation is only to give an idea of the magnitude of the problem, there is little said about how this distribution would be carried out, were it to turn out to be a practical suggestion. There are good reasons to argue that this task is unrealistic without accompanying changes in the global institutional framework, although it is unclear whether Pogge intends his calculations as only showing the scale of the issue.

Such redistribution would be impossible because of the lack of institutional arrangements (bank accounts, social security identification etc), cultural problems (introducing money to the few remaining self-subsisting communities) and ineffective because the whole issue of poverty-generating power dynamics would not be addressed. Poverty does not persist because of lack of cash transfers from the rich to the poor. Rather, a complex interplay of power, political situation, production patterns, education and such form what we refer to as "poverty". In the previous chapter, reference was made to the problems of universal "poverty lines" (and yet the situation would be more just if Pogge's scenario were to happen). For these reasons, usually long-term

96 PPP is short for purchasing power parity.

97 Ravallion 1998

development is called for as a more credible solution. For example Peter Singer, principally a proponent of radical redistribution by means of individual charity, goes on to admit that long-term development aid is a better investment in this moral cause than direct material aid[98]. So, again, what do we distribute?

It seems that most scholars of global poverty would agree that structural changes are needed. But this might be a case that is not easy to discuss by merely employing the vocabulary of social justice and distribution. There is need for change within the highly unequal societies of the global South, so that social justice would be possible in the first place. Societal changes are needed both to make redistribution possible, and as an act of redistribution as such, as the goods to be distributed include jobs, education, and power, which cannot be distributed as easily as money. Here we come to Singer's suggestion of the distribution of "development". To some extent, it seems, social change is something that can be distributed.

We encounter the notion of development close to each time when poverty-alleviating reforms in poor countries are discussed. Whenever problems of poverty are discussed, the concept of "development" is present. The concept surfaces in several popular ideas, such as "development aid", "human development", "rural development", "women and development" and so forth. The general understanding of pressing ethical problems seems to be that problems are caused by a lack of development, and, consequently, the remedy to these problems is more development. So if we are calling for poverty eradication by societal change, by going to the roots of the problem in order to seek lasting solutions, it seems that we are calling for development. Development surfaces not only in the context of development aid, but also in other fields of policy, such as in trade policy, in which a "development round" was proclaimed in 2003.

Yet, the concept of development, when carefully analysed, seems highly ambiguous. It would be difficult to define exactly what counts as development, or what kind of concept "development" inherently is – normative or descriptive, a description of a policy, a (deterministic) logic of societal change, or merely a political ideal. This is quite strange noting the pressing ethical concerns that motivate the pursuit for development. It would be fair to assume that a concept with such an ethical force would have a clear meaning.

Additionally, despite its proclaimed universality, the concept of development is far from this, even after decades of informing the global political agenda. It is deeply rooted in the western intellectual landscape and does not translate very well into non-western languages. True, the practices justified and motivated by the pursuit of development are close to being universally experienced, and that has led to the need to translate the concept into ever more languages. Yet, the connotations never translate completely[99], and thus the understanding of development requires an analysis of western intellectual history. When redefining a concept we have to know what exactly is

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98 Singer 2002; 122-123

99 Lummis 1996; 64-66

being redefined. I will next analyse in detail the connotations of the concept and possibilities for its redefinition. While other concepts discussed in this essay, such as poverty and justice, have their own intellectual histories too, development has a deeper metaphorical content, as I will argue next, and therefore deserves a more thorough analysis. Further, as development is the remedy that has been constantly offered for the problems of global poverty, the meanings of the concept are highly important also in the light of the discussion of the previous chapter. Shortly, if development is to be the way of overcoming poverty, we have a dual task. First, to show if there are problems incorporated in the concept and practice of development, and second, to ask what does development mean given the definition of poverty provided in chapter one.

## 2.1 Development efforts

It can be safely said that there has been no shortage of development endeavours. Indeed, the rich nations put some 100 billion USD[100] annually into international development aid, with the avowed aim to promote development. It seems somewhat surprising that all the development efforts have brought about so little, as the poverty situation has persisted or even worsened. The recipients of development aid have remained poor, although this has to be said with the reservation that counterfactual comparisons to reality without aid are extremely hard to make. The problems of "underdevelopment" are as bad as, or worse than, they used to be when the development aid enterprise was started.

This apparent failure can be explained in three different ways. First, it can be argued that there has not been enough development aid. Second, it can be argued that aid so far has been typically dysfunctional and ill-structured. The third possible answer is that there is no sufficiently sound understanding of "development" to be promoted.

The first answer is exemplified by Jeffrey Sachs, the Harvard economist and UN advisor, who campaigns for raising more funds for development aid in order for the world to meet the UN Millennium development goals[101]. Sachs argues that although the sums committed for development might initially seem large, they are nevertheless very small in comparison to the sums spent for other purposes, and they are also sometimes spent in a way that is irrelevant to development. Sachs' main argument is that adequate levels of development spending would cause a process of development to truly get going. So the problem according to Sachs is the level of money spent on such development projects, rather than the underlying idea of development.[102]

Another possible answer is that there is something structurally wrong with development aid. This is less a moral issue, and more of a practical one. It

100 OECD statistics 2005. Included also debt relief.
101 Sachs 2005; 288-308
102 Ibid.

can be that aid is given with good intentions, but the practicalities of the development enterprise cause the effects to be unsatisfactory. This argument has been made by several scholars and with slightly different emphases. Graham Hancock argues that aid is actually given to serve the donors' interests, and this grounding motivation is reflected in the reality and outcomes of aid[103]. Thomas Dichter argues that aid is designed in a wrong way – it has become a bureaucratic enterprise that does not serve the recipients' interests coherently, but rather the interests of the development industry[104]. William Easterly criticises what he calls the "big push" strategies, claiming that development can only come about by creative grassroots solutions brought about by "seekers" rather than "planners", by whom Easterly means top-down development strategies[105]. (This "planning" can lead to unwanted consequences by enforcing unwanted incentives). While Hancock's arguments are mostly deontological and Dichter's and Easterly's more about practical implementation, they all share the idea that aid as it is presently carried out is not functional – or that those efforts produce side-effects that counter their benefits. All in all, there is a large literature on what has gone wrong with development aid that does not need to be analysed here in detail.

The third possible answer is what I call "confused development". This means that what we call underdevelopment is actually often itself a product of "development"[106], and that development generally can include conflicting goals[107]. As development is a broad concept, a range of issues which are seen as improvements by some criterion or from a variety of perspectives manage to fall under the heading of "development". But criteria can be faulty, motives can deviate from what is pronounced, and perspectives differ. Thus, development can lead to be a circular and a self-justifying concept: as interventions marketed as development cause problems, these problems are labelled as underdevelopment and the only remedy offered to them is more development. Yet the question which remains to be answered is, more of what?

The question can be answered by either a narrow or broad definition. A narrow definition would be that there is a core of the society, say economic output, which increases with development, leaving other things intact. A broad definition would be that development is roughly anything positive related to societal change, and so it can easily happen that development endeavours are conflicting with each other. For example "sustainable development" denotes economic growth plus environmental conservation, and accordingly projects with a focus on growth (for example, factory investment) and projects with a focus on nature conservation can have effects that counter one another. Policies and projects marketed as development can be, and often are, contradictory to each other. Given such confusion, anything regarded as generally good passes

103 Hancock 1989
104 Dichter 2003
105 Easterly 2006
106 Goulet 1995, Frank 1971
107 Gasper 2005

as development, and development continues to be self-justifying. As will be discussed later, the problems of finding a suitable narrow definition has lead to these problems with a broad definition.

It is of important also to note that what has been said about the idea of development is merely theory that does not necessarily correspond with practice all that well. In other words, the idea of development can be, apart from being confused, ideological. Development theory can be ideological in the sense that there are implicit motives behind the rhetoric. For example John Perkins has argued, in vein with Hancock that the development endeavour was always about getting profits and natural resources to the North rather than genuinely helping the South[108]. Perkins has documented, how he personally used development funds to allure poor countries to accept partially loan-based projects, using faulty calculations about the likely economic gains of these projects.

Development theory can also be ideological in the sense that the developers act in good faith, but do not acknowledge the misperceptions caused by the dominant ideology, and thus promote ideas in a destructive way. There is evidence for both understandings, and it is very likely that some developers have acted in good faith while others have not. While both seem to be true to some extent, the deontological distinction is of significance for finding the accurate theory for redefining development. For developers acting in good faith, a Marxist-style ideological critique might be the appropriate strand of criticism. For those acting with self-interested reasons, we might rather refer to deontological moral theory, and perhaps need to reconsider the practices, even though the theory of development itself might be accurate.

These three possible answers to the problem of failed development efforts – lack of funds, counterproductive practical execution, confused goals – are slightly different in relation to the normative status of development. In answers 1 and 2, especially in answer 1, development is seen as desirable. In answer 3, this is not necessarily the case. Development can be unwanted. In this chapter, I will take this third answer as the starting point for discussion. We need a coherent idea of the meaning of development. When this is reached, the more practical problems related to answers 1 and 2 can be discussed, though this philosophical study will leave that effort to others.

The argument about confused development is often, though not always, Marxist. In Marx's terms, development itself means industrial and capitalist development, and it is therefore bound to create poverty as long as the capitalist mode of production prevails. Marx however did not question the dynamism and the forward-driving nature of capitalism, and therefore had no problem with the notion of development, although he saw development as necessarily creating poverty of a new kind, as previous forms of poverty are transformed (rather than abolished). For him, development was a simultaneously creative and destructive force, creating new kinds of poverty and exclusion. It would make no sense to think of what is called poverty in a

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108 Perkins 2004

capitalist society in similar terms with what was called poverty in pre-capitalist[109] societies. These are fundamentally different forms of social life with their particular material conditions. Similarly, the "development" promoted by official development aid very often has been designed to promote capitalist transformation, ie transform a peasant society into an industrial society. While the dichotomy between capitalist and pre-capitalist (non-capitalist[110]) modes of production is far too simple, we can learn from Marx that "underdevelopment" refers to a variety of conditions. Thus, according to this interpretation, the notion of development is ideological and confused for the very reason that its promise is false: development was never intended to abolish poverty.

The notion of the difference between pre-capitalist underdevelopment and underdevelopment generated by the current world order was originally proposed by the inventors of "dependency theory", such as Andre Gunder Frank[111]. The main idea of dependency theory was that development ought to be discussed on a world-system level. This leads to the argument that countries do not develop individually, but rather the world system and its power imbalances cause other countries to develop, while others underdevelop, these being parts of the same process, and further, being the causes and conditions of each other. Therefore, Frank argues, "underdevelopment" ought not to be confused with a premodern state of existence; rather it is part of the same process as "development". This idea was caught in Frank's phrase "the development of underdevelopment", labelled as "Frank's paradox"[112]. Later, the philosopher Denis Goulet warned about confusing "developed underdevelopment" with "original underdevelopment"[113].

C. Douglas Lummis provides an illustrating example of the problem by asking what do we regard as signalling modern or "developed" architecture. Glass buildings and skyscrapers perhaps best fit the intuition. Yet we less often think of the fact that the slum dwelling is actually the most typical type of housing built in the modern era[114]. Similarly, slums in general, rubbish collecting as a livelihood, and toxic working environments are all modern phenomena, products of some form of development rather than signals of its absence. This is unavoidably important when we discuss the theory of justice. The justice or fairness of a process cannot be judged without looking at the whole picture. A theory of justice has to be concerned with observed outcomes, and not only with utopian goals – even given the theory's normative nature.

Practically, what the "development of underdevelopment" thesis shows is that the classic developmental idea that economic growth is sufficient and necessary to overcome poverty, is problematic. It is again Marx, whose theory

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109 I am using Marxist terms when speaking of "pre-capitalist". A more accurate concept would be "non-capitalist", since there is no inherent logic why a non-capitalist society would be bound to become capitalist, as the concept "pre-capitalist" suggests.

110 Better concept, as the Marxist idea of historical succession is suspect.

111 Frank 1971

112 Lummis 1996; 61

113 Goulet 1995

114 Lummis 1996; 66-67

can show why. Marx noted that economic growth has a dual nature. One the other hand economic growth means more production, which is likely to have a positive effect on general wellbeing, as presumed in economic theory. But Marx also noted that the transformation from one social form to another also registers as growth, when seen from the perspective of the new social form[115]. Marx's analysis of the transformation from feudalism to capitalism is a case in point[116]. "Growth" can thus mean that there has been a change that ought to be impossible to analyse normatively, as the different social forms are incommensurable with each other. So the problem with development is that we ought to be able to distinguish growth which enhances wellbeing from mere social transformation.

So the concept of development, perhaps along with the practice of development, needs to be reconsidered, if it is to mean a process causally relevant for poverty alleviation, with a primary relevance to exactly this goal – this is the criterion of development I will start from. Indeed, if development is something that we have a moral duty to promote, it ought to be relevant for poverty reduction (or some other significant good). This reconsideration has to have several aspects. First, what is the relation between development and poverty? Second, what is the relation between development and justice? And third, how does the concept of development itself function as a descriptive and normative concept?

The concept "development" needs to be defined in a more analytical manner. Regarding Frank's and Goulet's critique of the notion of underdevelopment, it could be suggested that we ought to be speaking of "maldevelopment" in contrast to "underdevelopment". From the viewpoint of distributive justice, we could be speaking of "overdevelopment" in contrast to "underdevelopment".

## 2.2 Development: the metaphor

I will start the analysis by analysing, what development as a concept connotes. We have to understand what kind of social imaginary is attached to the concept. Concepts enjoin us to think in a certain way, they guide our imagination, even though we are not always completely aware of all their implicit meanings. In politics, such metaphorical meanings of words often personify processes with no real subject ("development causes X"), and hide various aspects of reality.[117] Thus, understanding development as a practice requires a prior understanding of development as a metaphor. So, what does development as a concept suggest metaphorically about societal change?

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115 Marx 1993, sce. 2 chap. 3

116 Ibid.

117 Lakoff & Johnson 1980; 25-27, 236-237

We can begin to answer this by asking where the idea of development originated? Before becoming institutionalised in the field of social sciences, the concept "development" was already being used in an academic field quite divorced from it, biology. Biology describes how plants, animals or human beings develop. In pre-Darwinist biology, particularly, every species was thought to develop according to its internal logic, dictated by God or the laws of nature. This form of change was thought to be inherent in every creature, and the task of biology was thus to find this pattern, or, in other words, to find the law-like and constant in the chaotic field of change.[118]

This metaphoric connotation can be traced all way back to Aristotle. Aristotle aimed at finding out the laws of nature in a scientific manner by studying the logic of change, the *forma*, typical to different species. He argued that the nature of all beings, their *fysis*, withhold a pattern according to which their change, or development, takes place[119]. The *fysis* could be ontologically detached from random features of individuals. This was part of Aristotle's perfectionist world-view. The end of the pattern of change was the beings´ *telos*, in other words, their goal or purpose. According to Aristotle, societies too had a similar kind of latent pattern of change[120].

Yet the basis of this notion has been abandoned in the course of western intellectual history. The notion of development rests on a biological basis, but simultaneously it manifests a belief in a biological impossibility: growth and youth everlasting. The idea of development as something bound to go on without limits would have not fitted with the metaphysical ideas of antiquity[121]. According to Wolfgang Sachs, it was not before the early 19th century, when development came to mean reaching an ever more perfect form rather than reaching an appropriate form[122].

This origin gives to the concept a lot of its metaphorical quality. When brought to the field of social sciences, the concept held on to its original connotations. Consequentially, we become inclined to think of societal change as similar to biological change. Gilbert Rist has analysed the implications of this biological metaphor. Rist divides these implications to the notions of directionality, continuity, cumulativeness and irreversibility[123]. *Directionality* means that growth has a direction and a purpose, and follows clearly identified stages. *Continuity* means that there are no "leaps". *Cumulativeness* means that each new stage depends upon the preceding one, in accordance with a methodological progression. *Irreversibility* means that when a new stage is passed or a new level achieved, there is no turning back. These are quite clearly highly problematic ways of understanding societal change.

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118 Rist 1997; 29-31
119 Aristotle 1952; 91-94
120 Aristotle 1995; 10
121 For a counter-argument against this interpretation, see Nisbet 1980; 11-13
122 Sachs 1992; 8
123 Rist 1997; 27-28

The biological metaphor also implies that development does not destroy anything, or at least nothing of importance. This idea is most visible in the tight conceptual and practical linkage between the ideas of development and growth. In biology, development is always a matter of growing and maturing. A child at ten years of age is the same person she was at five; she has only become more mature and bigger. The metaphor of development thus implies that with development, a society only gets more mature; people simply possess more money and so forth, thus making it difficult to address destruction. Yet in reality ways of life, traditional livelihoods and forms of social interaction are destroyed, while new ones are born, in the process of development.[124] Some people, even though not a majority, clearly prefer the older forms of life to the "developed" ones.

Development originates in the general idea of ongoing progress as a metahistorical idea. This idea has been a particularly western notion from pre-modern times onwards[125]. For a long time the notion of progress a metaphysical quality to it. Progress was not a matter of human experience or any idea of wellbeing derivable from the empirical world. Rather it was seen as a metaphysical logic of history. The content of progress was seen to be the logic of the "spirit of history", which follows its own law or divine "plan". In Augustine's theology, the idea of progress became expressed as the logic of change of the whole of humanity. Augustine believed that humanity was progressing as a single subject according to God's plan, and therefore everything happening in history was part of this progress. When looking from the viewpoint of mankind, he claimed, the passing of time would necessarily make life better[126]. Similar arguments were to be found decades later in Hegel's dialectic, in which it was claimed that the history of the Spirit was constantly evolving and thus any misfortunes could be understood as a part of the general logic of progress. Such a viewpoint of history is theoretically necessary if one wants to argue for a theory of inevitable progress. Making an empirical claim of necessary progress would be problematic since such a claim would be refuted by any negative societal change.

In enlightenment thought, the notion of progress attained an even stronger hold. The intermingled quality of time and progress turned from being a theory of the necessity of change to a theory of passing of time itself. It was argued, not only metaphorically but also concretely that time passes on only with progress; without it time stands still. Thus it was possible to ponder on how it could be that the time stood still in the Middle Ages[127]. This was a real question and not only a rhetorical one. A widely shared idea between the enlightenment scholars of progress was that tomorrow is always somehow qualitatively better than today, and that is something that fundamentally makes

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124 I am only pointing this out, and not taking a normative stance on the comparison between the "new" and "old" cultural forms.

125 Rist 1997; 93-99

126 Rist 1997; 31-34

127 Nisbet 1980

it tomorrow[128]. Such philosophies of history supposed that history has, if not a purpose, at least a direction, which can be stated by a qualitative language.

Even though this idea seems quite historical and even absurd, there are strong traces of the idea in popular thought. The idea of the intermingled quality of time and technology seems to prevail to some extent. Cultures with no high-tech solutions in common use are often described as "still living in the past", for example. The complexity of technologies seems to associate them with the "new", as if simple solutions could not be made in the present day.

For the western mind poverty and backwardness are associated with history, and poverty easily gets tagged as "being behind". These kinds of common but hardly justifiable suppositions reflect the idea that different countries and cultures progress along similar paths, except that some progress more rapidly than others. What is forgotten, though, is that poverty can be caused by exploitation, and the use of traditional technology can be a choice, even a rational choice, rather than denoting "living in the past". Generally, holding on to such a notion of progress makes the discussion of just distributions difficult.

Another way of understanding the metaphor is to look at the etymological origin of the concept. "Development" includes the Latin root word *velop*, meaning a cover or a wrapping. Thus, for example, an envelope is a wrapping for papers, and envelopment is a process of wrapping or covering. The opposite of envelopment, naturally, is development, meaning literally the process of unwrapping or uncovering.[129] Thus, development means uncovering something existing and latent but not yet visible. According to this metaphorical meaning, if something is destroyed in the process of development, it is only the cover veiling the inner essence. The implications are clear. Development indicates a process in which the true essence of something is taken out from its wrapping. Thus the essence has been in existence all along, but we have been hindered from seeing it, or it is yet to manifest its existence. A process in which the insignificant wrapping is removed is thus justified.

Are we to believe that societal change simply uncovers something that existed before? Do social structures entail in themselves their future? Put this way the idea might sound absurd. Yet there are prominent philosophers within the Western tradition who seem to have believed exactly this, and their theories indicate to us that the notion may be quite prevalent in Western understanding. Take for example Leibniz's *Monadology*[130]. This is a metaphysical rather than a sociological theory, but it shows interesting ideas about the nature of things. Leibniz understood the world to be composed of monads, which could not communicate with each other. This idea of non-communication led Leibniz to argue that the monads have to reflect the whole world in themselves, and, ultimately, to include the whole world. According to Leibniz, "what we call births are in fact openings". This means that all change perceptible in the world

128 Rist 1997; 21-24
129 Lummis 1996; 62-63
130 Rescher 1991

is a matter of organisms "opening" elements of their inner nature at a certain time.[131]

This logic of explaining change was brought to the field of social science mainly by Karl Marx. Marx argued that history was a matter of deterministic "iron laws". These laws dictated an inevitable pattern of historical change based on the logic of dialectics. According to Marx, social forms preceded one another in the logic of these "iron laws", so that each social form entailed the "seed" of the next form, in its internal contradictions.[132] G.A. Cohen's reading of Marx's theory as capitalism being "pregnant with socialism"[133] is an illuminating way of looking at Marxist social ontology. In other words, socialism already existed, it was developing within capitalism, and only the process of bringing it to the world or helping the birth of socialism was needed. Thus in Marx's theory, even though he didn't use these concepts, the inevitable future of every society is enveloped within a society, only waiting to be unfolded.134 Or, in fact, every society to come is enveloped within each society, as is the internal logic of the sequence of unfolding. Surprisingly similar ideas have motivated the task to help developing countries progress from premodernity to capitalist "high consumption society", to quote a term used by W.W. Rostow, one of the leading theorists of early development theory.

Yet Marx' idea of development is not necessarily applicable to "developing countries". Marx' idea of the necessity of capitalist development was a description of the societal dynamic of countries that had gone through the phase of feudalism. He seemed to regard the colonial experience as different. Also, several Marxist scholars have analysed imperialism as a process in which developing countries serve as a resource base for development in the colonial/post-colonial centre. Because of this dynamic, the "iron laws" of capitalism cannot be attributed directly to the postcolonial experience. This yet does not mean that this idea would not be applied, often even as the dominant ideology, in development discourse – even though it is a misreading of Marx.

So development seems to refer to a core of society, which somehow matures in the process of development. Other elements of society are thus seen as unimportant from the viewpoint of development, of belonging to other fields, such as democracy or culture. The question thus is: do societies have such a core? And if they do, what does it consist of?

## 2.3 The origins of the idea of growth

Of course there have also been symbols and instances of progress that can be seen empirically. These have been, especially, the advances in science and

131 Deleuze 1993, 8-9
132 Marx 1992, preface
133 Cohen 2000; 67-68
134 Marx did not use these exact concepts, though.

technology. Yet the measurable and empirical units of progress were invented centuries after the birth of the idea of ongoing progress. Such units were, primarily, measurable units of production, chiefly industrial production. The idea that the world inevitably progresses still survives in different forms, though it is more difficult to discern. One can argue, for example that the very idea of economic growth rests on the notion – it is sustained growth that is prescribed, rather than a certain level of economic activity. Hence, the logic of progress has become material, something measurable by output.

The change in the idea of progress was fundamental. It could be justifiably argued that the very subject of progress, or the idea of the essence of the society changed. Although the concepts are necessarily intermingled, this change could be called the change from progress to growth, or from progress to development. When in the enlightenment era the focus of progress had been in science, culture and the arts, the focus shifted to material production and output. In the Enlightenment there were serious academic debates about whether scientifically sophisticated antiquity could be ahead in terms of progress while being behind in time[135]. Later on, no one would have taken ancient Athens to be highly developed in other terms than in comparison with other societies of its time, because of its low level of production (as such an unintelligible concept in ancient vocabulary). Curiously enough, this change follows the change in the meaning of production, deriving from the Latin *producere*, which in the Enlightenment was understood as creating something new, such as the work of an artist, while the later concept "industrial production" shows the concept turning into merely signifying all material goods[136]. Growth was taken to be the signifier of societal progress. The unquestioned core of development thought was that increased industrial production was good *per se*. Thus the subject of development came to be seen in economic terms.

This became articulated by the notion of growth. Societies are expected to achieve "freedom from want", as the old development slogan goes, by maintaining and accelerating their growth rates. Growth is similarly as metaphorical a concept as that of "development". Growth also derives from biology, as in the growth of children and plants, for example. "Economic growth" will, according to the theory, liberate people from poverty, as it makes societies more developed. This is taken in development theory as self-evident enough not to even be worth arguing for: as the problems of poverty or underdevelopment are noticed, the argument goes on to seeking how to grow.[137]

To be more analytical, growth in itself does not mean merely that the economy grows while the society remains otherwise similar, as the metaphor suggests. Rather, very different kinds of societal change can lead to growth, or can register as growth statistically. Growth is not an event as such, but a general category for a number of economic changes. By definition, growth means an

135 Nisbet 1980, 103
136 Robert 1992; 181-183
137 Rist 1997

increase in the value of goods and services produced in a geographic area – this definition allows for very different kinds of processes. The level of economic production is also merely an average, and therefore says nothing about distribution. Growth in itself is not, and cannot be, a sufficient condition of poverty alleviation, because growth can be very unevenly distributed, to the extent that the poorest segments of society benefit nothing from it. What can be argued is that growth is a necessary condition of the alleviation of poverty. But because any case of functioning redistribution without growth that alleviates poverty – and there are such cases, such as land reform – will be enough for refuting the argument, the case is weak.

As noted, growth is not a process in itself. It is a theoretical model for showing changes in the economy, which as noted can be very different in nature. Increases in job-creating industrial production generate growth, but so do car crashes, destroyed possibilities for maintaining subsistence livelihoods, and projects leading to ecological destruction. Employment can increase or decrease in the process of growth. Practically speaking, economic growth worldwide has shown few positive results. Lately, studies have also pointed out that global growth actually offers the poor very little in the way of goods, if any[138]. For example, hunger can become more widespread as the economy grows, as seems to be the case in India from mid-90s onwards[139]. In the face of this, it is strange to see something as multi-faceted as growth to have a normative value. Yet problems appearing simultaneously with growth can be a result of the exclusion from the official economy of some groups, rather than features of growth as such. Nevertheless the mere possibility of such problems is enough to show the questionability of the normative equation "growth=good".

So where does the idea of growth, or the perceived need for growth in Western thinking come from? How did "growth" become the suggested solution for numerous problems with little in common? I will follow the argument put forward by Hans Achterhuis[140], who sees the quest for growth as a reaction to "the myth of scarcity", which became intermingled with the idea of progress – practically, history came to be seen as a movement away from from "original scarcity". We must find out how the feeling of scarcity become so strongly attached to western civilisation, to motivate the quest for never-ending growth. Here, it is important not to confuse "original scarcity" with "original underdevelopment". The former is the name of a myth to be analysed, referring to an understanding of history that is possibly not all that correct. The latter I use as a description of the premodern state of existence, referring to underdevelopment as a lack of certain modern technological and social forms.

Achterhuis located the origin of the myth of original scarcity in the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes presented the idea of scarcity in a way novel to European philosophy. Prior to Hobbes, scarcity had been seen as a

138 Woodward & Simms 2006
139 Mehta 2005; Patnaik 2005
140 Achterhuis 1993; 108-110

temporary state of affairs. There could have been bad harvests, wars and the like, which could have created the misfortunate state of scarcity. Yet this temporality also entailed that scarcity could be overcome, perhaps already with the next harvest. With Hobbes' theory, scarcity became to be understood as an omnipresent and inescapable condition, part of the "natural" state of affairs.[141] Hobbes argued that the highest priority for human beings is self-preservation, and attaining more acquisitions. Acquisitions here refer to both material fortune and positions of power. To Hobbes these were two sides of the same coin. All material relations were also power relations, and thus were of limited amount. There could never be enough for everyone to satisfy all wants[142]. And given the egoistic character innate in the human mind, the only possible outcome was a state of war, if no strong political checks took place.

John Locke accepted Hobbes' premises, but added to them one crucial point. Locke argued, contrary to Hobbes that material resources were not limited, and left aside the matter of power. Thereby Locke created the foundations of the discourse on economics, assuming that the production of goods can be discussed independently from the problem of distribution, as value can be produced without limits. According to Locke, it is one's labour added to matter (land), rather than matter itself, which produces value. Therefore, a more efficient use of resources creates increased value practically without limits. For this reason, Locke recommended the use of the land of native Americans by Europeans, believing this to lead to mutual benefit. Additionally, Locke argued that the invention of money has liberated human beings from constraints regarding the principally collective ownership of the fruits of the earth. Money value can increase without limits or checks. Locke's emphasis on money could lead to the understanding that the process in which economic value is created was merely a matter of more valuable labour.

Like Hobbes, Locke was concerned about violence. Locke discussed war in detail, and seemed to worry that mankind would resort to war, if material needs could not be met. Therefore, for Locke, the increase of production was a matter of keeping up social stability by overcoming "original scarcity". The idea of "original violence" is strong in later political thought. Not only has the idea served as a justification for colonial rule, it has also been influential in justifying the growth discourse[143].

The current problems of growth seem to go back to Locke's assumptions. Locke assumed that there were no limits to material growth or to increasing the value of production. Today we know better. Locke also assumed that it was not important to discuss distribution and power when discussing money. The experience of today shows that the opposite is the case. Locke could not see the problems of competing expansions, as he did not attempt to answer questions of global material wellbeing.

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141 Achterhuis 1993; 110

142 I use the word "want" here exclusively to refer to "desire", not in it's old meaning of "lack", such as in "freedom from want".

143 Ahluwalia 2001; 41

Why are Hobbes and Locke relevant enough for the discourse on development examined here? The answer is that the discourse on development is based on ideas of growth that go back to Locke and is justified by Hobbesian fears of life without such growth. Many of the concept's implications can be traced to these two thinkers, or more exactly to Locke's response to Hobbes' problem[144]. Noting this background of the notion of growth, the usefulness of the mental state approach to poverty can be seen as limiting the wants of the already materially well off. Growth gets problematic precisely when it is seen as a remedy to social ills with better available remedies, and it is likely that it is generally offered as a remedy if all deprivation is seen to originate in the absence of growth, no matter how a particular deprivation has come to be.

## 2.4 Problems of growth

Lockean theory was politically influential in creating the world order, as it was used in justifying economic enterprises and the takeover of colonial lands. While Locke argued that land in itself or its indigenous use generates very little value, he also concluded that a more efficient use of resources would leave everyone with more goods. Thus, if the lands of the native Indians, whose vast land produced only a fraction of the produce of land in England were colonised, this could be justified by making these lands more productive – and indeed, both such takeovers and justifications were common. Yet the result was often quite far from mutual benefit.[145] For example the lands of the Irish were transformed to more effective production, mainly benefiting England, and resulting in the Irish potato famine[146]. The Bengalese suffered pretty much the same fate in the 1940s[147]. The reason was that "value" as understood by Locke was a concept that did not take into account issues such as food security. The fear therefore is that this Lockean misconception has led to other similar disasters in the name of development, when only the increase of economic value is observed.

It was hardly coincidental that the economic idea of increased value and the colonial enterprises surfaced roughly simultaneously. Ellen Meiksins Wood has argued that theories of politics and economy such as Locke's were written principally to justify the imperial enterprise, or at least can be only understood within the "superstructural" context of imperial imaginary. While this Marxist interpretation can be criticised, the fact remains that annexation and expansion were practically always a part of the European practise of development[148].

144 Locke, of course, was not directly replying to Hobbes. Yet ideas similar to Hobbes' were debated at the time, and in at least one reference Locke is seen to be familiar with Hobbes' work.

145 Meiksins Wood 2005

146 Arnold 1988; 11-12

147 Arnold 1988; 97-98

148 Meiksins Wood 2005

Human and natural resources used in the colonies helped Europe develop economically, and "surplus population" could move to the colonies in times of unemployment or other difficult times. This leads to questions about whether such a model of development can ever be universalised; the developing countries of today simply have no such room for expansion. As the original strategy was to create added economic value, theoretically for common benefit and practically for colonial benefit, the suspicion arises that the case with present-day growth is not all that different.

There are two separate problems regarding growth as a normative concept, or more exactly as something defined to be desirable. The first is the desirability of growth in terms of human wellbeing. While growth most often leads to enhanced wellbeing, events that register as growth might also be negative. Growth as such is not necessarily desired. The second is a much more recent concern, namely the problem of the limits of growth. Ecological side-constraints force us to consider when consumption has exceeded its plausible limits. While these limits are often not clearly definable, over-consumption often manifests itself as harm in geographical areas distant from the site of consumption. Therefore, growth has also become more directly a problem of breaching one's negative duties.

Allen L. Hammond described the disagreement on the limits of growth as the debate between "malthusians" and "cornucopians"[149]. The latter school is based largely of Locke's assumptions, the former on Hobbes'. The disagreement on where the limits of economic growth stand ecologically is perhaps not that important in regard to how it is answered. It is more important, philosophically, that it is being debated. The cornucopian position cannot be argued without taking the counter-argument into account, which makes the very notion of ongoing growth suspect.

The societal paradigm of progress has been so dominant that it has been actually somewhat difficult for major western philosophers to discuss justice without appealing to the notion of progress. While theories of justice do not often explicitly discuss economic growth, the idea is there in the background. The agenda for global justice has for long been merely a matter of how to get progress going in developing countries, or alternatively a matter of redistributing the "fruits of economic growth". As the Indian scholar Suresh Sharma complains, it has been almost impossible to discuss justice without reference to the notion of progress. Yet, according to Sharma, it is justice rather than the perennial promise of development, which most people in the third world call for[150].

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149 Hammond 1998; 63-64

150 Sharma 1994; 22-24

## 2.5 The substance of development

A meaningful use of the concept of development requires that we know what is essentially developing, or to be developed, in a society. As we indicate a developed and an underdeveloped society and claim to know how the underdeveloped one will become developed, we are obviously not claiming that the societies would become identical. It is clear too that developed societies can be different from each other in many regards. Therefore, the subject of development is not the society as such, but some core or essence of it. The claim to be able to identify this core from outside is also hard to make.

While the idea of constant development remained dominant for a long time, the actual substance of this development has undergone significant changes. How are we to recognise development, or even the subject of development, as the core of society that "develops"? Not everything is progressing for the better. Instead a theory of development requires that we point out an indicator or how to recognise development. Here, the matter changes from finding the subject of development to an indicator of how to recognise development taking place.

For premodern scholars and partially the early moderns, this substance was not something that could be analysed or distinguished empirically (God's plan, the Spirit, the laws of history). For the more this-worldly Enlightenment thought there were other candidates for being the substance of development: culture, science, rational knowledge and so forth. There was a consensus that constant progress takes place and that there is *some* substance of development, which chiefly indicates it taking place. Yet, paradoxically, it was a seemingly impossible task to argue conclusively what this substance of development actually comprises.

The most remarkable change in development thought came about with industrialisation and the birth of modern of economics. The essence of progress shifted from the realm of spirit to the realm of matter. Increasing production led the scholars of the time to equate economic growth with progress. Yet the theory of growth, or what counts as growth, has changed over the centuries. At the beginning of the industrial period industrial output was used to measure economic progress. The output of key industrial products was thought to display the state of progress. Later on, the conceptual innovation of GDP (gross domestic product) became the key indicator. This new indicator calculated not only industrial production, but also the production of services, which were still thought by Adam Smith as not being productive – rather, he saw the producers of services to live on others' productive efforts[151].

For the ideas of unlimited progress and economic production as progress to emerge, a conceptual innovation of constantly increased productivity was necessary. While a similar idea was already a part of Locke's political philosophy, Locke was more concerned with the justification of property and

151 Smith 1994

surely did not believe in a linear increase in production. The idea that production can increase limitlessly goes back to a large extent to David Ricardo[152]. When Ricardo's ideas became a part of the idea of economic growth measured by the GDP in the early 1950s, the academic and political world had pretty much settled on the idea that economic growth can continue limitlessly, and that economic growth equals, or necessarily brings about, enhanced wellbeing.

If development has such normative relevance, or at least is something which is far better to have than not, why base the definition of the concept on merely economic and technological vocabulary and indicators? As the sociologist Wolfgang Sachs (not to be confused with Jeffrey Sachs) complains, different places became signified as identical because of the lack of TVs.[153] Yet even if there is a faulty understanding of the substance of development, i.e. the answer to the question "What changes when a country develops?", this does not mean that there would be no such substance. In other words, Sachs' argument does not refute the possibility of normative substance of development.

This leads us back to the meaning of "development". Ought development to be regarded as a positive change in the narrowly defined material basis of society? In this case, a definition of the substance of development could be reached. But then, changes in such a narrow basis do not imply everyone's benefit. Rather, development seems to be a fundamental societal change. But can such societal change happen without victims? It seems unavoidable that the idea of development is based on some form of utilitarianism that will accept sacrificing minorities (meaning certain groups of people, not necessarily identified or ethnic minorities). The democratic and egalitarian nature of utilitarianism ought to be kept in mind so that there is no economic purchasing-power bias to the utilitarian calculus.

Even though development would be defined as a fundamental societal change, it will not concern all the aspects of life in such a given society. There are always matters that are merely subjective and personal. But then there are matters about which it can be debated whether they belong to the realm of the public, and thus to the scope of development. For example Des Gasper in his *Development ethics* argues that violence ought not to be excluded from the development discourse. Violence, having been one of the main concerns of early modern political philosophy (which is particularly visible in Hobbes), has not really appeared as a concern in the discourse on development lately. Either it has been treated as irrelevant to development or as a problem which growth necessarily solves. Gasper argues that if development spells out a real concern for wellbeing, violence is a serious concern. This and similar examples show that the scope of development is also open to debate.[154]

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152 Ricardo 2004

153 Sachs 1999;28-29

154 Gasper 2005; 114-118

## 2.6 Active development

In writing about the implicit meaning and metaphoric content of the concept of development, I have been referring to the uses of the word that date back to the intellectual history of early modernity, if not even further back. The connotations of the word suggest meanings of such concepts in practical use, and therefore this analysis was needed. But when it comes to practical policy development is a far more recent idea. The actual political use of the concept, although reflecting the intellectual history of the concept, only began at the beginning of the 20th century and did not become a political programme until the post-World War II era, although already in the 19th century the British had a programme for the "development" of the colonies[155]. In fact, changing the name of *The law of the development of the colonies* to *The law of the development* ***and welfare*** *of the colonies*, the British first signalled this "dual mandate" related to development[156].

Interestingly, for most of its history "development" was a concept that referred exclusively to the logic of change as observed by a methodological outsider. It was seen as a law-like progress. If we observe that development takes place, we are only making a notion of change taking place, not making any active attempts to have an impact on this change. In particular, because the concept was understood as deterministic, attempting any active interventions in development would have seemed absurd. Why would one try to affect the inevitable? Yet 'active development' has been the most common use of the concept since the 1950s. "Development" has since then been understood as an active political-economic process. "To develop" became an active verb, as in "we develop the country" as opposed to "the country develops"[157].

What kind of process made this change possible? We have to note that the deterministic belief was never actually forgotten. The traditional understanding of development held that each country develops according to a similar "logic of development". There is one thing that alters in this process, however, namely the pace of development. Thus it was thought that political action does not affect the course of societal change, but rather its pace. By adding belief in progress, translated as a belief in the necessarily positive nature of development, such "accelerating of history" was necessarily seen as desirable politics, indeed a duty. Such an idea of accelerating of history leads to highly asymmetrical power positions. This is not only because of the internalised inferiority of the status of the underdeveloped. More importantly, such an idea makes the political steering of other societies justified by the claim to knowledge of the pattern of the development of societies. With the future is thus predetermined there is no room for democratic or autonomous decision-making.

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155 Lummis 1996; 57

156 Sachs 1992; 10. My emphasis.

157 Rist 1997; 73

The idea of accelerating history was sometimes expressed as the political goal of "catch-up development"[158]. The idea was that under the accelerated process of development the developing countries would catch up to the development levels of the developed countries in a short period of time, most likely in a matter of one or two generations. The first time the notion of accelerating history was used politically, was simultaneously with the coinage of the use of the concept "underdevelopment". This was in US president Harry Truman's famous "point four" speech, which is widely understood as having ushered in the "development era"[159]. Post-development theorists complain that on this occasion "over half of the world's population became underdeveloped overnight" and see this as the starting point of active development as it is currently understood[160]. While culture, the space for democracy and such were seen as local issues, accelerating the law-like progress of the core of poor societies became to be seen as a moral duty.

It has to be noted, though that the metaphorical idea of "accelerating history" is not necessarily as paradoxical as may initially seem. It is possible that the societies are thought to develop by themselves, but that outsiders can influence external conditions affecting this development, making them more favourable for development to take place. While the determinism/action paradox is still evident here, this way of understanding the notion of accelerating development at least offers a logically plausible understanding of what active development could mean. Practically, it is a different matter how to make the division between actual development and its external conditions. The division is clear when external conditions refer exclusively to political matters outside a given country. For example international treaties can be designed to be favourable for a country's development. But most often the focus of development efforts has been within the poor countries, and this is where "development obstacles" are typically sought, as when discussing the lack of capital, lack of infrastructure, corruption, governance etc.

Although the analytical distinction between actual development and enabling development is very clear, the practical distinction is highly complicated. For example, is a higher attendance in basic education development or enabling development? Practically, the notion of creating conditions suitable for development has meant getting to a level of capital and infrastructure defined as "normal"[161]. In classic development theories, infrastructure and capital were seen as enabling development. They were thus seen as mere tools for development, which could be brought from other countries, letting development happen by its natural course.

The early development endeavours focused on injecting capital, which was thought to lead necessarily to economic growth, and setting up infrastructure, which was thought to be a precondition of industrial production.

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158 Lummis 1996; 68

159 Rist 1997; 70-71

160 Sachs 1992

161 A good example is the concept of "underinvestment" often used in economics.

The injection of capital was planned with classic Smithian assumptions: that capital would be used only to promote productivity by investing profits back into the national economy, rather than to serve exclusively private purposes or speculative interests. Also in the vein of classic liberal economics, especially Smith's, capital and increased profit were thought to contribute to local capital formation exclusively – a point that Smith saw as highly important but which has turned around in the contemporary practice of unlimited movement of capital.[162]

Yet what became quite quickly noticed within the practice of development was that development was not working according to the theory. Injecting capital into the countries, infrastructural changes and so on did little to make "catch-up development" happen. Rather, what took place was growing inequalities, political tensions and further economic growth in the rich countries rather than the poor[163]. Developing practice was producing something not dissimilar from the opposite of what development theory predicted and prescribed.

This outcome was never taken as a sign of the failure of development itself, but rather a sign that there was too little development. The tension between development theory and development practice was surpassed by constantly redefining the poverty present as a sign of "underdevelopment". Denis Goulet, along with several other development ethicists, warns that the concept of "underdevelopment" is often used to refer to both "original poverty" and modernised urban poverty, which is in itself a part of the development process or an outcome of processes labelled development[164] (which is similar to Marx's argument). This makes the concept of underdevelopment suspect and potentially self-contradictory. As least we should be clear about what is meant by underdevelopment – it is an empirical notion of a societal state or a normative notion, claiming that some given state of a society is morally unacceptable? (If the latter, then it is unclear why it should be called underdevelopment, if development is part of the problem, without a redefinition of the concept of development).

## 2.7 Critique of the classic ideology

Having analysed, what the concept of development suggests, I will turn to a perhaps more enlightening side of the same problem, namely, what does the concept *not* suggest. If there are aspects of what is typically called "underdevelopment", which do not fit with the images borne by the metaphor, the concept calls for particular caution. I will argue that indeed the most important aspects of what might be called underdevelopment are exactly such.

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162 McMurtry 1998; 133

163 See for example Rist 1997

164 Goulet 1995

The factors concealed by the implications of the concept can be divided into five: unpredictability, conflict, suffering, external causes, and distribution.

1. First, *unpredictability* means that the future of societies is open to chance, democratic decisions with no prior knowledge of the outcome, and a change of hegemonic ideas. Therefore, at any given point it is impossible to predict the future of any society. From the perspective of democracy, such impossibility is also positive. The idea of development suggests otherwise. If countries develop according to a pattern, knowing this pattern enables the prediction of the future of societies. Furthermore, the concept suggests that some countries are "ahead" in development, and thus merely observing them enables the prediction of the future of the less developed countries. "The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future"[165], as Marx put it. Practically, accepting such an idea leads to a power position in which the countries taken to be "ahead" can dictate what being ahead means, and thereby dictate how the societies will "unavoidably" change. As Douglas Lummis puts it, the notion of development conceals the fact that we are taking about actions which human beings are free *not* to do[166].
2. Related to *conflict,* development bears the image of a process that is harmonic, not conflictual, and essentially about maturation rather than something involving genuine losses. But this is hardly ever the way societies change. Development means losses for some groups and gains for others, or at least more gains for some and less for others. Therefore, societal changes are always also matters of social conflict. The metaphor of development, by contrast, brings to mind the maturation of a society as a harmonious unit, with no internal conflict or disagreement. Some theories of development can include the notion of conflict, as in evident in Marxist theory[167]. In the Marxist dialectic, development occurs via conflict, as antagonisms lead to a new level of conflict in the dialectic. But in mainstream ideas of development, conflict has been seen as external from the process – regarded as unimportant when noticed[168].
3. Related to the notion of conflict, development as a concept does not recognise the possibility of *suffering*. Implicating a harmonious maturation of one single unit, development includes no setbacks for some groups, real losses or suffering. The metaphor suggests that either societal change can be explained by "growth", mere maturation with nothing lost, or the uncovering of the essence, in which the destroyed *velop* (the cover) is of no significance. This has been far from reality, as several development endeavours have caused significant suffering to vulnerable groups. This might even be a necessary feature of development, if we accept Marx's or

165 Marx 1976; 91
166 Lummis 1996; 63
167 Peet 1999; 92-93
168 Rist 1997

Schumpeter's ideas of economic development[169]. Thus the metaphor of development does not properly recognise the downsides of societal change.

4. Development traditionally refers to something that changes by its own inherent logic, as the discussion of Leibnizian idea of development revealed. The logic is seen to be somehow incorporated in the essence of the object. This was also how Aristotle's concept of *fysis* pictures natural and social reality. Yet when it comes to the development of nations the case is very different. As long as the discourse on development has existed there has been interaction with, and repression by, other nations. If one looks at the reasons behind what might be called underdevelopment, it is mostly external features that contribute to such societal states: colonial history, trade rules, global pollution etc.
5. Deriving from points 2 and 4, development as a concept makes no reference to the problem of distribution. Traditionally, the belief in progress has grounded faith on the assumption that poverty and other social ills would be overcome by growth – and some patience. For good reason, intellectuals from the global South have called for even a slightest sign for this promise to become reality[170]. Because there are conflicts related to development and external factors have their significance, there is need to discuss distributive justice both in domestic and international levels.

As far as domestic matters go, the logic of distribution is clearer. Poverty is a product of social injustice, and is, quite logically, difficult to overcome if this injustice prevails. But as for external matters, a theory of *globally* just distribution of goods is needed. This is significant, since it affects the logic of development itself. If development is affected by external factors and other countries' level of development, it makes sense to discuss something as seemingly absurd as the "distribution of development". As several "world systems" theorists have noted, the world does not develop as independent, self-contained units called nation-states, rather the world develops as one entity in which other parts gain advantages by "underdeveloping" others[171]. This refers to the global distribution of money to some extent, but even more to the distribution of raw materials and such resources. As Gilbert Rist says, "there is only one development"[172], meaning the global system.

As a result, the concept of development does not sufficiently grasp the existing social reality. To use Kuhnian vocabulary, the anomaly[173] between the theory and empirical reality has grown large enough to force attention[174].

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169 Peet 1999; 36-37, 102-103

170 Sharma 1994; 22-24

171 See for example Jomo 2006, Raffer & Singer 2001

172 Rist 1997

173 Kuhn 1996

174 This is not to go to the dispute between realism and constructivism – these arguments can also be taken to show that the dominant construction is problematic.

Practically, none of the promises of development thought have been fulfilled; in several cases the reality has been at odds with the promise. Instead of abolishing poverty, development has created new, even more degrading forms of poverty, such as life in urban slums, making a living by collecting rubbish etc. Instead of creating conditions for the South "catching up" with the North, development worldwide has caused unprecedented income and wealth gaps between nations (and also within nations). Development has also created environmental problems on a massive scale, making the very continuation of development suspect. While these can be seen as side-products of development rather than aspects of development itself, at least there ought to be some utilitarian weighing of the side-products and the process itself.

Thus it seems that for several reasons, the concept of development and the related theory are quite ill-suited for discussing the problems of "underdevelopment" understood as persistence of severe poverty. Yet, even though a concept is strongly affected by its etymology and intellectual history, concepts can also be redefined. I share the conviction of several philosophers concerned with "development ethics" that the concept of development can be redefined, yet such redefinitions might turn out to be surprising in content if they are to be kept logically sound. Most importantly, it has to be recognised that all poverty reduction takes place in the context of global power structures, and thus a main fallacy of the classic idea is to treat the nation-state as a subject of development. The more freely investment, capital, people etc move, the more fallacious this methodological starting point tends to become.

## 2.8 Growth and wellbeing today

Recent literature on development, which is practically a collection of reactions to the crisis of faith in the growth-wellbeing linkage has been generally twofold. First, there are theories denouncing the idea of development itself, as understood as a faith in the growth-wellbeing -linkage. These are mostly post-developmentalist theories, together with more popular environmental concerns. Second, there have been theories claiming that development is not to happen by planned political action. These theories have mostly been pro-globalisation, pro-free trade theories, arguing that a global laissez-faire capitalism is the best way to generate economic growth, which has been synonymic with development all along.[175] All in all, what became to be known as the optimistic "development age" has passed, if we take this to mean belief in both development and its planned "acceleration".

Interestingly, both theories denounce discussing the growth-wellbeing linkage. Those theories which argue against the idea of development argue that development is not contributing to wellbeing, but vice versa, and is therefore not desirable. The laissez-faire argument, on the other hand, seeks to find best

[175] See for example Bhagwati 2004

means for growth, but ends up sacrificing wellbeing simultaneously, thus taking growth as such as the highest objective.

But how, then, ought the growth-wellbeing linkage be interpreted? Free traders are more interested in growth as understood in economics than the philosophical problem of wellbeing. Development critics do not see any linkage between growth and wellbeing, or at least argue that there are severe side-constraints to the existence of this linkage. They argue that the growth-vocabulary is fundamentally wrong. Some even see growth as detrimental for wellbeing. At least, the argument holds that the notion of wellbeing ought to be detached from the growth discourse.

The "development by free trade" -ideology interestingly shows, how economic growth can be achieved by exactly those means which further weaken the growth-wellbeing linkage. Economic growth today generates or presumes typically severely growing income disparities, increasing economic volatility, dismantling essential public services and denouncing the above-mentioned Smithian assumptions about the local productive use of capital, which were the basis of Smith's idea of the wealth of nations.

"Growth" can be, in some situations, socially destructive and quite often environmentally destructive. Very often growth means simply registering events that are contrary to each other. For example, environmental conservation can also show in growth figures, and if this happens together with environmental destruction, nothing is exactly done, even though growth figures are enhanced by two simultaneous processes. Examples of socially destructive growth situations are, for example, dam projects, which have often included the forced eviction of up to hundreds of thousands of people as a side-product of generating energy for industrial purposes, deemed essential for growth. Or growth can be registered by the expansion of cities, which have the same effect by pushing slum dwellers out of their homes because of rising land prices. Growth can also be registered when subsistence livelihoods are destroyed by large-scale enterprises, which is typical for example in the fishing industry. A very typical case would be that in village A there are 100 small-scale fishermen, who fish in the nearby coastal areas so that the fish-stock remains constant. At some point, a large fishing fleet begins to fish the same areas, causing both a loss of employment and, due to overfishing, the depletion of the local fish-stock. Yet as the local fishermen have fished only to meet the needs of the local village, the result in economic terms is tremendous growth, as fish becomes a market commodity, despite effects that are disastrous in several respects.

The idea of growth, and economic theory more generally, tends to be insensitive towards these kinds of losses. The main concern in the development discourse has been the inadequate portion of the gains of development received by unprivileged groups. Everybody has been assumed to gain in the process to some extent, by the logic of "trickle-down", stating that increased economic activity is reflected in the whole society as more job opportunities, new demand for local products etc. The idea that growth could lead to losses has been very little discussed in the development literature. The texts of the few early theorists

claiming this, such as Ivan Illich[176], were generally seen as provocations[177]. (Although Illich was more concerned about cultural losses than displaying a utilitarian concern with overall losses through growth).

It should be noted that development cannot be treated as something to be measured merely by noting which goods are possessed by which people. Besides this, development leads to a new logic, or rather new logics, of distribution. This can mean shifting from a local market to the world market, instead of an expansion of the local market, in a situation in which several of the agents of a local market have practically no access to the world market. While it is easy to show by for example economic analysis, how goods are distributed, we also need a more thorough idea of what was the logic and rationale of different goods and different amounts of goods being acquired by their current owners. Development has had a remarkable effect on this logic as it changes existing cultural ideas of distribution to state-centred and market-centred ones. Features such as this are included in the deeper cultural critiques of development. It is not impossible for a theory of justice to discuss such transformations, if one wishes.

As mentioned, growth does not adequately take into account the moral demands related to development. This is not to say that growth and enhanced wellbeing would not sometimes appear simultaneously, and admittedly they very often do. What matters is that this co-appearance is not necessary, and there can be, and are, better ways for achieving enhanced wellbeing than growth. Also, the logic of causality has to be clear. While enhanced wellbeing often includes aspects that register as growth, this does not mean that promoting growth necessarily enhances wellbeing. It has to be kept clea what is the *explanans* and what is the *explanandum*, and what are the ends and means. To repeat: growth is not an event, but a possible way of observing outcomes of events, and very often a rhetorical justification for some event.

To provide a brief example, imagine that a foreign investor puts up a factory close to village A. The new factory will provide jobs and thus increased income for a hundred villagers, who are consequently better able to support their families. Thus the wellbeing of the villagers is increased, given that there are no considerable side effects from the factory. This will also register as economic growth. Here, there is one event (starting the factory), which leads to two outcomes, measurable with very different conceptual apparata: economic growth and increased wellbeing. Both are outcomes of putting up the factory, not causal reasons for one another.

Now imagine village B. A new factory has been put up by a foreign investor close by this village. Yet the workforce of the factory arrives from abroad, using their low salaries in a shop owned by the factory owner, buying imported goods. Thus, village B receives no benefit from the factory. Also it turns out that the factory is a polluter, causing severe illness and premature death among the villagers. The wellbeing of the villagers is thus decreased.

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176 Illich 1973

177 Illich 2005;103-104

Here, there is the event of putting up the factory, which leads to two outcomes: economic growth and decreased wellbeing.

Also, as noted in discussions on poverty in the previous chapter, growth can itself create poverty. This is because of the expansionist logic of the economy, as exemplified by the notions of radical monopolies and social necessities. Growth often makes life more expensive, thus increasing the income requirements for avoiding poverty. Therefore, the growth strategy needs two accompanying strategies. First, attempts for more equality in growth, and second, attempts for decreasing the income needed for meeting basic needs and avoiding poverty. While one may include these strategies for discussing growth, the concept does not necessarily include these.

The idea of development always calls for theoretical caution, as theories of development might assume distributive mechanisms to exist, while these very mechanisms simultaneously are seen by other theories as "obstacles to development". This applies to growth too. Growth was for long seen as a process that benefits the whole of society. There were two principal reasons why this often has been so. First, policies promoting growth were often designed in a Keynesian manner, meaning that growth was directed to create full employment. Also there were other distributive mechanisms enforced, which forced part of the created goods to be transferred to lower strata of society. Ironically, it was exactly the goal of full employment and the government interventions on income distribution that became later to be seen as greatest obstacles to growth in neoclassical theory. The merits of growth in this theory are debated and unresolved. Philosophically, the discussion seems confused. Yet even if growth theory would have come up with a superior answer to the question "how to create growth?" it seems to have completely forgotten about the underlying primary question "why growth?".

Relying on growth as a solution to the problem of poverty can be seen as confusing the ends and means of development. Amartya Sen has warned of this confusion[178]. Since economic growth has often been seen as either a synonym or the primary indicator of development, this confusion has been widespread. If economic growth were seen as merely a the means to ethically defined development (ie enhanced wellbeing), the approach could be criticised by pointing out more effective means to attain the goal, or discussing cases in which growth leads to the desired outcomes and the cases in which it does not.

Sen's own candidate for the end of development is enhanced capabilities. In his view it is the individuals' capability to pursue the things she values, the enhancement of which should be the highest objective of development. Admittedly, rising living standards are part of the recipe for attaining this goal. But more is needed: political changes, redistribution, basic services and so forth. To offer a practical example, Sen suggests that lower fertility could be seen as one of the objectives of development. While lower fertility is a more societal end than one related to individual wellbeing, it does contribute to capabilities by easing the women's domestic tasks considerably, and offering them possibilities

178 Sen 2000; 36-37

to educate themselves. But how is lower fertility achieved? According to common wisdom, economic growth does the trick, since economic growth and lower fertility are typically observed simultaneously. But merely noting the correlation between high standards of living and lower fertility is bad social science – there is no mention of causality. Indeed, Sen points out, lower fertility can be better achieved by sexual equality than by economic growth[179]. Further, sexual equality can also lead to economic growth.

If we aim at increasing the standard of living of those living in poverty, there also has to be a relevant goal or reason for this enterprise. As money is regarded as instrumental to something, it is not a sufficient answer to regard rising standards of living as ends in themselves. Sen's answer would be that money is instrumental to freedom and increased capabilities; others would prefer the concept of wellbeing instead of capabilities. This is yet part of the question of the definition of development, which I will discuss at later point.

## 2.9 Post-development

Theories questioning the traditional notion of development and arguing that development as economic growth is not only ambiguous but destructive, have been generally labelled "post-development theories". This category of theories includes several scholars with very different orientations. Yet as there is a common critical ground in these scholars' ideas, it is enlightening to look at their challenge to mainstream development ideas.

The post-development scholars have several ways to put the argument against development, but often they have a metaphoric nature. This is how Wolfgang Sachs puts it: "The idea of development stands today like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Its shadow obscures our vision"[180]. In other words, according to Sachs, we ought to see beyond the notion of development, which is made difficult by the stubborn existence of the concept in the academic and popular consciousness. As Vincent Tucker puts it, "We are in the presence of a crisis in western history, a crisis of imagination"[181].

Post-development theories, while quite unanimously having a post-colonial orientation and leaning towards critical theory, treat development as an ideology. Ideological use means, as the Marxist concept suggests that there are other interests ("class interests") behind the practices known as development. These "class interests" can be understood here as interests of "the North", or the developed world. The difference between these interests and explicit ideology can be understood as either ideology deviating from the true interests of the oppressed, or the "functionality" of the ideology for the interests of the privileged, without reference to "truth".

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179 Sen 2000; chap. 8&9

180 Sachs 1999; 3

181 Tucker 1999; 10

Development can be also seen as a culturally specific category pushed to other cultures. Development is seen as a concept with a specific history, with its own western peculiarities and mythological aspects. Such an "anthropology of development" approach has typically been culture-relativist as is typical in anthropology. Other endeavours in this vein include Arturo Escobar's Foucaultian theory, in which development is understood as a discourse creating and sustaining power positions[182]. With the rise of discourse theory and such Foucaultian mode of social analysis, it has become quite obvious than the choice of words is far from ideologically neutral. Rather than being an arbitrary or technical matter, the way how matters are defined form the agenda, the way of structuring the world socially, and power relations inherent in the discourse. Power is inherent in language. This insight has led some critics of development to consider the existing global agenda as utterly Eurocentric and cultural-imperialist because of its deeply western vocabulary. As Ziauddin Sardar puts the issue: "The worst form of Eurocentrism is the power to define.[183]" It can be thus seen that any development enterprises in the present world carry cultural imperialism with them, regardless of the motives of the agents performing this enterprise.

Gilbert Rist argues that the present politics of development are what he calls "as-if" politics[184]. The expression used by Rist refers to Kant, who argued that we cannot know the truth about God's existence, but added that from a moral point of view, it is best if everyone acts as if God existed. Similarly, although it is widely known that the classic assumptions of development do not hold, policies are planned with a similar "as if" logic. Policies are designed *as if* growth could bring prosperity to all and could be sustained without limits, *as if* the developing countries could and would catch up with the developed countries, *as if* international debts would (or could) be paid, and so forth.

The ambiguous use of the concept of development transfers the confusion to the use of the concept to its critique. Therefore, the points of critique need to be analysed. The critiques can be classified in the categories of "being unjustifiably ahead in development" critiques and "defining development" critiques. The former means that while the goal and ideal of development is widely shared, development levels are widely unequal and unjust practices and institutions bring about this inequality. The latter means that the Northern powers have the cultural power to define what counts as development, or what is a desirable state in a society, while some ways of life in the South ought to count as equally desirable and good. The understanding of being rich or being poor means, for example, is something that differs according to cultural viewpoint. There is room for both of these strands of criticism, and drawing the line between their applicability is to ask questions about limits of normative thought. To what extent are normative matters universal, and where does the area of culturally specific thought and legitimate cultural relativism begin?

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182 Escobar 1995

183 Sardar 1999; 44

184 Rist 1997; 229

This typology of critiques of development can also be called the distinction between the content of development and its form. The prior refers to the ends of development; a wider cultural idea about what is desirable. The latter refers to the means of achieving this idea. The critique of the content is what Ronald Munck calls the desirability critique and the critique of the form is what he calls the polarisation critique and the attainability critique.[185]

Desirability critique simply means theories based on the idea that development is something that is not good to human wellbeing in general. This strand of thought has had an audience for a long time, especially within the intellectual and social movement circles and of the third world. The fact that post-development thought only became really academically fashionable in the 1980's, leads us easily to forget that already Mohandas Gandhi was a vocal critic of exactly what has been called development: increasing production, machines, and the modern self. (Gandhi himself did not speak of development, but rather modernity, but this does not alter the point of his criticism.)

The desirability critique is a strong position against the growth-wellbeing linkage. The idea is not that growth has ceased to produce wellbeing, but rather that it has never been growth's function. Rather, arguably, development creates social alienation and moral degradation, thus being detrimental to good human life. Typical of this type of critique is also the questioning of the presuppositions of measuring development: that more energy use, higher production of industrial goods etc are good.

The types of critique more concerned with the form rather than the content of development hold that the ideals incorporated within the concept of development are desirable, and for this matter, there is no reason for critique of development as such. But, such critics note, such goals are unrealistic given the current world political situation. If something is set as a global goal, it has to be achievable. Representatives of attainability critique ask therefore, if it is possible to generalise the present level of consumption of the rich countries to a global level. It seems that it is not, as an eco-catastrophe would result long before the objective would be attained. Therefore, even though energy consumption makes life easier, the possibilities to consume energy should be globally equalised to an attainable level, rather than aiming at growth in each country. Even as rich countries grow, the critics note, equalising possibilities for consumption become a statistical absurdity: with the current phase, "catch-up development" would take 500 years, after which the global average GDP would be around $1,000,000 per capita.[186]

The polarisation critique is based on similar concerns, but is more involved with the interdependencies of development in different countries. Representatives of this thinking include imperialism theorists, dependency theorists and world system theorists, who all share the belief in the interdependency of development and underdevelopment. In other words, they argue that the condition of one's development is other's underdevelopment,

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185 Sutcliffe 1999; 135-139

186 Lummis 1997; 68

and vice versa. Even though development is desirable from the viewpoint of an individual country, it is typically not brought about justly. Therefore, the claim for distributive justice is in such theories even stronger than in attainability theories, although never very explicitly pronounced. While attainability theories treat the need of distributive justice as merely as something forced on us by external constraints of growth if poverty is to be overcome, polarisation theories claim that development and underdevelopment are reflections of each other.[187] At least they are so in the present world order, though not necessarily in any imaginable world order.

Polarisation theory is sometimes understood as merely meaning that GDP growth in the North causes GDP decline in the South, or that high growth in the North causes slow growth or stagnation in the South. The classic formulation of this idea is the so-called Singer-Prebisch thesis[188]. This theory is quite easy to analyse and prove wrong empirically (one only needs to look at GDP figures), and it indeed has been. This has led sometimes to the hasty argument that the polarisation critique is incorrect. But the development/underdevelopment balance can mean more than mere comparison of national GDPs. For instance, inequality within a society can be an important factor. Thus underdeveloped societies are typically societies in which gross inequalities persist. Also, as the GDPs generally rise in the process of the expansion of the market economy, merely the notion of a rise in GDP does not guarantee anything related to harm. Also, the conditions of the use of resources (who gets what from their commercial use) are not reflected by GDP, only the use as such. The relation between development and underdevelopment elsewhere is a theme I will come back to in chapter four.

Much of the critique of development has focused not so much on the content of policies but on power. The concept of development in itself is very depoliticised; it defies notions of power relations, dependencies etc between human beings. Yet, power is an unavoidable issue whenever it comes to political matters. Power is visible in two very different spheres. First, the matter of who dictates the policies or who are allowed to take part in the process of formulating and negotiating them, i.e. the problem of representation and democracy. Second, the matter of what kind of language is used to describe the political and social phenomena. This latter is very much analysed in theories concerned with ideology critique, aiming at describing the mechanisms which cause the subjects to internalise notions such as "development".

Development practice can also be seen as exporting cultural ideas in disguise. For example Wolfgang Sachs describes modern technology as the Trojan horse of development[189]. The idea of the "Trojan horse" of development has been articulated in several theories, highlighting the fact that nothing can be transferred from the culturally dominant North to the South without carrying something else in the process. Often, the development practitioners are quite

187 Sutcliffe 1999: 135-139

188 Raffer & Singer 2001; 16-17. For a more modern point of view, see de Rivero 2001

189 Sachs 1992

blind to the content of their Trojan horse. This critique concerns a wide field of matter and ideas. Others, such as Gustavo Esteva, understand even the notion of human rights having a similar function[190]. Esteva poses a question related to the UN conference on women's rights: "Why did the conference focus on (women's) rights? Why not a conference that explores *ahimsa* towards women, or *shradha* or *akaar*?[191]" Here, Esteva seems to underline the necessity of what he calls multiplurality. Yet, even in these polemical questions one finds a suggestion that global conferences on vital wellbeing issues could be held.

The critique easily comes to the point in which any idea presented under the notion of development seems to have an imperial function. Bring human rights and bring the atomistic view of the human being, the idea of the modern state as the sole legitimate arbiter of disagreements and the modern idea of punishment[192]. Bring schooling and bring devaluation of indigenous knowledge, hierarchies associated with schooling and western forms of knowledge[193]. Bring technology and bring the social order that goes with it, devaluation of local technology and dependency on foreign solutions[194]. Bring health care and bring the medical expert as the expert over one's body and the devaluation of traditional healing[195].

But where does one end up with this critique? Two questions arise. First, regarding development practices, are there any adequate means to weigh the pros and cons of different actions? It seems that simply noting that there are negative consequences in good-willed actions is not to say a lot about their overall desirability. One can surely imagine situations with evident harm involved, in which, nevertheless, the same action brings about positive things enough to make the action justified, or even refraining from the action unjustified. Indigenous knowledge is indeed valuable, but hardly valuable in itself or without limits.

Second, the critique of western power as the power to define, although a relevant critique, does not say much about the alternatives, nor about normative positions generally. The problem of universalism and relativism surfaces. We can admit that the present vocabulary for discussing global issues manifests the Western power to define. Yet two very different reactions are possible. We can adopt a relativist principle and argue that we face an unavoidable incommensurability of discourses. Or, we can try to create a more culturally balanced language for global issues, one that is created in a process that takes participatory equity as the leading principle in the definitional process.

It is important not to end up with banal conclusions from the cultural critique. It would be insensible and certainly defy the very meaning of culture

190 Esteva & Prakash 1998
191 Esteva & Prakash 1998; 119
192 Ibid.
193 Sachs 1992
194 Gyekye 1997; 39-40
195 Illich 2000

to argue that blending cultures and foreign influences are bad as such. Rather, the normative perspective has to involve the possibility to criticise some cultural ideas. Not all Western ideas are good, and certainly they are not all good because of their association with a "development level". But it has to be argued what western and what "indigenous" practices and ideas are wanted and why, rather than merely pointing out that "development" intrinsically carries Western influences.

These kinds of criticism face the same problem as that of all ideology critiques, that of paternalism. If the objects of development have internalised the notion of development, the critique risks bypassing the democratic argument. Even critics of the idea of development, such as Gilbert Rist, document that development was something wanted by the third world leaders from the very beginning of the "development era"[196]. Yet, this is merely to say of these leaders, as it often is the case that the subjects of a "developmental state" do not wish for the same approach as the political elite.

## 2.10 Normative redefinitions

By arguing that some (existing of imagined) social systems are superior to others, we are not arguing that it is necessarily the western model, or a system based on the our own valuation, which possesses this superiority. There are, indeed, many westerners who believe for example the Tibetan traditional society to be the superior society because of its capability of settling conflicts and making communal life possible[197]. The normative notion of better and worse (possible) societies exists merely for the reason that unjust social orders can be criticised and better societies aimed for. The notion might seem self-evident ("a platitude"[198]), but the post-structuralist tendency of post-development thought tends to blur this point.

Similarly, it is necessary to note that a need for redefinition of a concept does not imply that the concept necessarily ought to be replaced with other concepts. It surely makes sense to argue that we need a redefinition of the notion of "poverty" (and in the same vein, the notion of "affluence"), so that we are not thinking that low consumption of energy and natural resources automatically equals poverty. But this does not mean that there would be no need for a concept of poverty. Even after such reconstruction, we note that there are rich and poor people in different societies, and from a global viewpoint in particular. The need to reconstruct concepts essential to social justice does not mean that the demand for social justice is over – or needs to be reconstructed.

It is possible that there is no problem with the concept of development as such, but that the critique misuses the concept. Thus the easiest criticism of

196 Rist 1997; 81-88
197 Norberg-Hodge 2005
198 Smith 1994; 32-25

post-development theory would be to argue that "development" as criticised in the post-development thought is simply development misunderstood by the dominant narrative. Practically, if development is something else than what usually goes under this notion, the critique has a wrong goal. In other words, it is not development that is criticized, but a particular understanding of development. For example, Sen's concept of development is quite different from the development as depicted pictured by its post-development critics. I believe that post-development theory has not taken the possibility of this critique seriously enough. The critical picture of the idea of development may turn out to be a critical picture of one of the uses of the concepts, of a specific understanding of it. If so, the critical theory looses much of its argumentative force.

What post-development theory seems to be describing is the dominant and hegemonic but not the only idea of development. There are, and will be, alternative strands of development thought. One of these strands is the culture-pessimistic tendency of Western philosophy, which has recognized development but not necessarily shared the general belief in its desirability, Rousseau being the intellectual forefather of the idea. Another strand could be formed by some schools of Marxism, which see conflict and antagonism as the mechanisms that create development, and development only as a reflection of the current state of struggle. So it is important to note here that my analysis of the concept of development as a metaphor will claim to be talking of the concept's hegemonic meaning, rather than the concept's universal meaning.

Another way of putting the issue would be to distinguish between cultural criticism and moral concerns. The post-development school points out quite correctly that there are many "developments", in the sense that there are different cultural traditions with their most suitable paths for social change. The amount of energy consumption or home TV sets per capita say little, if anything, about human wellbeing in a society; surely high wellbeing can be achieved by other means. But the critique of the cultural hegemony, which has been backed by the uses of the notion of development is quite different from the moral critique. Indeed, even to say that energy consumption says nothing definite about poverty is implicitly to regard poverty as morally important. The only challenge is that doing away with the cultural imagination of development can be more difficult than one would anticipate.

Development can and ought to be redefined. But what about the notion of being unjustifiably ahead in development? The redefinition of development has to come close to a theory of distributive justice, by pointing out how one's development is other's counter-development – if this is the case. This is not yet to do with the control of resources, at least not exclusively. But the preoccupation with growth in the North may have anti-developmental effects, such as the strengthening of Southern elites, eroding the Southern resource base etc., which may in turn lead to the upholding of poverty-creating and poverty-sustaining social systems in the South. This might prove to be counter-

development, even though economic growth can be registered in the South and North simultaneously.

So it seems that denouncing the concept of development would be hasty. As there are moral problems related to poverty, we ought to react. If the concept used to denote the required change is progress, development or something else is less significant, although the connotations of the concept need to be known. What is crucial is that the substance of development is redefined. Most importantly, if development is to have moral meaning and create moral obligations, this substance needs to be defined in moral terms. In this case, development can carry normative meanings.

One of the main characteristics of the concept of development is that its descriptive and normative elements are difficult to separate. When contemplating the intuitive meaning of development, any attempt to present the concept in an exclusively normative or exclusively descriptive form seems to fail. This separation tends to be only analytical. If development is understood as a merely normative concept, any positive societal change (though perhaps restricted to the society's material base, though) ought to pass as development. Yet it is likely that cases can be found in which a positive change would not intuitively seem as development but some other form of positive change. More than that there are very few cases in which a societal change would pass as positive without any doubt or opposition. This is especially so if positive is defined as a non-democratic normative notion, rather than a minimum consensus. While economic growth has generally been seen as merely enabling subjects to pursue their own goals more effectively and thus being necessarily positive, it is today difficult to find a consensus even for the desirability of growth.

If, on the other hand, development is understood as a merely descriptive concept for, say, the expansion of production within a certain geographic area, it ought to allow for resistance to development. But as development seems to be a concept with inherently positive normative connotations, such resistance would seem absurd. In this case it would be possible for some political groups to be anti-development using sound arguments.

So it seems that as a concept development is both descriptive and normative by nature. For this reason, some caution is needed when using the concept. If a concept is both descriptive and normative, it will lead to some processes to be defined as automatically or intrinsically good. For example, when economic growth has been seen as close to synonymic with development, economic growth has become to be understood as good in itself. Therefore, one has to be careful with what passes for development in the descriptive sense.

For a concept to be descriptive-normative is not a problem in itself. There are numerous similar ethical concepts, usually called "thick" ethical concepts. For good reason it can be said that our everyday ethical language is pervaded with such concepts[199]. Take the concept of "murder". Murder is a normative concept. Strongly normative, we could say: murder is morally very bad indeed.

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199 Williams 1985; 129

Yet it is also a descriptive concept: there are some descriptive elements for an act to pass as murder, instead of, say, manslaughter. In this concept, there is a self-evident descriptive core to the concept: the death of a human being caused by intentional action. Additionally, there are aspects that are more open to interpretation, such as the motive of the agent who caused someone's death. An act might not be regarded as murder, if it has been accidental, even though the causal relation were clear.

What does this analysis contribute analogically to the contemplation of the concept of development? As with the concept of murder, the moral assessment it clear: development is good and desirable. The descriptive aspect, on the other hand, is more interesting. Is there such a core inherent in the descriptive side of the concept of development that would not be open to dispute (such as death and intention in "murder"), while other aspects are (such as the motives and the mental state of the killer in "murder")? If such a core cannot be found, the concept loses its function.

What would such a descriptive core of development be, then? Economic growth in itself will not qualify, since the concept is broad enough to allow for such measures to pass as development, which are irrelevant or harmful to the wellbeing of the poorest segments of society, as noted. This is particularly important if development is understood as a normative concept in the strong sense. If development is confused with growth, the conclusion will be that human beings have a *duty* to promote economic growth. This would lead to highly absurd outcomes. It suffices to think of the fact that car crashes increase economic growth.

Rather the core of the concept ought to be defined in terms of enhanced human wellbeing, but then, wellbeing is in itself a normative concept. Thus, the descriptive core of development would take a form in lines of "societal processes which enhance general human wellbeing are desirable", but this definition makes the concept of development of little use. Additionally, there has to be some special attention on the issue of poverty, if the ethical aspect of poverty is taken seriously. After all, development is an ethical concept for the reason that poverty is an ethical problem.

## 2.11 Limits to growth

Another, and maybe even a more serious problem in the definition of development is the fact that ongoing economic growth can no longer be taken be as granted. There are serious ecological reasons for this. The universalisation of the consumption levels in today's affluent countries would quite clearly lead to global catastrophe, which would be difficult and indeed absurd to regard as development. Therefore, the notion of everlasting economic growth has to be reconsidered. This will lead to difficult questions related to access to material goods and the possibilities to consume.

Yet some economists argue that economic growth can go on limitlessly by increased productivity, and that we can maintain the classic ideas of development, as far as the growth of material consumption stays within limits. This can happen by more efficient production patterns, and by moving the core of economic activity from industry to services, knowledge and other forms of "immaterial production". Being immaterial by nature, the production of such goods can increase without limits. The keyword called for is the "decoupling" of growth from resource consumption[200]. To such arguments, one can only argue that if growth is expected to continue limitlessly, efficiency alone seems an unlikely solution. The limitless increase in production would logically require also a limitless increase in productive efficiency. Also, while immaterial goods can be produced without material limits, we still need to discuss the distribution of material goods – energy, raw materials, rights to pollute, and so on. While an alternative concept for the ambiguous "consumption" would perhaps be necessary, the issue of distribution of material goods remains.

This leads to the question, are some countries in the present world "overdeveloped" by some standard. If the way of life is such that it affects other's possibilities to achieve wellbeing in a negative way, we are facing a problem of justice. I have argued elsewhere that such a concept of "overdevelopment" would be useful when shifting the theoretical focus from development discourse to redistribution discourse[201]. Yet as mentioned above, it now seems to me that we ought rather to seek radical redefinitions for the concept of development, ones that would include more aspects of just redistribution. A concept of "overdevelopment" is paradoxical, if development is seen as a normatively positive concept independent of context.

But overdevelopment can be a meaningful concept in three different cases. First, where the available resource pool is limited, and the "overdeveloped" take a big enough share of the existing resources, to hinder others' possibilities for development. This is a way of seeing the limits to growth in a global view of just distribution. Second, if development levels harm others in other ways. An example of this is the global climate change. In the process, the underdeveloped are most severely harmed by the consumption levels of the rich countries. These countries are thus overdeveloped in the sense that their consumption creates negative effects elsewhere.

The third way of using the notion of overdevelopment is quite different. A country can be overdeveloped in the sense that increased standards of living cease to increase wellbeing. The living standard can thus be either irrelevant or negative for wellbeing. This indeed is a frequent notion in studies that aim to analyse wellbeing in a broader sense, rather than merely by the levels of material consumption. Such studies typically show that wellbeing has been highest in the global North approximately 20-30 years ago, when living standards have been significantly lower than now[202]. Of course this does not

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200 see f.e OECD 2002

201 Eskelinen 2005

202 see for example Redefining progress 2005

show that the living standards have had a causal effect on decreased wellbeing. Yet if it can be shown that the relation between growth and wellbeing does not exist, development as understood economically has no use.

For example Martha Nussbaum has argued that there are cases where economic growth is irrelevant or even harmful to wellbeing. Nussbaum highlights several ills caused by excessively high living standards. In such cases, we are discussing a case in which win-win situations are theoretically necessary, given that the same resources that are negative to wellbeing could be used for development (understood as a process enhancing wellbeing) elsewhere. In such cases, goods instrumental for development are discussed. In cases in which goods relate directly to development, developments can be conflicting in the sense that more development for one can cause less development for the other. But as noted, this is not always the case. As with the third case of "overdevelopment", good relates to development in a context-specific way, meaning that roughly with lower levels of material consumption additional goods are more likely to contribute to development.

## 2.12 Development and exploitation

If development is a normative concept, it means that development is desirable – there might even be a duty to promote it, depending on the understanding of normativity. Here an empirical problem arises: to distinguish development from exploitation. If development is to be something normatively described as desirable, it has to be a process that is not by nature exploitative. Here we encounter again the problem of development allowing for both opulence and poverty. Think of the process typically called "industrial development" or "economic development". In the process, capital is attracted to a country or area, which creates jobs with not necessarily very good conditions, but jobs nevertheless, and this process in turn creates further effects in the society as capital accumulates and wage-money is spent. But how does this description of "economic development" differ from a description of exploitation? Would this not also serve as a description of exploitation?

Critical development theorists have called attention to the fact that in practice development, despite its positive connotations, has often been a process making exploitation possible – or even, a literal process of exploitation. For example Arturo Escobar has analysed the role of women in development discourse. In the 1980s, women emerged into the discursive scene of development, as the slogan "women in development" was launched and women entering the workforce became to be seen as a highly important element in development. In a way, women were "found" as subjects of development. Yet, incidentally, it was at the same time that the first so-called special economic

zones[203] were founded in third world countries. In these economic zones, aimed at increasing exports by creating an "attractive investment climate", workforce is low-paid and its working conditions are modest. Typically the majority of the workforce is composed of young women, as they were seen as culturally conditioned to be humble workforce, willing to accept a low pay.[204]

Escobar's discussion naturally aims at asking whether the co-appearance of these two phenomena was really coincidental. It seems that, at least to some extent, it was not. The discourse on development focuses on the conditions for growth in the given circumstances, and even most exploitative measures are likely to be reflected as "growth" in economic calculations, as growth is focused on output, rather than salaries. But then, the matter is not only a misconception of development, but also a real moral paradox. It *is* a positive thing for many young women to enter the workforce rather than to stay at home, even if the working conditions could be far better.

Getting over this problem could be possible by abandoning the idea of exploitation and arguing that development requires sacrifices, or is not immediate. But this would be a dangerous path to take. It is not clear why development would necessarily require sacrifices, and indeed there is no proof that *any* industrial utilisation of labour or *any* investment in a country, regardless of its attached conditions, would cause better social conditions in the future. Of course, we could also abandon the concept of development and argue in a Marxist vein that any forms of interaction between capital and labour means exploitation, but this would not be a very promising route either. It would be insensitive towards the genuine wishes for the future of several people and make indicting appalling exploitation difficult, as most other economic activity would also be labelled "exploitation". But if we keep both notions in place, we need some kind of criteria for distinguishing the two processes.

If development is to be understood as a morally positive, it has to be distinguished from exploitation. Exploitation, even as a side effect of a larger process, cannot be something we would have a moral responsibility to promote. And even if development and exploitation could appear simultaneously, or be sides of the same coin, this does not say that development could not take place without exploitation. It is necessary to make the distinction between given alternatives and possible/feasible alternatives.

Practically speaking, we are faced with the necessity of discussing just deserts. If something is to be non-exploitative, it is assumed that the worker gets goods according to her just deserts. Apart from income, among other things there are leisure time, proper working conditions etc. But how are we to define just deserts? In classical Marxist theory, the worker deserved all the fruits of her product, thus making any "added-value" for capitalists a matter of exploitation. But this would be too harsh, perhaps, and could also render the

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203 Special economic zones (SEZs) go by a number of names, for example Export processing zones (EPZs)

204 Escobar 1995; 175

concept of development useless. Too much of what ought to count as development, would be defined as exploitation.

One can take any of the definitions of development proposed, but similar difficulties emerge. It seems that the only way development can be intelligibly defined as something opposed to, rather than complementing, exploitation, the definitions have to have a temporal aspect. In other words, development is something that will bring about positive future changes. But having made this normative point, empirical assessments become even more difficult. How are we ever to assess whether certain societal changes will bring about positive change in the future? Can matters referring to the future ever serve as a functional normative criterion? Naturally, predicting the future is possible to some extent – and to some degree good social science is good because of its ability to predict future trends and patterns in societies, and analyse what contributes to future development. But then we are talking about probabilities, different kinds of societies, and generally a situation in which false or ideological claims are very hard to argue against, since there is no empirical verification available.

These questions cannot be affirmatively answered here. Yet what can be said is that there are several processes and side-constraints that make poverty alleviation in the future more or less likely. By analysing these we can get some idea whether something claimed to be development is merely ideological or a true future promise of a given process.

What is noteworthy is that side-constraints making the likelihood of future gains greater, are exactly the ones which have been diminishing with the "lost decades of development"[205], such as relatively good accessible education with no user-fees, protection of "infant industries" of poor countries, national marketing boards, the possibilities to set development criteria to foreign investment, better possibilities for taxation etc. Paradoxically, growth theory has often relied on assuming these distributive mechanisms to exist, while there has been a push to dismantle the very same mechanisms in the name of growth. Amongst these are the possibilities to restrict capital flows and further utilise capital for politically determined goals, the capability of government to provide schooling and other basic services, and general empowerment of the people.

What is common in the idea of development in the discussion above is that the idea of development-with-exploitation holds that development can only take place by capital injection to developing areas. This is, indeed, how development often has taken place. With too little local resources, it is difficult to generate new forms of employment and such, making foreign capital necessary. Yet development does not necessarily have to be a kind of top-to-bottom -process, in which only agents commanding resources inaccessible to the subjects of development can trigger the development process[206]. Development can, as well, be a bottom-down process in which the subjects of

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205 Rist 1997; 211-213

206 The minor role of foreign direct investment on development has been shown by for example Böll et al. 2008.

development themselves launch the process from their own set of demands, perhaps with small-scale local capital formation as a part of the process, or with no capital involved.

## 2.13 Development ethics

Ethics need to be discussed when there are dilemmas. The dilemma here is who benefits and who suffers from changes claimed to be about development, or how much suffering can development involve. If it is noted that any case of development is not only a case of mere maturation of society, but a case of conflicts, then development necessarily includes dilemmas. The question often asked when highlighting the value of development is: "development for whom?" Alternatively, the question can be asked as "what counts as development?"[207]

Even if we accept the idea that development requires sacrifices, it has to be asked, how are these sacrifices, or "bads" distributed, and what are the likely goods to be reaped out of these sacrifices, and how they are likely to be distributed. This is particularly important, since in practical development projects the bads are often disproportionately borne by the poor and vulnerable, often the politically marginalised, who are also unlikely to see any of the benefits coming out of such projects. To regard the nation as the subject of development is ideological in this manner.

Remember the example of the giant dam, which requires thousands of people to be evicted from their homes, while creating electricity, which mostly benefits people in urban areas and industries with new jobs, cheaper household electricity and so on. There are obvious benefits created by dam projects, but these benefits are extremely unevenly distributed, with a strong bias in favour of urban populations, typically the middle and upper classes. Possibilities for even more unequal distribution of benefits and burdens do exist, though – priority access to water and electricity can be given to companies instead of the urban middle class, for example. Thus there are several ways of distributing such goods.

Several other projects are by their dilemmatic nature more complicated, and it is indeed typical that the assessment of their justness is not as straightforward as in the case of giant dams. Often there are gains and losses of very incommensurable kinds involved for the same people. Yet what this illustrative example shows is that the question of whether development requires sacrifices ought not to be asked without asking "sacrifices from whom?".

When assessing, what kind of sacrifices may be required and from whom, we need some kind of moral metric, a "calculus of pain"[208], to use Des Gasper's

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207 On the "confused" nature of development, see Arndt 1987;165

208 Gasper 2004; 128-129

term, for assessing pros and cons, assets and human costs. For such moral assessments, the methodology is unavoidably utilitarian. This is not to say that other kinds of moral arguments would not be used. Quite typically in struggles against dams, for example, the movements have utilised a sharply rights-based rhetoric, referring to the rights to land, livelihood, or local natural resources. But as there are conflicting rights or at least conflicting ideas of development involved, it is not sufficient to refer to rights, but some kind of utilitarian argument is needed – at least in order to settle between conflicting claims of rights. At least some *sufficient consensus* is needed about what counts as development.

Roughly there are three common ways of forming such utilitarian calculus. These can be called economic utilitarianism, democratic utilitarianism and prioritarian utilitarianism. Economics bases itself on a preference-utilitarian ground, more exactly on simple preference theory, but recognises only preferences communicated via the market. (Or presupposes that other preferences are communicated by the vote). Other kinds of preferences are hard to express within this framework, especially preferences related to the size of the market in the social sphere, i.e. commodification or resistance to it (for example a willingness to preserve a subsistence or local-scale economy). Also preferences communicated via the market are accompanied with a bias in favour of the wealthy. Therefore, the question "development for whom" is unlikely to be answered in a just manner by referring to this framework only.

Democratic utilitarianism means that the utilitarian calculus is based on an egalitarian utility-function. In other words, the utilities and preferences of each individual should be equally valuable in the calculus, even though utilitarian thinking allows for sacrificing individual interests for a greater good. This egalitarianism has always been a feature of utilitarianism, even though this simple fact is often forgotten when discussing utilitarianism's willingness to sacrifice individuals. What is crucial is that utilitarianism treats each individual's preferences as equally valuable. This is distorted in the market version of preference-utilitarianism. In classic utilitarianism egalitarianism was a strong starting point, although the focus was more on wellbeing in general rather than preference.

Nevertheless, it is possible to employ an even more sophisticated model of utilitarianism, in which the preferences of the least well off are taken into special consideration. For example, it might be less justifiable to destroy the livelihood of a poor man than that of a rich man for the sake of the public good, if the rich man has alternative livelihoods while the poor man does not, and the public good demands that one of these sacrifices is to be made. Even this would not necessarily be contrary to the above-mentioned egalitarian ideal, as the rich man's overall wellbeing is likely to suffer less from this destruction. If the currency of egalitarianism is analysed in terms of wellbeing rather than preferences, it might even be what egalitarianism calls for. In addition to the egalitarian model there still might be cases in which some form of prioritarianism ought to be applied. Even though typically cases of special

consideration are based on the egalitarianism of wellbeing, some special groups, such as small children, may be legitimately subject to prioritarian considerations. On the other hand, if we discuss egalitarianism so that preferences are taken as central, then poverty reduction in itself becomes to be a claim for prioritarianism. It can be also argued more generally that a minimal level of material goods has ethical significance beyond the problem, if increased material standards of living enhances wellbeing[209].

The relevance of the question "development for whom?", and the claim for prioritarian and egalitarian answers leads to further important questions. Namely, if we note that development is about conflicts and not only universal gains, it might be that it is not only the "development for whom?" question we have to answer, but also the question of "development according to whom?". Would development be a commonly agreed framework of goods that merely ought to be distributed, the question would be less difficult. But it is not. Rather, the ideas of development can be differing and incommensurable, and the task of a normative theory of development is to find a way of expressing the content of development so that this conflict can be overcome. But this is philosophically difficult: can a theory be both democratic and normative in nature? Is it not exactly the non-democratic nature that makes an argument normative, in other words that it is based on more than merely a vote?

The notion of conflict cannot be overlooked when discussing development. Conflict does not only cover distributing scarce goods, but also conflicts regarding incommensurable arguments in need of being settled. One persons' development can be other persons' "anti-development". Additionally, it is not only utilitarian economic logic that suffices to show that development has occurred; rights-based notions are also needed. Violations of a certain groups' fundamental rights ought not to count as development. Even without such violations, utilitarian logic will lead to tragic situations. If a thousand people are lifted from poverty, but at the same time five hundred are forced into even more desperate poverty, are we talking about development?

Development ethicists have discussed widely the issue of marginalised groups. Development *tout court* has been as a process very unfavourable to such groups, including indigenous people, ethnic minorities, women, slum-dwellers and such. It would be important to focus special attention on these groups when considering, how benefits ought to be distributed by a process to be called development.

## 2.14 Poverty and development

Whatever the critiques, there are some premises which can be taken as granted. First, as argued in chapter one, poverty is an ethical problem. It calls for action. Second, we are not devoid of means for affecting the persistence of poverty in

209 Griffin 1986; 41-42

developing countries. Even though several approaches and standard means of aid have failed, it would be wrong to argue that such means do not exist. Third, "development" can be redefined as a concept. This may mean a radical redefinition of its meaning, but there is no need to scrap the concept altogether.

The redefinition of development calls for an answer to the question: what makes development ethically desirable? The question can be answered in detail by referring solely to poverty reduction, or by taking a broader perspective. Is development wanted (ethically) only because of poverty reduction or because of the good life generally? The problems with both answers are clear. It seems intuitively mistaken to regard a country with a population surviving just above the poverty line as "developed". In other words, development is about a good life and not only about survival[210]. It ought to reflect more than what Marx called "simple humanity"[211], life on the brink of survival. On the other hand, references to a good life generally might draw attention away from the specific needs of the poorest and most vulnerable.

When looking at current political discussion on development, the solution to this problem seems to be using both of the alternative answers. Official "development goals", the most famous being the UN millennium goals, state minimum indicators for life above the poverty line. Yet development is often also discussed as a process of large societal change, which generates wellbeing for people regardless of whether their starting position is one of extreme poverty or not. For example, Thomas Lines, a development expert surely concerned about world poverty, complains that recent international processes have focused on "poverty reduction rather than development"[212]. For Lines, there is nothing paradoxical here, but a matter of choice of policy.

The relationship between development and poverty seems quite straightforward in the traditional ways the concept of development has been used. The prevalence of poverty is seen as a symptom of underdevelopment, and the process of development is understood as the process of poverty eradication. Still, Frank's paradox of the "development of underdevelopment", mentioned above, makes the conceptual relation more difficult. Interventions regarded to be about "development" have at least been partially causing poverty or changing its appearance, rather than eradicating it.

The first analytical question related to the problem is whether development is just another name or a *synonym* for the absence of poverty, or whether it is a *causal reason* for the absence of poverty. Or are the two interlinked in some other way? To take the first possibility, seeing development and the absence of poverty as essentially the one and same thing would lead to the need to redefine one of the concepts in cases in which they seem to be conflicting (as in Lines). Yet another question regarding the concepts is: why use two separate concepts if they essentially mean the same thing? A still bigger

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210 Perhaps the most famous quotation on survival vs good life has been the Indian chief quoted by the World Commission on Environment and Development 1987.

211 Marx 1988; 29

212 Lines 2008; 56

problem for the definition would be that even though the concepts may overlap, they are not identical. The eradication of poverty is typically seen as merely one aspect of development. Finally, development is a process while the levels of poverty are a state, and for that reason too it would be difficult to argue these to be identical in meaning.

The other option is to regard development as the causal reason for the absence of poverty. If this position is taken, what needs to be defined is how strong the causality is expected to be for a process to qualify as "development". Typically, poverty reduction is a slow process, and it is not easy to point out what exactly causes the poverty levels to fall. Of course the understanding of poverty is important in itself. Also, pointing out that development is a causal reason for poverty reduction, does not say anything about the question, whether it is the only possible causal reason for poverty reduction. If there are mechanisms that seem to reduce poverty, ought they be counted as development, or merely seen as poverty reduction instruments additional to development?

Taking a more fluid interpretation of the same idea, the absence of poverty can be seen as merely an *indication* of development. Thus the processes would be separate, but development would be observable by the absence of poverty. But then, development and poverty reduction would be such different phenomena that one ought to ask, which one is the true goal? If poverty is the ethical problem, why make development the political goal? It seems that if solving ethical problems are merely indications of development, development itself looses its ethical significance. Development cannot be discussed intelligibly as a normative concept when we lack an answer to the question: why seek development?

Another problem is that development seems to intuitively indicate much more than merely the absence of poverty. For an example, think of the cases of poor countries, in which severe poverty has been eradicated, even though the living standards generally are very low. Examples of such places would be Cuba and the state of Kerala in India, although the situation is changing in both. Even though Cuba and Kerala have achieved good results in such areas as health care, life expectancy and education, I believe that several people would find it difficult to describe these economically very poor places as "developed".

Rather, an intuitive idea of development seems to be more about high average consumption-levels *and* the absence of dire poverty. Thus development has at least traditionally included in its image some sort of trickle-down theory: it is not good enough for the population to be generally not poor, but the eradication of poverty has to happen through general economic growth, creating a strong well-off class. It is not by coincidence that the concept of "pro-poor growth"[213] has become central in development economics. One can only ask, is it more important to sustain growth or to be pro-poor? When it comes to sustaining growth, the above-mentioned problems of limits to growth have to

213 Ravallion 2004, Kraay 2003

be taken into account – especially as the limits to growth are likely to create the ever more pressing question of who can sustain growth and who cannot.

Briefly, development can be defined as something causing or being causally relevant for poverty reduction. Poverty has to be understood in the broad sense described in chapter 1. Thus for example cases, in which living becomes cheaper because of declining NRI, ought to count as development. From the basis of this simple and widely acceptable definition, there are indeed several conclusions to draw. First, there are several cases of economic growth that do not pass as development. Second, there are cases that are difficult to recognise as development though they are. Several societal processes in for example the above-mentioned Kerala are about development, even though the average living standard remains low. Incidentally, if we look at non-western accounts of development, similar ideas to the NRI can be found. The Chinese philosopher Lin Yutang writes: "development what makes food more and more difficult to get"[214].

A simple definition, which can be used here, is that something counts as development if it causes poverty to decline. Thus, if development is significant for poverty reduction and meeting human beings' basic needs, then Cuba and Kerala have to be regarded as quite developed. The only choice of not following this definition would be to add a criterion of the high income level of privileged groups to the definition of development. Yet it still needs to be shown how a high income level contributes to added wellbeing.

## 2.15 Development and equality

The mere lack of poverty does not mean that there is social justice, especially if the definition of poverty includes the idea of relative poverty. Typically, the reality of countries labelled as underdeveloped is rarely a situation of overall poverty, but one of high income disparities, including the control of political power and national wealth by a narrow elite. Even though people living in desperate poverty might see their situation improve slightly, nothing would be necessarily done to change the underlying structural injustice of such a society.

Noting that a contemporary underdeveloped country is typically one in which there are high income disparities, we have to question the linkage between development and social justice. I will take it for granted that a society in which a narrow elite controls most economic enterprises and the political life cannot pass as just, let alone equal. It can be argued that severe inequality is a sign of underdevelopment as such. This would make sense for the reason that there is the strong connection between inequality and poverty. Yet the causal relation in this analysis remains unclear. Inequality can be seen as a reason for underdevelopment, as unequal political power positions, for instance, tend to cause poverty, or underdevelopment can be seen as a reason for inequality.

214 Lin 1998

Additionally, a similar question needs to be asked on the global level. Are disparities in the development levels of different countries rather outcomes of global inequality, or is global inequality an outcome of disparities in development levels, because poor countries cannot absorb money or cannot get high-paying jobs due to low education levels etc.?

If inequality is seen as a reason for underdevelopment, we are essentially referring to underlying political injustices, which themselves make most of the country's population stuck in highly repressed conditions. This line of argument has been supported by several observations pointing out that when it comes to rising incomes and equality, the political empowerment of certain oppressed groups is a key element. For example Amartya Sen has made this point with reference to women's liberation[215]. If, on the other hand, underdevelopment is seen as a reason for inequality, we assume that certain political processes that go under the heading of development are inequality-reducing in themselves. This would quite likely require that development as a process has radical redistribution patterns. As is known, this has hardly been the reality of development. Also, it is dubious whether top-to-bottom development strategies can ever change the fundamental power structure.

"Development" can be seen as a societal state making just outcomes possible, rather than an outcome or logic of distribution itself. If countries are seen as developed according to how well their basic institutions function etc., the development level is only about pronouncing the requirements of being able to acquire wealth in the global system. For example, a functioning education system makes it easier to get high-paying jobs in the country. Thus development would be to global social justice what equality of opportunity is to domestic social justice. This way of formulating development does explain why it is not synonymous with social justice – it is merely a means to that end – but it fails to tell why development might be such an important thing in itself. For the ends sought by development there could always be more efficient means.

Here Frank's paradox is highly significant. Traditional societies have typically been more highly equal by nature, at least when it comes to the distribution of material goods, however scarce they might have been. Therefore, the mere lack of economic development does not signify inequality. The trickle-down theory, along with the idea of economic growth, has been at the very core of development thought for decades. Thus development, as it has been perceived, has included the idea that rising income disparities will be an unavoidable and necessary part of the process of development, even though these phenomena are rarely promoted as such. Therefore, if economic growth with rising inequality is defined as maldevelopment, the bulk of development processes have been about maldevelopment. There is a need to turn the definition on its head.

The concept of poverty and the concept of development have a common theoretical problem. This is that both concepts can be understood as being mainly ethical concepts or not. As noted with the concept of poverty, the

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215 Sen 2000; 189-192

definition given by ethicists bases itself partly on ethical concepts, such as suffering, dignity and basic needs. The economic definition, on the other hand, is based on the calculation of purchasing power, with a claim of objectivity. The same applies to development. If development is understood as the improvement in the wellbeing of human beings in a certain country, the definition is based on ethical concepts. Yet the mainstream understanding of development is based on calculations of purchasing power, with a claim for objectivity. Thus the understanding of poverty and understanding of development can be seen as interlinked.

The problem with the purchasing-power definition of poverty is that because it is merely a description, there is significantly less ethical force to the concept than in the definition based on wellbeing. There are cases in which people live very good lives with very little money, and only to point out one such case suffices to counter the argument about the inevitable connection between purchasing-power and wellbeing. Indeed, the purchasing-power definition of poverty leads to the question of why poverty as such would be an ethical problem at all. If, on the other hand, poverty is seen as a state in which human beings lack the capabilities to live a life in dignity, without avoidable suffering, a sufficient level of purchasing-power becomes simply a means to achieve this.

Being a societal concept, poverty has something to do with "development". As noted, in popular discourse underdevelopment and poverty go hand in hand. But this relation will turn out to be complicated, and necessarily alter the definition of development. First, development has to refer to a process that eradicates poverty, and second, development has to refer to the key roots of poverty. Any serious attempt to discuss poverty eradication has to refer to existing power structures and conditions, as opposed to what Dale Jamieson calls, with certain contempt, the "live-aid approach"[216], which means seemingly benevolent attempts to fight hunger with no analysis of the reasons for it. Therefore, if it is war, for example, which is the key cause of extreme poverty, avoiding warfare has to be fitted into the development discourse.

## 2.16 State versus process

The curiosity about the concept of development is that it seems to be a process rather than state, and yet all "development goals" or reasons for development are posited as constant states. Because development is strongly tied to the economic myth of sustained growth, "development" seems to be about achieving sustained change in economic patterns, rather than a *sufficient* level of material wellbeing. Poverty, conversely, is a failure to meet an existential level and not a matter of failing to accumulate income limitlessly. Here the concept of "development" is open to interpretation: are we concerned with development

216 Jamieson 2005

as an established process or development as an established level of wellbeing? It seems that in the economic understanding of the concept, development is strongly rooted in an ever-increasing standard of living.

This problem goes back to the etymology of the notion of development. As noted earlier, Gilbert Rist has argued that at some point in history development has become to mean reaching an ever more perfect form instead of reaching an appropriate form, which was the concept's original connotation. Here, the notion is in need of a revival of its origin. Because the problem is about reaching the existential baseline of freedom from poverty, we are discussing a society reaching an ethically appropriate form in this extent. There is no need for constant development, only a need for the solution of a pressing ethical problem.

The notion of a certain existential level, though, allows for the possibility that this existential level may be different in different societies, or even though if it is understood as constant, the means for reaching this existential level can differ. This, in turn, allows for the possibility of a rising poverty line. As the poverty-line is likely to rise along with the process of "economic development", this process can be counter-productive for poverty alleviation.

In practical political rhetoric this dual use of the concept of development is conspicuous. All major "development objectives" are pronounced as poverty alleviation, with strict goals of meeting certain levels of goods for a certain number of people. The baseline is too strict given the context-dependent nature of poverty discussed in the previous chapter. Yet the process of development itself is seen as merely an accumulative process. This can of course arise from the understanding that material growth is the best way of meeting development objectives. But if so, there needs to be room for an alternative empirical analysis. If other ways are seen as better, they ought to replace the dominant development-approach understood as ongoing growth. Consequentially, in the context of demands of justice we have to discuss *an existential state or a baseline instead of an ongoing process*.

## 2.17 Summary and conclusions to chapter two

In the first chapter I noted that poverty, especially in its extreme forms, is an ethical problem but an ethical problem of a special kind, as it is always related to social arrangements and social justice. Poverty is caused by a lack of social justice, in turn caused and maintained by the existing power structures. Yet the typical way to address poverty has been linked to the notion and practice of "development". Emergency aid aside, this has been a long effort to manipulate the societies of poor countries, with the expectation that poverty could be overcome by these efforts. Empirically, the results are not impressive. While the failure of development can partly be traced back to selfish motives and the personal affiliations of the donors and policy planners in the international

institutions, I have argued here that there are fallacious elements in the understanding of development as such that need to be analysed philosophically.

The idea of development goes back to the enlightenment belief in progress and the Hobbesian myth of scarcity. The resulting metaphorical elements have remained part of the development discourse. This has lead to a preoccupation with growth, or the belief that growth will eventually solve the problems of poverty. In addition, there has been a widespread belief in history that an economic core of a society can be manipulated separately from the rest of it, and that this manipulation is merely a matter of "accelerating history", i.e. changing the pace of an inevitable change. With the fading of this belief, development has become to include anything positive, which gives it a confused, often self-contrasting, nature.

Development has been fiercely criticized both as a concept and a practice. Yet these criticisms prove too relativist if applied as a normative strategy. Rather, development needs to be redefined ethically. This means that the goal of development has to be clearly that of poverty eradication. Only after an ethical redefinition of the concept can we begin discussing the means to development. It is especially important not to confuse the ends and means of development. In an ethical redefinition it is important to reconsider the linkage between growth and poverty.

For a redefinition of development, two things are especially important. The first is to put the notion of growth in context, the other is the problem of settling conflicts. While the classical idea of development seems to presuppose that development is merely about "maturation" rather than destruction and conflict, this has become to seem inadequate. Therefore discussing and settling the dilemmas of development will be necessary. These dilemmas include distributing resources, balancing gains to others and losses to others, and conflicting normative ideas. Even though a full consensus on the meaning of development cannot be found, an informed sufficient consensus seems possible.

I referred to a number of understandings of development. First, development can be seen as mere ideology. The arguments behind this view have been thoroughly presented, so there is no need to repeat them. Second, development can be seen as general social change, creating new forms of being poor or rich. This comes quite close to the Marxist understanding, and empirically, it seems to be a good description about what the practice of development has been about. Development has been promoted by both selfish and altruistic motives, for sure, and as a result, we see new social forms with very little in common with "original poverty". The modern and urban forms of degrading poverty permeate the global South, yet it would be fallacious to claim that this is the only outcome of development – indeed, development has created gross amounts of wealth. The third possibility would be to see development as solely an ethical concept, meaning roughly increased wellbeing and poverty reduction. But this understanding fails to grasp too much of what goes on under the banner of development.

So we come to the fourth possible understanding, which I see as most promising. Namely, development can be seen as a description of a change of a social form, added with ethical constraints relating to equality. Development as an ethical concept thus requires that the change of social form is added with policies to ensure that power positions, positions in the money economy etc are levelled so that poverty and domination can be avoided. As development is a "thick" ethical concept, meaning that it is both descriptive and normative by nature, both aspects have to be considered. As a descriptive concept, I have referred to a quasi-Marxist understanding of development, meaning that development (as well as growth) can be seen mainly as a name for a change of social form, allowing both new forms of opulence an new forms of poverty. This seems plausible from the point of view that development has generated wealth to a large extent, and the point of view of the "development of underdevelopment" thesis, meaning that development has often only meant changes in the form of poverty. The normative side of this issue is, then that if something is to qualify as development, the process ought to be egalitarian in nature, not allowing for excessively inegalitarian distributions of power (and, consequently, wealth). This understanding of development helps us to get around the problems of post-development critique as well as problematic notions such as "overdevelopment".

It has to be noted that some forms of "original poverty" are not poverty according to the definition I gave in the previous chapter, and with poverty absent,there is no moral need for development in the sense of societal change. This definition of development leads to the possibility of denouncing a number of policies marketed as development as being about something else, as the equality criteria fail to be met. All in all, whether referring to "original poverty" or development as a process incorporating equality, the equality criteria for normative acceptability are bound to be strict. This is especially important, since development seems to enable discrepancies of power and wealth on an unprecedented scale. I will now discuss equality in detail.

# III EQUALITY

In the preceding chapters the notion of equality has been examined to some extent. In the first chapter, I argued that social justice, which is necessary for poverty alleviation, requires an equalisation of the existing power imbalance, and the equalisation of expectations stemming from class positions, along with the equalisation of the need-required income in different contexts. In the second chapter, I argued that if development is to be understood meaningfully as a normative concept, the process of development has to include processing equalising the power balance, incomes etc. Even though it was argued that reducing such poverty, which is a moral problem, does not require the total equalisation of power (if it were possible), rather levelling the power imbalances to an agreeable level in which domination by economic power could be avoided, it is important to analyse the concept of equality as an ideal.

I now look at the standing point of normative theory, and why equality should be defended as a goal for such a theory. I then move on to a more specific analysis of equality, namely why we seek equality and what is the actual key good to be distributed equally.

## 3.1 Utopia and theory

I will first discuss the problem of the goals of social justice. What is the function or purpose of the theory of social justice? Even given the apparent simplicity of this question, it has been answered very differently by different philosophers. The goals of theories of justice can roughly be described as theories of "realistic utopias" and "utopias". "Realistic utopia" is the term used by John Rawls in his *Law of Peoples*[217]. According to Rawls, "political philosophy is realistically utopian when it extends what are ordinarily thought to be the limits of practical political possibility and, in so doing, *reconciles us to our political and social*

[217] Rawls 1999

*condition*"[218]. Utopia, in the strict sense, asks the purely normative question of what kind of social order would be just, without taking "practical" political possibilities as the starting point the, but merely attempting to extend, in Rawls' words, "our political and social condition". Rather, it would be a case of questioning and surpassing "practical" political possibilities, thus not starting from within the "political condition".

Another way of putting the issue is the distinction between theories based on minimum consensus and those based on possible conflict. The minimum consensus approach has been made popular by Rawlsian theorists. Rawls argues that the principles he proposes for social justice can be accepted by anyone, who takes a rational and impartial view of justice; he presents the choosing agent as an idealised subject, thus he does not refer to actual subjects[219]. Similarly, Thomas Pogge has argued that his idea of global social justice, which demands poverty reduction, can be accepted by anyone given a similar commitment to rationality, or rather, by the notion of overlapping values which show the "kernel" of political morality[220]. While these theories have their role, it seems questionable as to how wide a consensus can after all be reached about matters of social justice. It is likely that the theory of justice will also be a matter of articulating conflicts, and achieving justice will require political actions that some groups will not consent to – and are likely to aim at rational arguments for voicing their discontent. Or even if they consent, it may be a reflection of the "accepting injustices" problem as analysed by Nussbaum.

The major problem regarding the issue of "realistic utopia" is that "realism" is difficult, if not impossible, to define objectively. As realism here refers to what is practically feasible, it has to be noted that practical feasibility easily turns out to mean feasible given the current power positions and political structures – and thus given the injustices of the present system. Although Rawls is not very explicit in defining "our present political and social condition", or the limitations set by this notion, it is a legitimate concern that a "realistic utopia" is hardly an attempt to tackle the underlying injustices of the present order. In other words, a "realistic utopia" ought to be accompanied with a notion of utopia – perhaps unrealisable for now, but relevant in the field of normative enquiry.

The notion of unrealisability has to be taken seriously. It makes no sense to demand anything genuinely impossible. Yet we need fair assessments of the condition, detached from the particular motivations and desires of individual agents. What does it mean for a political goal to be unrealisable? First, it can mean that it demands too much from politics. If attaining a goal would require co-ordinated action from a too large number of agents, and changing close to all distributive patterns simultaneously, it is likely to be too demanding. It is fair to say that an utopia in which incomes would be globally equalised in say two years' time is unrealisable since the pace of change is beyond the means of

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218 Rawls 1999; 11. Italics added.

219 Rawls 1972; 18-20

220 Pogge 1989; 214-216, 227-230

politics. Second, unrealisability can mean that what is aimed at is beyond the scope of politics. For example a utopia which argues for an equal distribution of subjectively experienced wellbeing is unrealisable since the distribution of subjectively experienced wellbeing is beyond the scope of distributive justice – and the political system can only distribute the means to wellbeing and not personal feelings. Third, unrealisability can mean that proceeding towards the goal would create other, intolerable social bads, say the establishing of a dictatorship. This can well be the case in a scenario in which too much co-ordinated action is required. But then, such a scenario fails as a utopia, and can be criticised within the normative framework.

Noting these cases of "genuine" unrealisability, why should we entertain a critique of Rawls' idea of a realistic utopia? The answer is that current power positions cannot be taken as justified as such. Consider a society in which the distribution of income is unequal to the extent that we can fairly regard it as unjust. In this society person A earns amount X for his work, whereas person B earns 1000X for similarly demanding work. When facing person A's justified call for a fairer distribution of income, a willingness of person B and his political representatives to reduce his income to 950X, might be considered "realistically utopian", especially if the situation is that B's consent is required for any political decision to take place (assuming, again that his representatives control politics). This surely counts as "the political and social condition" in this given society. It can also be "extending the limits", if for example the income of B has constantly increased as a "law of the system". In a situation like this the merits of articulating a "realistic utopia"would be questionable. Radical redistributions of power and wealth tend to be unrealistic for the very reason that those in highest positions are unwilling to compromise, and because of their position, are quite able to do so.

Any theory of social justice must incorporate in itself some assumptions about the field to be covered by the theory, even though this would not be discussed within the conceptual framework of "feasibility". Take, for example, the idea that social justice is a matter of redistributing goods allocated by the market, and thus covers questions such as, how widely the government ought to interfere with the market. In this kind of case the basic laws of the market are taken as kinds of universal laws, even though history has known other kinds of distributive systems[221], and there is no reason why such systems could not also be in effect in the future. Additionally, the premises of the market system are to large extent normative rather than law-like – they can be transgressed.[222] This shows two things: first that the concept of feasibility can be misused, and second that a theory of social justice needs to make some presumptions about the functioning of the social system.

For example it can be considered as a law of economics that higher taxation in order to promote better a egalitarianism of income and public services will increase capital flight and decrease investment. It could be argued

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221 See fe Zaoual 1997

222 McMurtry 1998; 62-68

that given this fact low taxation is eventually more beneficial even for the poorest members of the society than high taxation with its consequences, thus being justified from a Rawlsian point of view (as "pareto-optimal"[223]). Yet the movement of capital is a political decision benefiting those with large amounts of money, making it easy for them to seek high turnouts for their capital. The current privileges of capital-owners and their power to avoid distributional taxation initiatives are presented as a "law", even though the situation is brought about by political arrangements and eventually, a power shift in the favour of capital owners. Thus even seemingly law-like phenomena cannot be taken as the facts of "our political condition" without further investigation.

A normative way of putting the issue is that excessive power over others is never justified. This can, I believe, be accepted without problems. But then we have to consider whether an unwillingness to lose one's position with regard to material goods is seen as such as the use of power. But what else is the using of such negotiating position than a use of power? Here the argument resembles the idea of domination discussed in chapter one. It is precisely the function of justice to ensure that power is not exercised illegitimately over others, and economic power is a common form of power.

When addressing the issue of the globally just distribution of goods, we are facing quite similar problems. If, for example, a theory of distributive justice points to the need to decrease material wealth or resource consumption in the richest countries, and they are unwilling to pursue this goal, and in their capability of realising this unwillingness how ought a "realistic utopia" respond? It again seems that the notion of realist utopia only grants given power positions, since here unwillingness and ability are two very distinct things when it comes to the realisation of just policies. At least some laws ought to be questioned, and scrutinised to see if they essentially justify currently prevailing injustices.

To give an example of such "laws", let us think of the doctrine of "comparative advantage". This states that each nation benefits from concentrating its production in goods, which it can produce more cheaply than others. Thus tropical countries are prescribed to keep growing bananas and coffee. Yet all of the currently rich countries have become rich by transgressing this doctrine[224]. Another example is the beneficial quality of free trade. Although theoretically free trade makes each country better off, it is the rich countries that do not adhere to this doctrine, obviously for a reason, while expecting the low-income countries to do so[225]. In such cases "laws" are very suspect. In other cases, forming just treaties are presented as political impossibilities, pointing to the problem of "realism" I discussed above.

So we find concealed power in such "laws" in three forms. First, formulating the laws themselves is typically biased to include some groups' privileges. Second, by what is conceived of as "realistic" given these laws and

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223 Rawls 1972; 67-70, 119-120

224 Stliglitz & Charlton 2005; 14-15

225 Ibid., 5-7

what is not. Third, by which players have the practical capability to transgress the rules at will.

## 3.2 Contextualism versus universalism

Each theory has some unquestioned starting points, or premises. One of them concerning the theory of social justice is universalism. In simple terms this means that the principles of justice ought to be applied similarly to all individuals. While this premise is sometimes questioned by communitarian theorists, who argue that justice can only be meaningful within a particular context[226], I will leave sidestep their argument here and proceed by accepting the premise of universalism. In this I take universalism to mean a genuinely borderless principle. The idea has been promoted in a restricted sense, meaning for example universalism within a nation, denoting in turn that certain principles ought only to apply to the nations' citizens. I instead accept Peter Singer's notion that distance or membership of a community are not relevant for ethics or justice – or at least not for moral worth. While membership might entail some duties and rights for an individual, the general notion of universal equality is unaffected by this. The problem is to find the correct scope for equality and for particular distributions.

Singer argues, quite correctly that distance has no moral significance when it comes to serious moral issues, such as extreme poverty. He makes no distinction between geographical proximity and affinity, so I rather discuss membership. If the viewpoint is shifted from Singerian ethics to social and political philosophy, which I have argued is necessary for poverty reduction, inequality becomes the major concern. As the universalism principle applies, egalitarianism ought to apply regardless of borders. This egalitarianism can refer to an egalitarian minimum, i.e. "sufficient shares" for all, or complete egalitarianism, "equal shares" for all; but this discussion aside, the principle holds.

Contextualist theories, which are typically communitarian, argue that any meaningful notion of morality can only take place within a particular social context, with its own specific culture and specific history. This point could lead one to conclude that as opportunities and such are so different in different social circumstances, no universal justification of justice could be appropriate. The background to this debate is the long arm wrestling between liberals and communitarians, with the latter arguing that only a social tradition can give meaning to normative concepts.

When it comes to social justice, a focus on the debate between liberals and communitarians[227] is somewhat misleading. In looking at the root causes of extreme poverty, the most acute form of social injustice, we find that most

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226 See MacIntyre 1984

227 On the debate, see Mulhall & Swift 1996.

poverty takes place in countries that are subject to unfair standings in trade rules and other economic arrangements. The goods distributed within a moral community, which might well be culturally contained, are produced by international economic and political interaction, the rules of which are subject to matters of justice. Thus, to argue about the relevant sphere of moral concepts is quite different from discussing how just is the current economic and political world system. Thus, we encounter two different levels of theory, and the notion of moral pluralism and complexity is more applicable in the moral sphere.

A typical example of this category error is Michael Walzer's an otherwise insightful theory of justice. Walzer argues that it is up to a political community to decide according to which principles goods are to be distributed within that particular community[228]. Yet Walzer fails to note that political communities do not function as the units of production, nor do they always control distribution decisions. As goods are produced outside the particular community, their money value is determined in economic interactions that cross borders, and because distribution mechanisms often have a transnational nature, it is empirically questionable to argue for this kind of prerogative to the community in distributional decisions. It can be a decision of a political community, how are the profits for selling bananas distributed between the banana salespeople and the government, but this cannot be a justification in any terms for the banana trade with poor countries.

A useful way of making this point are the concepts used by the historian Immanuel Wallerstein. Wallerstein refers to "world systems" and "microcosms" when discussing different systems of distribution. Microcosms are closed systems of distribution, which have indeed been abundant in human history. World systems, on the other hand, tend to destroy distributive microcosms, integrating them into larger systems of exchange. Wallerstein argues that it is an unjustifiable assumption that the units of global distribution are essentially "societies". This notion should be rejected, and the viewpoint ought to be changed to analysing the microcosms and the world systems.[229]
A microcosm is very close to the idea of society as a unit of distribution. For example, indigenous people typically have their own culturally specific forms of distributing goods, and often have little if any interaction with the outside world. In such a contained society, it would be fairly sensible to analyse the society-specific logic of distribution. World systems, on the other hand, are not based in societies as basic units. World systems are, to paraphrase Wallerstein, "world economies rather than world empires"[230]. This means that there is no sovereign political power or common administration, though there is a common logic of exchange and distribution. In the realm of social justice, it is more important to analyse distributive patterns than moral microcosms, which might of course co-exist with a larger system of exchange.

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228 Walzer 1984
229 Wallerstein 1979;155-156
230 Ibid.

Consider ancient Roman democracy an example of borders and distribution. The Romans had a fairly democratic way of distributing their acquired possessions (with its own limitations, of course). The system had both clear rules of decision-making mechanisms and appropriate distribution principles. The Romans also had culture-specific value systems quite different from those of the neighbouring peoples. Thus, according to a contextualist theory, it would have made sense to argue that the Romans had their contextually relevant patterns of distribution, which cannot be intelligibly judged from the outside.

Yet a major part of the wealth acquired by Romans and forming a problem of fair distribution consisted of booty. Almost everything that was distributed with these context-specific, shared rules were goods unjustly stolen, usually very violently, from other peoples. Noting this, the argument of context-specificity and the internal virtues of the Roman system do not amount to much – clearly the method of obtaining these goods was unjust.[231] Similarly, to appreciate the pluralist theory of contextual value systems and systems of distribution, we ought first to make clear, how wealth is to be distributed within a society acquired in the first place. If the process has been unjust, there is little value to the argument about the distribution of this wealth within the society.

## 3.3 Why equality?

As mentioned above, the notion of universalism leads to egalitarianism as the basic principle of justice. Here, I mean equality as "egalitarianism", and not necessarily as "equalitarianism", and meaning that each person has to be taken into account similarly[232]. If a theory of global justice accepts genuine universality, it also has to accept the principle of egalitarianism. (Some prioritarianist constraints on universal egalitarianism may still be relevant at some specific cases, such as in the cases of the needs of small children[233]).

Asking the question "Why equality?" might seem useless[234], but there have to be philosophical reasons as to why inequality is unwanted and unacceptable. This is because inequality can be seen as bad for distinct reasons. It can be considered bad because of its consequences, or as intrinsically bad. As for the former argument, it is quite easy to point out negative consequences of inequality even apart from the subject of this study, global poverty, and the connections with social justice, which I have already discussed. Inequality also breeds envy, corruption, violence and social unrest generally, crime and so forth. Often, increased purchasing power breeds negative social results, if

231 Lummis 1996; 126-132
232 Pogge 2002b
233 LaFollette & May 1996
234 Sen 1992; 12-16

distributed unequally. More generally, the social fabric of society, "the social contract", is threatened if a large minority feels that they are not getting what they deserve from society and become alienated.

But it is questionable as to whether this point suffices when contemplating the problems of inequality. Would inequality be justified, if it did cause further social problems? One can point out some real or imagined social orders in which this is the case. When it comes to real societies, an ancient Hindu society has most likely been quite close to this model. If the people with the lowest status in the caste system meekly accept their inferior social status and serve their roles willingly, or under repression, so that no further problems are caused, is the social order then justified? Most of us would intuitively answer "no". When we contemplate this social order, or even some more extreme imagined orders, it seems clear that there is certain intrinsic value in equality.

But there are noteworthy constraints to the argument of the intrinsic value of equality. One of the serious counterarguments has been made by Derek Parfit. He suggests that we consider a situation in which there are blind people and normal sighted people. Obviously, the blind people are in a position of severe disadvantage. The only way of equalising the position between these two groups is making blind those who can see, as vision cannot be recovered. This "levelling down" is of course not acceptable, which leads Parfit to the conclusion that equality ought to be promoted only in a way that makes the disadvantaged better off.[235] His argument is intended to be analogous to other cases of "levelling down".

Yet even if we grant Parfit's conclusion, the consequences of his argument might not be as far-reaching as they might initially seem. How, for example, is the plausibility of more equal distribution of income affected by this example? A utilitarian might suggest that Parfit's example makes a case against levelling down the incomes of the well off, if the incomes of the worst off remain unchanged. This is the case only if utilities (the obvious "currency" of a utilitarian theory) are confused with money. The worst off might be better off by improved equality as such, when it comes to such things as happiness or feeling a sense of justice. Very wide income gaps can influence the life of the poor in many ways – just think of housing prices within a city and the process of the formation of slums. Levelling down the position of the well off does improve the position of the worst off if correctly designed, even though aggregate income in society might decline as this has effects on the prices of goods. It is important to discuss all goods distributed by a political system, as money can give only partial ideas of total utilities.

What Parfit's example is useful in pointing out is the notion of the scope of justice. Before discussing the principles according to which goods ought to be distributed, it has to be ascertained what goods belong to the scope of distributive justice in the first place. Healthy eyes are a difficult case – and even though health care might be relevant here, healthy eyes are not exactly "distributed". But as noted above in the chapter on poverty, there are a number

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235 Parfit 1997

of goods that may or may not belong to this scope, depending on the definition of justice. Risks is a good example. Similarly, natural talent does not belong to the scope of distributive justice, but how much one can legitimately gain by using one's talent does.

## 3.4 Equality of what? On the "currency" problem

Social and political philosophy bases itself on an understanding of empirical reality, even given its normative nature. In order to make ethical assessments of a given situation, we need an empirical idea of the situation in hand. The natural consequence of this is that distorted data leads to distorted normative reflection. Thus we can consider, for example, such utilitarian problems as whether 6 units for A and 3 units for B is better than 4 units for both, and at least theoretically answer this question within the realm of philosophical reasoning. Yet it is considerably more difficult to contemplate the measurement and definition of units relevant for wellbeing or needs, as seen in chapter 1. The task of social and political philosophy is therefore also to make sense of the available data and consider the ethical and methodological relevance of the data itself. In other words, we have to measure the correct units.

This problem is conspicuous when it comes to assessing economic data, such as income measures, or the differences in gross domestic product between countries. It is tempting to simply take income as the relevant aspect, or even the only relevant aspect, of social justice, and argue for a more equitable income distribution between individuals and countries, or fairer rules for income distribution. For sure, a more egalitarian distribution *is* demanded by any sensible theory of social justice. Yet the argumentative path leading to this conclusion can take different forms, and it is potentially dangerous to put too much weight on income measures. Philosophy can base itself on economic measurements or it can take the role of questioning such measurements.

Relying on economic data exclusively poses at least three major problems. First, it is very difficult in the sphere of economics to appreciate the fact that income plays a different role in people's lives in different contexts as seen in the critique of PPP methodology. Second, economic measures rarely succeed in identifying the ills or burdens caused by economic practices and policies (I will return to the notion of harm in chapter 5). Third, economic measurements fail to assess the matter of relative poverty.

As discussed above, there is a case for the intrinsic value of equality that goes beyond utilitarian arguments, or at least implies that utility cannot be reduced to such common measurements of equality as income. Still, this says little. It is one thing to notice the importance of equality, and another to say what equality consist of, and how it could be achieved. The problem of equality is that any society distributes a number of incommensurable social goods – and

bads, for that matter – which makes it problematic to point out the kind of social order that would be ideally egalitarian.

When we ask what social justice consists of we usually encounter a range of theories, from those emphasising the egalitarian nature of social justice to those emphasising rather (negative) liberties and individual rights. The former theories tend to focus on the egalitarian distribution of resources, whereas the latter are labelled "libertarian", exemplified by Robert Nozick's modern-day Lockean rights-based theory[236].

As Sen has pointed out, every theory of social justice that has been able to put up with initial criticism is based on the equality of some good seen as central to the theory. Thus, libertarian theories also base themselves on equality – that of negative rights – and utilitarian theories on equal consideration of people with regard to the utility function. Sen argues that the question is not "why equality?", but rather "equality of what?". Equality thus can be argued to be an "empty form with no substantive content of its own"[237]. Yet Sen specifies that "the need to value equality in some space that is seen to be particularly important is not an empty demand"[238].

Thus egalitarianism ought to be taken as the starting point for the theory that aims to answer the question why is the proposed good (rights, liberties, income, capabilities, opportunities etc) superior to other competing benefits in such a way that it ought to be to be distributed in an egalitarian manner.[239] This is particularly important with regard to global justice. If we take the scope of justice to be truly universal – rather than constrained by national boundaries – it soon becomes clear that the world clearly falls short of the general demand of equality. No matter which good is chosen to be the key good of egalitarian justice, it is hard to argue that equality between human beings would be established in the contemporary world. This is particularly obvious when we focus on the equality of resources or wealth, but it is also evident in the equality of power, functionings, capabilities, opportunities or even negative freedoms, (which still direct duties only to nation-states and are thus global only in principle). Egalitarianism, as a starting point for any credible theory of social justice, clearly points to the direction that there is a demand for social justice.

But how ought the question "equality of what?" be answered? It should be noted that the currency of egalitarian justice is not equal to elements of good life. Good life includes several elements, such as love and friendship that cannot be allocated by distributive mechanisms,. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between the elements of wellbeing and the means to wellbeing[240]. It is the means to wellbeing we refer to when discussing egalitarian justice. In the following, I will sketch four different ways of answering the question. The first

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236 Nozick 1994

237 Sen 1992, 23

238 Sen 1992, p. 24

239 Sen 1992, 12-23.

240 I am using here the concept of wellbeing consistently. Some philosophers prefer the concept of human flourishing, while still others use the notion of good life. Yet these concepts are almost interchangable.

answer could be called the complicatedness of equality theory. The second answer is equality of opportunity, and the third is Sen's own answer, focusing on capabilities as the key good of egalitarian justice. Finally, I will analyse Thomas Pogge's answer, which gives this position to resources.

### 3.4.1 Complex equality

Several philosophers have argued that the whole issue, or political task, of equality is too complicated to be discussed as a theory of distribution of one key good, or to be decisively addressed at all[241]. This line of argument leads some philosophers to recommend abandoning the whole concept as a normative guideline, while others, while admitting the task is unavoidably complex, still see promoting equality as a task worth pursuing. The agreement between these philosophers, or the reason to lump them into one category is that they argue that there is no one key good relevant for justice, by the distribution of which egalitarianism ought to be sought. The general agreement between these philosophers is that when equality is investigated thoroughly, we end up with a collection of incommensurable goods to be distributed.

As mentioned, in Sen's analysis egalitarianism is a unifying feature of theories of justice. These theories are competing with each other by regarding different goods as the socially relevant good. Different theories have different merits. A Rawlsian theory emphasising the equal distribution of freedoms and basic goods might, or might not, be superior in some aspects to a Nozickian theory of equal distribution of negative liberties and rights, while theories of equal distribution of income, opportunities etc have their own merits. While it seems that some theories have weightier arguments than others on their side, it seems unlikely that any theory is going to outweigh other theories in a manner that would show the irrelevance of other social goods. In other words, while some goods are more important than others, there is still an argument for a just distribution of other social goods, too.

One way of putting the problem is that there ought to be a "currency" of social justice. The theoretical task is to find some way of measuring social goods, a method by which we could find the relative importance of different social goods to be distributed. Two examples of attempts in this task are converting relevant goods into "currencies" of money and utilities. Thus a social good could be, at least in principle, convertible to real or hypothetical "money value", or to utilities, referring more to experienced welfare. A mainstream economist would be most likely happy to argue for the money position. As it happens, economists often argue that social ills are maldistributed and are unnecessarily numerous, for the reason that they have no calculable (negative) monetary value which would act as a disincentive in their production. This is a familiar line of argument when it comes to for example environmental protection. According to this argument, people suffer from pollution for the reason that there is no (negative) "price tag" on pollution.

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241 Walzer 1984, Miller 2005

Were there to be, there would be a corresponding disincentive to pollute. Ideally, people could communicate their preferences related to goods or bads via the market. Apart from pollution, goods potentially argued as the key goods of egalitarian justice, such as social rights, could be promoted by pricing their violation.

Utilitarians base their moral calculations on an imagined utility currency. Accordingly, any social good or bad could theoretically be converted into a currency of "utilities". In classic utilitarianism, these utilities refer mainly to general happiness or wellbeing, in more recent versions the meaning gets closer to goods and thus become somewhat more measurable. Yet there is a good argument in pointing out the difficulty, if not impossibility, of these kinds of conversion exercises. All in all, utilitarianism bases itself some kind of notion of welfare as the goal and metric of social justice, measurable by the satisfaction of preferences ("preference-utilitarianism) or an objective notion of comparable utilities[242].

But, as has been seen, while the notion of egalitarianism would be generally shared, some scholars argue that this is an infeasible objective, at least in the global sphere, given the complexity of goods. David Miller is one such critic. In his view, the ideal of global egalitarianism ought to be refuted because of this complexity. Miller asks: When can we determine that there is a metric, by which to compare different kinds of goods? In particular the problem is according to him is that of when different goods are substitutable or equal, and when they are not.[243]

By way of example Miller considers two relatively isolated villages. In one village there is a football field while in the other there is a tennis court. These two could be well regarded as equal goods and thus substitutable. Neither of the villages has a distributional advantage over the other. They both provide the villagers access to sporting facilities, which is a more relevant definition of a good than finer-grained "access to a tennis court". But if there would be a school in the other village and a church in the other, a broader "access to enlightenment" would not, intuitively, apply. Rather we would think of the village with the school as being better off. Yet not everyone would share this seemingly clear idea of the substitutability of goods. Miller's point here is that there is no objective logic, by which to determine how a broad-grained description of the good is relevant in a given context. When the argument is taken on a global level, it becomes practically impossible to determine, the level on which we ought to compare the goods to be distributed.[244]

Though Miller's argument succeeds in pointing out the complexity of goods involved in distributive justice, it might be an overstatement that the task to pursue egalitarian justice ought to be given up. The problem of the substitutability of certain goods does not lead to conclusions to the

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242 This notion of welfare is what is being criticised by main rival theories (capabilities and basic goods theories).

243 Miller 2005

244 Miller 2005; 61-62

unsubstitutability of any goods. Going back to the basic needs discussion, we could find necessities for meeting basic needs substitutable. At least an agenda of an egalitarian minimum could proceed by analysing substitutable goods. While a suitable "currency" of egalitarian justice is necessarily loose and gives room for interpretation, this does not mean that it is not useful.

Curiously, even in Miller's argument the notion of inequality is not refuted, merely the practical hope for achieving equality. Rather, Miller argues that inequality ought to be reduced and prevented "from having unjust consequences"[245]. So obviously even Miller agrees that there is inequality in the world. His explanation to this paradox is that "our concern with equality is derivative, not foundational"[246]. This means that Miller does not see inequality as a problem in itself, or as an intrinsic problem, but rather a problem because of its effects. Yet even if this is accepted (and I have given reasons why it should not be), it nevertheless seems to be a problem for Miller's point, whether a theory of global equality is achievable or not.

This also brings us back to the question of the power to define. There are surely situations, as Miller points out himself, in which it is impossible to settle, how the fine-grained level of the matter of goods of equal importance ought to be judged. It is not enough to argue that the problem of the suitable categories of substitutable goods cannot be conclusively settled. Rather, it is merely shown by Miller's argument that there are two aspects to the problem of equality: One being the actual egalitarian distribution of relevant goods, the other being the power to define, which goods count as substitutable.

Brian Barry puts the argument for complex egalitarianism bluntly in his *Why social justice matters*, arguing that there simply is no such thing as the "currency" of egalitarian justice, or any one key good of egalitarian justice. "We have to discuss each right, each opportunity and each resource separately and ask what principles of social justice can tell about it. There is no need for surprise that the hunt for the 'currency of egalitarian justice' was as unsuccessful as the hunt for the Holy Grail. The problem in both cases is that there is no such thing."[247] Thus Barry, while arguing against the existence of such "currency", does not argue against the importance of egalitarian justice, but rather that there are several fields or "currencies" of justice to which the ideal of egalitarianism ought to apply. A similar argument is made by Michael Walzer, according to whom there are several "spheres" of distributive justice, which cannot be reduced to one single "currency"[248].

A further complication arises from the fact that especially in a global theory, the status of goods and bads can differ according to the social context. In more simple cases, we can be distributing the object or good A to a person, and ask, to what extent A counts as a good/bad. Or we can distribute the bad B to a person and ask, how much she ought fairly to be compensated. Here we

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245 Ibid., 76
246 Ibid., 56
247 B. Barry 2005; 22
248 Walzer 1984

have to presuppose that the good or bad is equally good or bad for different persons. But there are cases of objects which are "goods here, bads there" or vice versa. One famous example is given by Jagdish Bhagwati, regarding Nestle's campaign to market baby milk formula in developing countries. The product may be well regarded as a genuine good in rich world context – not all mothers can or will breast-feed their children. Yet the same product has proved to be disastrous in third world countries, where mothers dilute the formula with contaminated water, resulting in massive rise in infant mortality.[249] It seems to be the case that at least when it comes to products, the same thing can be a genuine good and genuine bad simultaneously in different settings – perhaps in even all settings. Such cases complicate further the ideal of egalitarian distribution: what would be an egalitarian distribution of such "good/bad"?

Yet it ought to be noted that some objects can be similarly "goods/bads" even in the same setting depending on how they are used. For example useful or even necessary tools (such as kitchen knives) can be used as weapons. Yet such objects do not seem to be the essence of distributive justice. Similarly, there seems to be no reason why kitchen knives and baby milk formula are different in this manner. It is enough to say that there are a number of useful objects that can be misused, but this does not lead to conclusions about the complexity of distributive justice, but rather that specific objects ought not be discussed as a basis for egalitarian justice. It is not goods which are distributed, but positions in the money economy or other forms of distribution which give access to goods.

It does not suffice to note that the correct level of generality of goods to be distributed cannot be settled finally, and instead political decisions need to be made concerning egalitarian distribution of goods. It needs to be asked, who or which institution has the power to decide over conflicting ideas of which goods are equally important – or how this power is distributed. Schools are a good example here, since it is almost universally agreed that access to formal education is an important asset to such a degree that it cannot be substituted with something else (as churches, in Miller's example). Yet there are, for example, indigenous people who regard schools as cultural colonisation, and would very much prefer support in spreading their ancestral wisdom. So the matter of "what goods are equal" is not only a matter that cannot be settled, it is also a matter of continuous social negotiation, and thus a matter of negotiating power.

### 3.4.2 Opportunity

A classic liberal idea of egalitarian justice is the equality of opportunity. According to this idea, each person ought to have similar conditions to start with, further inequalities being justified, as they are products of personal merit. This can denote equality of opportunity in a formal sense, meaning that no one

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249 Bhagwati 2004; 187

is discriminated against, for example, when applying for a position, or in the distributive sense, meaning that starting points in society ought to be equalised. In the minimum sense, this is close to the poverty reduction agenda, if extreme poverty is understood along with Sachs as being unable to function (and thus aim for any position). These different ideas of equality lead to very different practical conclusions, as the latter seems to recommend a far more equal distribution of resources, schooling etc. For example Brian Barry in his *Why social justice matters* lists several reasons why equality of opportunity does not take place in today's Anglo-Saxon world. According to Barry, the access to education, locales of residence, family's class status and such matters lead to very unequal opportunities in these societies.[250]

Also even within one society, let alone globally, it becomes problematic to state what are the relevant positions everyone ought to have equal opportunity to aim for. Again Miller has written on this problem. In Miller's words, the problem is about finding "equivalent opportunity sets", leading to the problem of how to compare opportunity sets[251]. While he intends his critique to be a critique of global egalitarianism of opportunity, it also turns out to be a critique of this particular understanding of the "currency" of egalitarian justice. Miller, referring to Darrel Mollendoerff[252], asks, whether global egalitarianism of opportunity means that, ideally, "a child growing up in rural Mozambique would be statistically as likely as the child of the senior executive of a Swiss bank to reach the position of the latter's parent". The question is obviously meant to be rhetorical, and points to the realisation that each society has systems of social prestige, and the good of attaining of these positions is very difficult to analyse by cross-societal comparison.

It indeed might be infeasible to argue that each person ought to have the same possibilities to become a senior executive of a Swiss bank, but then, what does this rhetorical question point to? If the position as the senior executive of a Swiss bank were incomparable in terms of social status to a position achievable in rural Mozambique, the point would be only about cultural relativism. Yet I doubt that Miller would go this far in his argument – at least it seems unintuitive. Rather, I believe that he accepts that globally the senior position in a Swiss bank is regarded as a very prestigious position. So the question arises: what makes the Swiss society such that for persons born in that societal context can achieve globally more prestigious positions much more easily within their society than the Mozambicans? So there are aspects related to social justice behind this problem, and these aspects are not related to opportunity as such.

As a poverty reduction agenda, equality of opportunity can be discussed as equalising the minimal starting point, the capability to function, which is the necessary requirement for achieving any social positions. On a global scale, however, opportunities tend to become difficult to equalise, as it is difficult to say which starting points or positions are commensurable and which are not.

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250 B. Barry 2005

251 Miller 2005; 60-64

252 Moellendorff 2002;.49

### 3.4.3 Capabilities

Amartya Sen has gained fame by arguing that the main "currency" to be distributed by the economic-political system are special kinds of freedoms, which Sen calls "capabilities"[253]. Sen argues that the human beings' actual freedoms (or "positive" freedoms) to function and attain desired goals is the most relevant good to be concerned about. For the purpose of very simple illustration, the nutrition intake of an individual who chooses to fast does not imply that she is deprived of decent nutrition, since she could feed herself adequately should she choose to do so. Yet a person who would wish to eat but does not have access to nutrition is deprived, even though she might actually enjoy a bigger calorie intake than the person fasting. Sen understands goods to be only instrumental to something, this something being quality of life or human capabilities.

According to Sen, material possessions of income are less relevant for human wellbeing. In market-oriented societies, money is naturally a crucial asset and has strong ties to capabilities. Yet money ought not to be confused with capabilities, since there are occasions in which there are other things more relevant to capabilities, health being a clear example. In other words, means ought not to be confused with ends. The end of a political system can be seen to be the securing and promoting of the individuals' capabilities, and money is merely one means in achieving this end.

Sen's notion of capabilities presents a shift from focusing on the means to focusing on the ends of social justice, but it also presents a shift from focusing on welfare, typical in utilitarian theories, to focusing on the possibilities of creating welfare as the metric of egalitarian justice. This apparent paradox has lead to some misunderstandings regarding Sen's theory. For example, Gerald Cohen has pointed out that the concept of capability includes some difficulties because of this double meaning[254]. Nevertheless, even given this ambiguity, Sen's answer to the question, equality of what?, is quite clear. Capabilities are something between goods and welfare, Sen's insight being that these options for the substance of social justice present a false dichotomy. The capabilities approach means taking something between welfare and goods as the metric, but also regarding as more important what a person can do, instead of merely pointing out what she does.

Sen also argues that a capability approach can take the diversity of human beings and their conditions better into account. This diversity extends to distribution within families, some peoples' special needs, such as the fact that in some situations more resources are needed, and the varying contexts people may be living in (urban/rural, possible polluted areas etc). This diversity has, according to Sen, be reflected in the theory of justice in a way that merely discussing resources cannot grasp.

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253 Sen 2000; 74-76

254 Cohen 1993

In Sen's language wellbeing is interpreted in a somewhat liberal manner. Wellbeing is for Sen a matter of being able to pursue one's personal goals that is, subjective preferences. Thus capabilities refer to preferences rather than an objective idea of human good. There is no reason why capabilities could not be taken to be the metric of wellbeing, while capabilities would be defined objectively. This, for example, is precisely what Martha Nussbaum's work has been about[255].

The idea that the currency of egalitarian justice ought to be capability seems intuitively to fit the scope of distributive justice well. Capabilities seem possible to translate into the ideas of distributing material goods, at least when the idea that money is not the sole good bringing capabilities is taken seriously. The theory is useful in combining objective egalitarian agenda with context-specificity. Yet as noted in chapter one, there might be a problem of expectations deriving from unequal social positions translating into claims for unequal distribution of material goods, as with the capability to appear in public without shame. Even though Sen's theory has important implications for equality, it is quite difficult to actually form political decisions that would be based on the ideal of equal distribution of capabilities. However, the theory can be useful in analysing the ends of policies.

### 3.4.4 Resources and basic goods

In some ways the most traditional, and presumably also the most common, way of discussing (global) inequality is by focusing on material goods or resources. This is quite understandable. Basic material goods are absolutely vital to life; no human being can survive without food and water. Poverty is typically discussed by reference to a lack of basic goods, which easily leads to the conclusion that basic goods would be the key good of egalitarian justice. Also the metric for material goods, money, is very pervasive in contemporary western discussions of distributive justice. It is also for the present political systems the good that is the easiest to distribute, because of both existing institutional capacity for distribution and the relatively easy measurement of value by money. Of course money is not the only way to measure the holdings of material goods, but several scholars seem to think of monetary measurements as accurate enough in order to meaningfully discuss global redistribution.

Maybe the most vocal and agenda-setting philosopher to have recently discussed the distribution of material goods and taking material basic goods as the key good of global social justice is Thomas Pogge. In several articles and especially in his *World poverty and human rights*, Pogge argues that the failure of a large segment of the world's population (the global poor) to access basic material goods can be seen as harming these people[256]. I will get back to the

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255 Nussbaum 2000

256 Pogge 2002, Pogge 2005

issue of harm later, but it is worthwhile here to discuss Pogge's basic argument of how to establish that the current state of affairs in unjust.

Pogge's main focus is on absolute poverty. He lists in several occasions the facts that hundreds of millions of people suffer from malnutrition, preventable diseases such as malaria, minimal-level health care, or such things that can be quite safely regarded as signs of falling beyond the minimal requirements of decent life. Pogge argues that the eradication of extreme poverty would require only minimal costs relative to the living standards in affluent countries[257]. As he starts his argument on the importance of poverty eradication by referring to UN social and economic rights[258], one could easily conclude that Pogge would argue that social justice globally requires only that these minimal standards pronounced by the human rights charters be met.

This kind of understanding of justice is familiar from John Rawls' work. Rawls takes the relevant goods to be distributed by the nation-state to be basic material goods and liberties (he calls these goods "primary social goods"). Rawls places his emphasis on such primary goods, as he finds the utilitarian welfarist reasoning, which was hegemonic before his work, "repugnant"[259]. The utilitarian theory's unwillingness to employ egalitarian reasoning, and its willingness to sacrifice individual interests for the greater aggregate good, as well as the "expensive tastes" problem, led Rawls to argue for shifting the focus of theory of justice from welfare to basic goods and rights. This Rawlsian preoccupation has been inherent in the works of later Rawlsians, such as Pogge.

Pogge's argument can be seen as a genuine universalisation of Rawls' principles, which Rawls himself fails to do in his global theory of justice. In other words, justice requires globally that the minimum basic needs of everyone are met, and that people enjoy equal liberties. Pogge discusses liberties less, as his focus is on the global economic order. The core of present injustice for him seems to be the lack of access to basic goods, rather than a lack of freedom. Yet his notion of justice can be seen as the globalisation of the liberal ideal, in which human beings are treated as the ultimate subjects of justice. Rawls makes the mistake in his works on global justice of unnecessarily treating nation-states as the exclusive arenas of social justice, arguing that global justice is only a matter of intra-state relations.

Yet the problem is that the holding of resources is not equal to having the components of wellbeing, and further the relation between the two varies from one context to another. While at very low levels of command of resources additional resources can be of great importance, at higher levels they do not provide the same kind of effect on wellbeing. But this is even more important when we analyse the distributions on a country level. As noted, additional resources can be used merely to meet the needs people used to meet before with lower amounts of resources, as social necessities have become more complex. For these reasons, it is doubtful whether resources as such can serve as the

257 Pogge 2002, 92
258 Pogge 2002, 91
259 Rawls 1972; 62

metric of egalitarianism. Capabilities seem to form a better metric, since by utilising the notion of capabilities it is possible to assess the relevance of material resources in addition to their distribution. In poor conditions, reference to the importance of resources is possible, while in rich environments ways to enhance capabilities with fewer resources can be discussed. In some contexts, capabilities can be enhanced while the available material goods decrease[260].

Yet Pogge has criticised Sen by arguing that the key of resourcist approach is access to resources, rather than resources themselves. Pogge argues that "the key question dividing the relevant approaches is then *not*: Should alternative feasible institutional schemes be assessed in terms of what their participants have or what their participants have access to. Rather, the key question is: should alternative feasible institutional schemes be assessed in terms of their participants' access to valuable resources, or [...] their access to valuable functionings?[261]" In other words, Pogge argues that the resource approach is necessarily no more "welfarist" than the capabilities approach. The utilitarian focus on welfare, not discussed here in detail, is thus not what Pogge has in mind when discussing the distribution of resources.

The argument that resources are the key good of egalitarian justice often aims at avoiding this problem by referring to "basic goods" rather than any goods. In Rawlsian theory, the distribution of basic goods is seen as a requirement of justice, but distributions above the level of basic goods are not seen to be a matter of distributive justice only, as incentives too are relevant for creating a greater amount of distributable goods. Pogge comes very close to this viewpoint by referring to a minimum level of resources as a human right, thus hinting that it could be *positive* rights that are the key good after all. Yet the theories of basic material goods as the key goods of egalitarian justice seem to lack important elements, if the only matter discussed is the outcome of the distribution of goods. It is also of great importance how the goods are accessed. It is very easy to imagine different scenarios with people achieving the basic goods necessary for human life by very different means; to give an easy example, the amount of work required for getting the basic goods can as well be six as 16 hours a day. Because being overloaded with work is the reality for the poor masses in the global South, a theory of global justice has to be concerned with the issue. The notion of capabilities also seems to give better tools for discussing social justice. Leisure time, for example, is easier to read as a capability than as a resource.

If resources are taken to be the key good of egalitarian justice, then Pogge does not explicitly aim at a theory of egalitarian justice, rather a theory of tolerable inequality. But his theory could be read another way. The concern for nutrition, health care and human rights leads one to wonder whether social and economic rights are after all the currency of justice in Pogge's theory. Thus human rights would stipulate a minimum baseline for material goods necessary for meeting these rights.

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260 Nussbaum 2000

261 Pogge 2002b; 16

To sum up, capabilities seem to be a better candidate than basic goods as being the key good to be distributed for the reasons discussed above. Yet the problem of capabilities is that the notion is somewhat general and vague, and it is difficult to draw normative political conclusions from the notion of capabilities. So it might be that the notion of capabilities has to be accompanied with more accurate concepts, such as needs. There even exists a risk that using capabilities as the key good of egalitarian justice will lead to problems of complex justice and justifying inequality. There are also some aspects of poverty that are somewhat difficult to discuss by employing the notion of capabilities, such as risks. Because these are, as noted, important aspects of the problems related to poverty, they are also caused by some failure of distributive justice, and therefore need to be discussed within the framework of theory of social justice. I will next turn to discussing power as a problem of social justice, in order to avoid discussing the problem only partially.

## 3.5 Summary and conclusions to chapter three

In this chapter, I have analysed the notion of equality in more detail, after noting in the previous chapter that equality needs to be a part of the normative definition of development. I also argued that inequality can be seen as intrinsically bad, in addition to being bad because of its consequences. Yet there are certain reservations to the egalitarian agenda. The egalitarian agenda can be restricted either because of its infeasibility, or because of accepting a sufficientarian criterion of egalitarianism. I have argued that the former is problematic because of accepting the existing power positions. The latter seems to coincide to a large extent with the agenda of removing poverty, and thus can be seen as a sufficient way to discuss the main theme of this text. Yet ultimately, an egalitarian agenda must mean full egalitarianism, as argued by Sen.

When discussing egalitarian justice, the theory has to extend beyond national boundaries, as there are no moral reasons for confining justice thus. Even though there might principally be goods, the distribution of which to be decided within a closed community (microcosm, as Wallerstein puts it), the means of acquiring these goods have to be just. To highlight the issue, I used the extreme example of Roman democracy, distributing fairly democratically within a closed community goods that have been originally acquired by force. While not completely analogous, I believe the example shows the problems of communitarian accounts of justice in contemporary globalised economy, in which the outcomes of economical and political decisions are felt far beyond the given national boundary.

Yet demanding equality is yet not much of a normative demand, since there are severe disagreements on what is the “currency” or central good, i.e. what people should have an equal share of. While I have referred to power structures as the root problem behind the phenomenon of poverty, power as

such is hard to distribute equally. Rather, egalitarian justice has to refer primarily to its implications, or "what power translates to". I have discussed theories highlighting resources/basic goods, opportunities, capabilities and theories arguing that there is no "currency" of egalitarianism.

# IV POWER AND INSTITUTIONS

So far, I have analysed poverty as a problem and how this problem interlinks with social justice. For the latter purpose, I have analysed the notion of development critically, along with the general ideal of equality and its content. But these have still said little about the role of people and institutions in other countries in causing poverty. Having started from exactly the moral problem, "our role", the analysis needs to move to this direction. Extreme poverty could, at least theoretically, be caused by solely local agents, on the basis of the analyses of basic needs, development and equality. So the role of external agents, along with their moral responsibility, needs to be discussed next. In this chapter, I will discuss the role of global institutions, and more specifically, can problems and remedial responsibilities be traced back to a global institutional basic structure, or if not, where?

It is one thing to note that inequalities exist globally and another to argue that they are brought about by the injustice of global institutions. Injustices can be caused by other agents, such as local misguided leaders, other nation-states, companies etc. This topic withholds several questions. First, what belongs to the scope of global justice, rather than domestic justice? Second, what is the role of institutional basis of the global order vis-a-vis the conduct of individual agents within this institutional basis? Third, what role has political power to play, when it comes to forming the global order? Answering these questions will help to determine what is unjust in the present global order.

It needs to be noted here that if institutions are designed so that they promote justice, in situations of existing injustices, these institutions ought to reflect special considerations for those who presently suffer from injustice. Mutual bargaining, on the other hand, while possibly seeming to be just, will lead to the prolonged existence of such a situation. So we can expect this special consideration to take place wherever responsibility is located.

## 4.1 Power and legitimacy

In the previous chapter, I discussed Pogge's argument about the notion of resources as a central good of egalitarian justice. Pogge contends that the resources needed for meeting basic needs ought to be acceptable by everyone. He also argues that if this is not the case, the global poor are harmed by the global order. Yet there is more to Pogge's argument than merely reference to the command of these vital resources. This is shown by the first of what he argues to be "two minimal requirements of social justice". While his second criterion regards exactly the avoidance of life-threatening poverty, in other words, the satisfaction of basic needs and the command of corresponding resources, the first criterion states "social rules should be liable to peaceful change by any large majority on which these rules are imposed"[262]. So in the end, it seems that for Pogge too the matter is also about global democracy, and not only a Rawlsian distribution scheme. Global poverty is partially, perhaps even essentially, generated by the misuse of power.

As mentioned, from the viewpoint of poverty it is essential to address the problem of unjust power relations. Typically powerful economic and political agents can exert such a position of power position over an unskilled labour force, for example, so that the workers have practically no alternative but to comply with the dominant agents' will. From the viewpoint of justice generally the problem is somewhat different, as the main question concerns when unequal power positions are legitimate, rather than if they ever are. Any theory of government, for example, relies on some kind of notion of legitimate inequality of power, rather than equal distribution of power. From this perspective, the matter of power positions does indeed not belong to the scope of *egalitarian* justice. They might link to capabilities, which can be equal only if gross power imbalances do not exist.

Power as a concept can be interpreted in several ways. A typical way of understanding the issue is a Foucaultian view, in which power is seen as a creative and not merely a coercive force, and additionally as being fluid, being manifest in language and being a part of human subjectivity (or, in fact, creating human subjectivity)[263]. Even though such power analysis is highly relevant, in the context of a theory of justice it is useful to limit the analysis of power to more explicit and visible use of power, i.e. the problem of legitimacy. In normative theory it is meaningful to analyse power only in the context in which power can be used differently, or not used at all. Yet political power ought not to be understood merely as power to rule, but also power to define concepts and policies, and power to have less constraints when it comes to discussing policies seen as feasible, or "our political and social condition", in Rawls' terms. Power is usually manifest in politics precisely in the power to define the "facts". Yet power can also be interpreted as merely having the

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262 Pogge 2002; 96

263 See for example Escobar 1995

possibilities to function, even so that other people's consent (or more clearly the lack thereof) does not form a legitimacy problem. Such cases, "power-to" cases have to be separated from "power-over" cases[264], which call for legitimation. For analytical purposes, I will suggest three spheres of political power, which are relevant for the discussions on social justice.

First, the power to rule. By this I mean traditional notions of political power; to make decisions that have impacts on others, to pass legislation, to represent others, to settle and make decisions in situations of conflict, and so on. On a domestic level, the mechanisms of the nation state still have the power to make lots of such decisions, even though the notion of sovereignty does not provide a very accurate description of the current political situation, as a nation-state is never independent of other nations. The power of the nation-state has to be legitimised. On the global level, there is no corresponding mechanism, some relatively weak global institutions aside. The problems related to supranational power therefore are problems related to decisions made in one nation state affecting people in other nation states. I will return to this later.

Second, there is the power to define how rules are formed in the process of negotiation. This can be called the problem of *metaprocedural* justice, in contrast to the problem of procedural justice, referring to the content of these rules. In domestic issues, the procedures of decision-making are typically quite settled and institutionalised. Passing legislation and such have a clearly defined order, even if military regimes etc do constitute exceptions to the rule. Perhaps for this reason, and for the reason that the notion of democracy on the national level combines the legitimacy problem and the metaprocedural problem, the metaprocedural question at the global level has not gained much attention in political philosophy. Yet, the metaprocedural question is highly important when it comes to international institutions and decision-making. For example in negotiating trade, climate and such global issues the results are highly affected by the procedural logic of making these decisions. Documented means of routinely arriving at "mutually beneficial" agreements on the rules of the game, for example in trade treaties, include secret negotiations, intimidation, threats to withdraw aid, etc[265]. It is one thing to ask, if a given trade treaty is fair, and another to ask, whether the process of forming this treaty was fair. Often, the fairness of the process affects the fairness of the outcome, but there is no causal correlation between the two.

Third, there is the power to transgress rules at will, create new practices and stretch the interpretations of agreed rules. To give a practical example, the WTO treaty on medical patents stipulates the conditions in which patents can be lifted; that is, in situations of exceptional national emergency. On the basis of this treaty, the medical companies and the US government campaigned fiercely against the South African government for producing generic HIV medicines to combat the country's burgeoning HIV situation. Even though this was, for a

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264 Holloway 2002; 28-30

265 Jawara & Kwa 2003

good reason, seen as most observers as highly immoral, the action against South Africa was made possible (and successful) by the treaty. Yet when there were fears of intentionally spread anthrax in the US in 2001, the US government lifted the patent on anthrax vaccines after half a dozen cases, arguing that the situation was "exceptional".[266] It is exactly the matter of what counts as exceptional that is subject to definition and where the most powerful subjects have a highly advantaged position. This form of power is also undertheorised, as the theory of justice has been mostly confined to the domestic sphere, in which coercive powers legitimately force agents to comply with the rules. There is no such power in international cases..

Apart from these forms of political power, there are of course other types of power too, of which it can be asked, if they are in need of legitimation. The liberal theoretical preoccupation with the legitimacy of *political* power has caused a problem, namely that there has been surprisingly little interest in the problem of legitimising economic power in liberal theory. Still, it would be hard to argue that economic positions are of no relevance in contemporary world, when it comes to power over others and the problem of being under domination. On the contrary, in many cases agents (people and institutions) in good economic positions seem to outweigh those with official political power. One only has to think of multinational companies in weak developing countries – it is quite evident that political leaders have very little possibilities to challenge the companies.

When we consider the question of why power needs to be legitimised or why it ought to be restricted, there seems to be no significant reason why political power should be the only form of power in need of legitimation. The prevalent situation has led Allessandro Pinzani to argue that it is exactly the division between political and economic power and the idea that the former needs to be legitimised while the latter does not which is the main problem of the liberal theory[267]. While liberal scholars argue that market contracts are free if not forced by the interference of political power-holders, the reality of "free negotiation" often conceals a situation in which choices do not exist in practice, as John McMurtry has shown[268]. This applies especially very poor people and poor nations.

An analysis of the concept of power is important in global theories of justice, since unequal power relations manifest themselves in certain moral questions. Consider the question of what kinds of policies the World Bank should choose to reduce poverty in Africa. The question is highly relevant and important in the ethical discussion on decision-making. If the World Bank has the choice of alleviating poverty or merely pushing forward investor interests (as it is often accused of doing), it ethically ought to act in the manner to alleviate poverty. Yet, the presupposition behind the question, for it to be meaningful in the first place, is that the World Bank has the power to reduce or

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266 Jawara & Kwa 2003

267 Pinzani 2005; 172-175

268 McMurtry 1998; 97

increase poverty prevalence in Africa. If this is not supposed, the question seems meaningless, taking into account the "ought implies can" thesis. Yet if an institution, the decisions of which cannot be affected by Africans, has such a power over lives of people in Africa, we are facing an injustice as such, disregarding the actual conduct of the institution. So the question regarding power can be asked in two ways. First, how ought the existing power be used in an ethical manner? And second, to what extent ought the power imbalances be levelled so that no person or institution would exercise excessive power over others? It is highly likely that power becomes misused. Further, as has been argued, gross power imbalances are signs of poverty as such.

In ethics, the "ought implies can" thesis is theoretically important. An ethical case, in which an act is supposed from someone who is not capable of doing that particular act, seems necessarily too demanding. For this reason it is necessary to keep in mind the thesis when carrying out ethical analysis. Yet an underlying question not so often discussed in the context of the thesis is why is an agent in a position in which it can carry out particular decisions or actions. If it is in my power to decide whether someone far away will live or die, it seems to be my duty to act so that the person will live. But then, it ought to be asked also, how did this power come to be in the first place. The discourse of ethical action thus easily omits the matter of power when we focus on the question of how existing power should be used in an ethical manner.

To some extent it is a feature of human life that we practice power over each other in a weak sense. A passer-by could harm me physically at will, and this kind of power cannot be avoided. Because the passer-by can harm me, so he ought to refrain from doing so. Yet when it comes to political and economic structures, it is highly important that this kind of power (the power to harm others at will) is legitimised. In a democratic political community, the leadership is constrained by certain checks of against the misuse of power, and the leadership ought to be elected democratically in the first place. While in reality these principles get violated every now and then, this idea of legitimacy is widely accepted. Yet the principle gets very weak in practice when it comes to structures or individuals with power over the lives of people abroad, and economic power. This could be explained by arguing that the essence of justification of power is not the possible serious consequences to the lives of other people, but the argument would seem strange. The alternative is to refer to a contract-theory as a justification of power, in which consequences do not directly matter, though no fictional contract seems particularly legitimate, if it systematically produces negative consequences.

Another question of course is whether power imbalances necessarily create unjust outcomes. The most likely answer is that they probably do, if not necessarily. There may be benevolent dictators, and similarly benevolent uses of other forms of power. But it is highly likely that unchecked and illegitimate power will breed negative results and lead to injustices. This is enough of a social-psychological fact that we can argue that unchecked and illegitimate power imbalances are consequentially bad, in addition to being intrinsically

bad. Therefore, there should be a large consensus on the undesirability of such situations. Additionally, power imbalances do not even necessarily have to be consequentially bad. If we see excessive power imbalances as intrinsically bad, they are unjust whatever the consequences. From the viewpoint of democracy theory, benevolent dictatorships cannot be justified. Consequentially, there is no straight-forward reason why any other form of unjustified power would not be intrinsically unjust, especially when we recall the analysis in chapter one of poverty as an extreme form of power imbalance.

As the problems related to unjust power structures discussed above seem to be not only problems as such, but also ones that breed unjust distributions of goods and capabilities, power positions have to be discussed as a part of a theory of justice. The legitimacy of power and just distributional systems are interrelated questions, and a theory of justice ought not to be focused on only one of these. This is especially highlighted in matters of global justice, in which power relations are very visible, for example in changing the rules of the game.

## 4.2 Distribution and "the free market"

When discussing the just distribution of resources, the problem is typically labelled as a matter of "redistributive justice". This notion means that the society or other political body relevant for distribution ought to be performing corrective measures to the outcomes of the market system so that each individual would be guaranteed a just level of income and other goods. In Rawlsian theories, a just level is seen as a level that guarantees income necessary for acquiring basic goods, along with basic liberties, accompanied with the general redistributive principle of pareto-optimality, often called "the difference principle"[269]. Somewhat similarly, Michael Walzer argues that everyone's basic needs ought to be met without resorting to market distributions, as these are non-sellable goods over which distribution is not a matter of justice and can be left to the market[270]. In other words, the distribution of luxury-yachts is not a problem of distributive justice.

At the other end of the spectrum from Rawls, libertarians argue that any redistributive measure is a violation of basic liberties of ownership and free exchange, and that redistribution generally leads to a "slippery slope"[271] as the governmental interference gets its first justification. Further, libertarians argue that it is the just procedures (based on rights) that are relevant for justice, rather than the just outcomes. (By libertarians, I mean philosophical libertarians rather than neoliberal economists with a more utilitarian preoccupation). In other words, social justice is not a matter of ideal outcomes, but rather the rules under which individuals act in the society or in the market. While these rules can of

269 Rawls 1972; 60-61, 78-80
270 Walzer 1984
271 See for example Lamb 1988

course be formed on different bases, it is typically negative rights that are most important from the viewpoint of libertarians. For example, for Nozick any outcome that is based on individuals' rights and legitimate transactions is necessarily just, whatever the outcomes might be[272].

Hence, the question of distributive justice is typically seen as a matter of how much the political community ought to interfere with the market by such measures as taxation, limits to capital accumulation and so forth. Yet what is shared by several philosophers, allegedly on the opposite sides of the debate, is a basic understanding of the market as spontaneous. This is the very reason why some libertarians, such as Friedrich Hayek, argue that market outcomes are not a matter of justice in the first place[273]. According to Hayek, there is no virtue of justice within a "spontaneous order", as the market allegedly is. Rawlsians, on the other hand, note that the market is bound to create unequal outcomes and argue that for this reason, distributive decisions cannot be solely "left to the market".

Yet it is worth asking whether the market is really as spontaneous as the underlying assumption of these theories suggests. Even though a ideal small-scale market, as observed by Adam Smith[274], might function according to this description, large-scale market exchange is more a matter of political decisions, struggles and compromises, and it never even exists without government interventions. This is especially true in the "post-industrial" production of our age, when a question such as "what counts as production" has become significant in itself[275].

Take as an example international patent rights, which are in the process of being enforced globally, due to previous WTO commitments. Patent rights cover such areas as research results, cultural products and computer programmes. There is no inherent reason, why such things would necessarily be commodities, to be sold in the market and owned by a private person or corporation, not necessarily even the original inventor. It is a political decision to turn the results of creative work into commodities, especially when these results are by nature such that they are not lost in the process of transaction, allowing other people their utilisation or enjoyment. Several things sold in the market and protected legally as commodities under ownership rules could as well be defined as something out of bounds of the market, commodities and property rights. Here, it is the fundamental definitions of ownership that matter, rather than a spontaneous market. The market "metaquestion", namely, what constitutes the scope of market exchange, is always a political question – as Walzer would also argue[276]. The fact that the grounding rules are often formulated in accordance with the interests of the wealthy gives a strong hint to

272 Nozick 1974
273 Hayek 1973: 17-19
274 Smith 1994 [1776]; 484-486
275 See fe Hardt & Negri 2001
276 Walzer 1984

the direction that these are essentially political choices, rather than removing restrictions from spontaneous market transactions.

Also free market competition is necessarily guided by a number of rules that do not merely state non-interference. It is debatable what does free competition comprises. Does it mean guaranteeing access to relevant information to all market agents (such as information about prices set by other market actors), as the theory of the ideal-typical market would suggest, and what would be the implications of this? Does it mean that the monopolistic tendencies of the biggest firms ought to be restricted, and if so, to what extent? What does it mean in regard to credit access and money circulation more generally? To what extent can governments set environmental restrictions on corporate activity, without "interfering" with the market? In general, when one contemplates the notion of the free market it becomes clear that there are several political questions to be answered regarding even the definitional problem. "Leaving it to the market" or "redistributing market outcomes" as political notions are very dependent on how the market and its freedom are defined in the first place. In other words, just procedures might, and most likely will, include actions that are typically seen as "redistributive", even if the theory focuses only on procedures rather than outcomes. The market does not come prior to all other distributions. And if there is no spontaneous market, the main preoccupation for the theory of justice ought to be distributive justice, understood as defining the grounding rules on which the market, as well as all other distributive mechanisms, function.

Thomas Pogge notes this when criticising Nozick's libertarian theory. He argues that the problem of social justice is not a problem of how to redistribute the goods already in existence, but of what kinds of grounding rules the distribution ought to be based on. "We must keep sharply distinct, as Nozick does not, our subject, how the ground rules of a social system ought to be assessed/desinged, from the (secondary) subject of how actors (individuals, associations, the government) may and should act within an ongoing scheme whose terms are taken as fixed"[277] Here, Pogge sees the notion of "redistribution" as being particularly misleading: "Nozick frequently conjures up the horror of redistribution, the idea that some authority (the government, say) will come along, whenever it pleases, to take away part of what you own [...] But our Rawlsian proposal is not redistributive in this sense"[278]. In other words, what is typically called "redistribution" is not an arbitrary act of seizure of goods by an agent (the government), but rather a grounding rule of how exchange takes place, comparable to the definition of free market exchange. Thus for example Pogge sees a certain level of taxation as a constitutive rule of the social order, rather than an arbitrary intervention. The problem, according to Pogge, is to compare the merits of alternative grounding rules of the system,

277 Pogge 1989; 17
278 Ibid; 17

for example such in which 20% of market transactions is used for common purposes, and one in which there is no tax on market transactions[279].

To sum up, the problem of "redistribution" is not whether to intervene or not, and for this reason, the whole notion of redistribution is somewhat misleading. It has to be understood that all trade, exchange and economic activity is subject to some grounding rules of the system, no matter how "free" the economy is declared to be. Indeed, typically "liberalisation" of trade requires very extensive political decisions and their enforcement, and more rather than less politics, as seen in the extensive free trade treaties constantly negotiated and especially in the moves to enforce new systems of ownership, for example on patents. Additionally, success in the market depends, according to some economists, more on market control and therefore exactly the capability to manipulate the grounding rules or "intervene", rather than genuine virtues of competition[280]. Thus, again, power positions translate into money. "Redistribution" ought for this reason to be seen as a constitutive principle of the system, which ought to be compared to other systems with other grounding rules, rather than arbitrary seizure of goods within a framework of "free trade". Additionally, the question is not *if* there is distributive control of the market, but *how* and *by whom* it is exercised, and to whose benefit.

## 4.3 The global basic structure

When discussing the principles of global social justice, it is typical to start with the nation-state analogy. The analogy appears, when global social justice in described as similar to domestic justice, with the difference that the agents settling the problems of justice are nation-states, or "peoples", as in John Rawls' theory[281]. It also appears when the principles of distributive justice applied within nation-states are argued to be exceeding national boundaries, as Thomas Pogge demands. In these and other Rawlsian theories, Rawls' notion of the "basic structure", typically used in the nation-state context, is applied as the scope of problems of justice. In other words, it is a just basic structure what is needed. So the problem is, what is the extent of a basic structure in global issues.

So the problem is, which questions and which institutions fall into the category of the problems of global justice, as opposed to domestic justice. Basic structure in Rawls' theory refers to the basic set of institutions in a society, which ought to be structured to promote the principles of justice. The first question regarding global justice, especially if we take a Rawlsian approach, ought therefore to be what is the scope of the global basic structure. This is followed by the question of what such a basic structure would be like in order

279 Ibid; 16-20
280 See f.e. Baumol & Willig 1981
281 Rawls 1999

to be just. Even given all the fashionable theory on globalisation, it has to be remembered that nation-states are far from disappearing, and any matter of global justice is unavoidably mediated through the structures of the nation-state. Therefore, a certain caution is needed before regarding a problem, policy or institution as "global".

It is clear that on the global level, there are no direct equivalents of the basic institutions of a nation-state. There are no mechanisms of global taxation and thus redistribution, no global legislation, no global minimum wages, no global social security schemes, and so forth. So it is easy to argue that such a global basic structure does not exist, at least for now. A noteworthy difference between a possible global basic structure and the domestic basic structures is that such a global basic structure, if understood institutionally, consists merely of governments negotiating with each other. So it is a possibility to think of global justice as merely a problem of intra-governmental justice, or in broader perspective as justice between different agents which do not interact within what could be called a "basic structure".

Thus the present global order could be understood as a system of nation-states, in which the decisions taken within certain states affect the lives of people far beyond the borders of these specific nations. Accordingly, there would be no need to speak of a global basic structure, but rather to discuss how ought the agents act so that others would not be harmed, and how could all those affected have their say to decisions taking place beyond their current political reach. There could be numerous normative conclusions made about necessary reforms and moral duties, even if a basic structure is understood not to exist on a global level.

One way of discussing the issue of social justice without the notion of a basic structure is the democracy theory notion of "all-affected principle". For example Nancy Fraser has defended this principle as the basis for a theory of justice beyond national boundaries[282]. Quite simply, the principle means that when considering the rightness or wrongness of an action, all people affected by the action ought to have their say by a just representative logic. If this principle is accepted, the present political system is faulty of misrepresentation, as Fraser calls it. The all-affected principle does not in itself lead to conclusions about just institutions, but it is a way of pointing out a general problem of representation, rather than making the problematic division between domestic and global basic structures.[283]

There are, however, counter-arguments to the idea of a lack of a global basic structure. Rawls argues that there indeed can be said to exist such a structure, but it is limited to the justice of intrastate relations, thus regarding international politics and diplomacy rather than distributive justice. Thomas

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282 Fraser 2005

283 The all-affected principle yet fails to show, without further specifications, which decisions belong to the scope of democratic justice. It can be that the all-affected principle would regard taking issues into the scope of democratic justice that have not traditionally belonged in the scope (for example, say, the interest rates of a central bank).

Pogge argues that there is an *implicit* global basic structure with rules about distributive justice, formed by institutions such as the WTO and the World Bank and the nation-state structure. Yet even if we accept Pogge's argument, it seems that the functions of the basic institutions in the global level are different from those on the domestic level. For example in the WTO, governments seek to exclusively promote the economic interests of their countries, rather than showing compliance with some distributive principles. Consequentially, in an arena such as the WTO there are no grounding principles of justice[284], merely negotiation procedures. Thus fairness is addressed only metaprocedurally, rather than procedurally – as procedural justice here would refer to the outcomes of the negotiations. Metaprocedural justice rather refers to how the procedural rules are created.

The problem of discussing global institutions from the viewpoint of a theory of justice is that while it can be said that there is a global basic structure it is not manifest in the institutional structure. Rawlsian theory, in which basic structure is typically discussed, tends to focus exactly on the justice of institutions. The effective lack of an institutional basic structure can be seen as a bad basic structure. To provide an analogy, take a "failed state" that is, a nation-state with no effective government with a political rule over the territory. In such a state, there is no basic structure to speak of. More specifically, there are no clear constitutive rules of distributive justice, not even bad ones – this is exactly where a failed state differs from an unjust state. The distributions in such a state are unpredictable. Theories of domestic justice point to the fact that there ought to be a basic structure, the lack thereof cannot be seen as merely indicating the impossibility of promoting social justice, but also a judgement that the institutions guaranteeing a functional basic structure ought to be in effect. This leads to a normative argument. A practically non-existing basic structure cannot be seen as a bad basic structure if we do not add the normative premise that institutions relevant for such a basic structure ought to exist.

A basic structure can be said to exist when there is a system of social co-operation. While Rawls speaks of a society and defines it as a "co-operative venture of mutual advantage"[285], Pogge prefers to speak about social systems in which there is any co-operation and interaction between people[286]. Pogge goes as far as to argue that there is a "basic structure" even between two people on a deserted island. Yet this proves easily to be problematic, since the different modes of interaction between human beings would require us to think of a basic structure existing on innumerable levels. For example, is there an implicit basic structure that governs the interaction between, say, me and my collegues, if we have a routine of taking turns to buy lunch for each other? Practically, no rules or practices of interaction are relevant for a truly global field, even though some may come close to this. Also while there are always implicit rules governing human interaction, this does not seem to be the kind of thing "basic

284 Stiglitz & Charlton 2005; 67-86
285 Rawls 1972; 4
286 Pogge 1989; 20

structure" intuitively refers to. A basic structure, be it implicit or not, is different from any interaction between human beings. Indeed, Pogge refers to precisely global institutions and regulations when discussing the global basic structure.

It is important to note here that Pogge uses the notions of "global order" and "the global basic structure" almost interchangeably. Thus, for him, both refer to the terms of co-operation and distribution of benefits from economic activity. I would suggest using these concepts somewhat differently. It is meaningful to limit the global basic structure to mean the institutional basis and the agreed terms of co-operation. The global order, on the other hand, includes the current power positions. Thus, the latter refers also to metaprocedural power and the power to transgress the agreed rules at will, or to change the means and terms of co-operation. This aspect of power, which I have discussed above, cannot be analysed by merely analysing the present global institutional structure. The failure to do this conceptual distinction leads Pogge to also largely ignore the power positions in the current global order.

Yet it can be debated, if a basic structure is necessarily institutional, or if it is, what do we define as institutions. When we discuss social justice, we are typically discussing the virtues of public institutions relevant for justice, such as taxation systems and social security systems. Yet a basic structure is defined by Rawls as all social systems relevant for the distribution of goods. Rawls was struggling with, for example, the problem of whether the family institution belongs to the basic structure, countering his earlier view in his later works. Thus we can agree that institutional structure is central to the problem of justice, but we would need a clearer understanding of what is meant by institutions. While most social practices can be defined as institutions, using a very broad sociological definition, I mean public distributive and coercive institutions when discussing the problem of global basic structure. The problem of the definition of a basic structure is relevant also in cases in which there are no functioning institutions of justice.

The analogy between a basic structure of a nation-state and a global basic structure gets complicated when we discuss the powers of institutions. In functioning nation-state settings, institutions have coercive powers for making sure that just practices prevail. Thus the basic institutions ought to outweigh self-maximising individuals in order to create an effective system of distributive justice. Additionally, in Rawlsian theory the individuals are expected to show some compliance to the principles reflected in the basic structure – it is exactly the "overlapping" ideas of justice that Rawls emphasises. On a global level both presuppositions are problematic. There are no coercive institutions of justice, and there is no expectation of compliance to the principles of global justice. Even while some agreements are theoretically binding for parties involved, some have the power to transgress these agreements, and each party is aware of this when negotiating the agreement. If the first condition is taken seriously, we are quite far from having even an implicit basic structure. As global organisations are merely negotiation fora, which do practically nothing to

restrict the power of the politically strongest nations, the function of a basic structure is practically non-existing. The problem is that while individuals can be expected to have some moral principles (in Rawls' theory, compliance with the basic distributive ideas), nation-states are not similarly moral agents.

A global basic structure seems to imply a system beyond the control of nation-states. Yet any global order is very dependent on individual nation-states, which do exercise considerable power over the system. The whole global order can be, at least almost, seen as a consensus reached by most powerful nation-states. On the other hand, the global order also affects policies within nation-states, and therefore its functioning is partially visible only by comparing the present policies of national governments, especially in developing countries, to counterfactual policies – how would the institutions have been ordered had the global order been different? Therefore, the global structure cannot be discussed as an empirical phenomenon. Yet it can serve as a functional tool for moral consideration, but its existence and functioning has to be analysed by analysing the actions of nation-states. A system of nation-states can of course be seen as a bad global order, yet as discussed before it is an open question whether it is rather a matter of the lack of a functioning order.

Any UN body serves as a good example. Take the UNHCR, the United Nations refugee body. According to its critics, the organisation is focused these days only on building refugee camps with intolerable circumstances, and pressuring the refugees to return by rhetorically "voluntary" means. When looking at its original mandate, it ought instead to be pressuring the governments to give asylum to refugees, and to pressure those governments with most funds to share the financial responsibility of the expenses created to the asylum-providing countries. It seems that the current strategy is required from the agency by its funders, which leaves the agency no choice but to act accordingly. The original mandate could be served only if the body would be politically and economically independent enough as to be able to pressure politically the very governments it today takes its orders from.[287] The same problem applies to several similar institutions. As they are not independent from nation-state control, there is no reason to see them as forming a coercive institutional structure.

Also, no such overlapping consensus exists in the international sphere to establish the basic ethical consensus on social justice. Yet if we understand a global basic structure to exist, there are severe constraints on the *scope* of the global basic structure. It seems clear that the global basic structure has to be limited to truly global matters. These constraints are in place quite the same way, as it is needed to discuss liberal constraints on domestic social justice. Because there is some space for genuine decisions of individuals, the scope of domestic social justice cannot possibly cover every distributive decision taken within a nation-state. Similarly, a global basic structure is necessarily constrained by nation-states and their policies, as well as by individuals.

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287 Stevens 2006

Rawls defines the basic structure to be a collection of most important institutions relevant for distribution. "The primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which major institutions [sic] distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the advantages from social cooperation. By major institutions I understand the political constitution and the principal economic and social arrangements"[288].

To conclude, we can say that there is a global basic structure, but at present there is no institutional core to it, the just functioning of which we could assess from the viewpoint of this basic structure. Rather, there is a set of institutions that can be used in an unjust manner by those players with most political and economic power. For this reason, the theory of global justice needs to primarily refer to equalising the power imbalances and the conduct of the agents within the basic structure. Also, because of the lack of an institutional setting to which the basic structure could directly refer to, there is no problem in arguing that there is no institutional basic structure for discussing global justice in the present world.

## 4.4 Self-maximisation and altruistic motivations

Theories of social justice do not necessarily concern only theories of suitable social structures, but also the conduct of individual agents (be they human beings or nations, corporations etc). It is a matter of long debate as to the role played by individual virtue or motivation in matters of social justice. The basic problem with the Rawlsian idea of social justice is that a social order based on the assumption of individual self-maximisation runs the risk of making this self-maximisation a virtue, or accepted as a "fact", and will eventually erode the basis of its own distributive mechanisms. It is very difficult for domestic distributive mechanisms to remain just even given a principle of pareto-optimal distributions in the current political context. The possibility of moving assets out of the country will set strong side-constraints on political options, with these side-constraints greatly favouring the rich, who have excessive bargaining power.

Recent influential theories opposing Rawls have not been much different in the matter of presuppositions about individual morality. Neoliberal or libertarian ideologies have seen the distinction between justice and virtue as even greater. According to these theories, a society is just when it does not interfere with free market transactions, and the moral good matters only in individuals' choices to promote good causes. But the promotion of these causes is up to the individuals' choices, and the individuals have no obligation to uphold a political system with more equal distributional outcomes.

In the opposite end of the political spectrum, classical Marxist theory sees that a just society can be only produced by a class struggle, or by some other

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[288] Rawls 1972; 7

means of overcoming the antagonisms of the capitalist system. Yet Marxists see little connection between individual morality and social justice, or more exactly, little relevance in individual morality in general. The theory takes as its starting point that individuals are self-maximising within their social context, and this self-maximising is seen as taking place within the framework of class interests. Thus, justice is seen to take place only as a result of pursuing personal interests dictated by the class status, while Rawls sees justice as taking place as a result of pursuing personal interests in the market, given the correct social checks. Libertarians see justice as taking place when individuals are let to pursue self-interested motives without interference, no matter what the outcome is.

The presupposition of self-maximisation is typically taken as granted to the extent that it is defined as rational behaviour. This is most explicitly stated in Rawls' theory: "I have assumed throughout that the persons in the original position are rational. In choosing between principles, each tries as best he can to advance his interests". But, as John McMurtry has pointed out, this definition of rationality is contrary to the traditional notion of it, where it is understood as an impartial position, while self-maximising necessarily assumes a partial position, promoting a special interest – that is one's personal interest. So it seems that several theories of justice leave unattended a very problematic view of human conduct.

Karl Marx criticised the sharp distinction between the public and the private in his text "On the Jewish Question"[289]. In later philosophical theory, G.A.Cohen especially has drawn attention to the problems of this distinction. Cohen argues that we care "disproportionately" about the coercive basic structure, because the reason for caring about it, its impact on people's lives, is also a reason to care about the motivations of agents functioning within the coercive structure[290]. According to Cohen, a coercive basic structure as such does not produce a sufficiently just society. Cohen's argument can also be well applied to the international level.

Cohen argues that a precondition for a socially just system is that the well off are willing to work for less and make other concessions favourable for the purpose of social justice. Cohen believes that inequality can only be overcome by "a revolution in feeling or motivation", as opposed to a change in economic structures (or "basic structure" more generally). This point is in some manner self-evident, since if people are not motivated to uphold a just system, it is highly unlikely that this kind of system will last. But this does not say much about the relevance of the underlying distinction between justice and individual virtue. Yet Cohen's point that individual motivation is not irrelevant when it comes to installing and upholding just distributive systems has not been taken as self-evident in most social justice theory.

Because it is often the situation today that almost any gain for the rich is presented as benefiting the poor in some manner, Cohen urges us to be clear in what is truly benefiting the poor optimally. Rawls' difference principle, Cohen

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289 Marx 1967

290 Cohen 2000; 140

argues, ought to be extended to private life also if taken seriously, and this would lead to a highly more equitable distribution of social goods. Thus self-maximisation is detrimental to social justice, even if pareto-optimal distribution measures would be in place.

As mentioned before, the discussions on poverty have traditionally often extended back to the issue of charity. As we discuss matters like global poverty, the question is typically stated by the vocabulary of individuals' virtue and consumer choice. Having this and this amount of money, how much ought I give to charities with life saving purposes? Yet poverty always persists within and because of certain political systems, and extreme poverty is thus an example of gross social injustice and especially very uneven power relations. So it would seem sensible to aim to tackle the issue of poverty by discussing social justice. This takes us back to the initial question: ought we to act individually to give to charities, ought we to act individually to generate more just political orders, or ought we to act individually as self-maximisers, while expecting the political system to ensure that this self-maximisation would eventually generate the greatest overall benefits with its appropriate distribution mechanisms?

Yet in a global theory of justice, accepting that Cohen's argument does not lead back to the traditional emphasis on charity, if we take the standard approach of the moral obligation to give to charities, we are still taking individual self-maximisation as an economic agent as a given, or rationale. At least the problem, how is income to be possibly given to charities achieved in the first place, gets omitted. The very process of gaining income might be interrelated to economic practices which are harmful to the global poor, and undermining social justice in general. So Cohen's question can be transformed to the global level: ought the globally rich be willing to accept less income as a precondition of social justice? Would this be more important than willingness to give to charities?

Is we are to consider the motivations of agents relevant to justice, we must consider all relevant agents. Such agents include individual agents, companies and governments. Governments are very special kinds of agents when it comes to discussing motivations, since the motives of governments are always outcomes of political processes. Rawlsian theory, in which governments are thought to be furthering the self-maximising interests of a "people", does not accurately reflect this political process. Especially in developing countries, foreign companies can be powerful enough to outweigh the local government and allow no room for furthering local interests. Yet companies are a special case of the problem of motivation, since it is hard to expect companies to have "motivation" for altruistic behaviour.

Rawls himself supposes that agents act justly, in the sense that they respect the basic principles of justice and the institutional order (these being the side-constraints to self-maximisation). Yet when it comes to the global level, this presupposition becomes difficult. As there are no institutions clearly corresponding a domestic order on the global level, allegiance to the principles of justice within these institutions is difficult to make reality. Also the agents

acting within the global sphere include also such agents, such as nation-states, which do not clearly hold to any distributive ideals.

## 4.5 Global versus local

In theorising global social justice, the problem is that while there are some transnational institutions, institutions are not confined to the "global" sphere. If global justice were only a matter of assessing how institutions such as the WTO or IMF ought to function, the matters of domestic justice could be unproblematically regarded as a different subject matter. But in reality, several decisions made by domestic institutions have consequences globally, or at least close to globally. Take as an example the US Federal Reserve. Now sometimes the "fed" might decide to significantly raise the interest rate. Such a decision would be made because of domestic concerns, more precisely in order to avoid the overheating of the economy. But the consequences of such an interest raise would be felt around the world. Most significantly, it can lead the fragile economies of developing countries to default, causing massive suffering as a consequence of such governments' loss of vital resources for health care and social security[291].

The key issue here is not the details of the consequences of such decisions, but rather the notion that policies designed for domestic reasons can and do have consequences beyond national borders. Therefore, if we would accept the idea that a basic structure consists of all institutions relevant for distribution, this would mean that logically, on a global scale, the basic structure would include also domestic institutions. So a global basic structure would be composed of national institutions to a large extent. Ought we restrict the discourse on global justice to issues that are global in the sense of non-domestic? This would seem unjustifiable. Also, taking seriously the idea of basic structure as principles of conduct between *interacting* agents, we might find it difficult to discuss a basic structure at all, as most decisions have at least some consequences elsewhere. The global order cannot be detached from the domestic order even analytically, since the global order necessarily has effects on the shape of the domestic orders and vice versa. An excellent example of this effect are the resource and borrowing privileges mentioned by Pogge[292], meaning that some intergovernmental arrangements generate unwanted incentives within developing countries, as predatory leaders are capable of misusing national wealth for their private purposes.

This impedes any seemingly obvious way to find solutions to the problem of the demarcation between the scopes of global and domestic justice, namely to consider counterfactual global and domestic orders. For example, Bashar Haydar proposes this strategy, suggesting a thought experiment in which an

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291 Herman 2008

292 Pogge 2002; 22-23, 113-115

optimal domestic order accompanied with the existing global order is compared to the existing domestic order accompanied with an optimal global order[293]. According to Haydar, this thought experiment ought to reveal the extent to which global order causes the existing injustices. But Haydar himself admits that this thought experiment is anything but easy. It is first of all very difficult to determine what an ideal global or an ideal domestic order would be like. Also the moral status of the global order is quite different if we assess the global order as causing something, or merely letting it happen or foreseeing it[294].

The risk of making a wrong assessment of the scope of a basic structure can lead to equally serious injustices in both the cases of assessing the scope too widely or too narrowly. If the scope is defined so that it is too narrow, this will enable individuals and individual nation-states to act in a manner to create harm elsewhere and thus act unjustly. This has been well observed by several cosmopolitan theorists of global justice. Yet equally serious, if not more serious, are those cases in which the scope of the global basic structure is allowed to be too wide, and "domestic constraints" and local political decisions are allowed too little space. Take, for example, the World Bank's policies. The World Bank argues that the political conditionalities it imposes on third world countries are benevolent policies, installed in order to generate macroeconomic stability and prevent misuses of public funds. Yet it has been argued that the World Bank policies are planned according to the political interests of rich countries, and the anticipated – or at least promised – results are yet to be seen[295]. Moreover, several problems are caused exactly by the lack of political space of poor countries, leading to a democracy deficit with implications for the power structure in the country. Thus it is necessary to ask whether the policies of any country should be designed by such global organisations as the World Bank? It can be argued for good reason that they ought not, no matter how good the policies as such would be.

The matter of existence of a global basic structure is relevant because we need a clear idea on whom or on what institution claims of justice ought to be made. To address global injustices, ought the existing (implicit) global basic structure be changed, or ought the parties suffering injustice rather make claims on nation-states or other agents causing the injustice by their decisions? Take the classic example of injustice, often used by Pogge, of oil drilling in Nigeria. When an oil company causes environmental destruction in the livelihoods of people who get no gain but only suffering from the drilling, it is quite obvious that they are suffering from injustice that ought to be compensated. The oil company in question is simply seeking market profit, which is what companies do, but it ought to be restricted in its actions by an agent with strong enough powers. To whom should the people suffering from injustice make their claim? While the questions of who is responsible for a particular wrongdoing and who

293 Haydar 2005; 241-242
294 Haydar 2005; 241
295 Sharma 1994

is responsible for global justice, are analytically separate, Pogge shows the practical interconnectedness of the problems.

Pogge's answer is that the global order promotes the power of the military government of Nigeria for example by upholding the resource and borrowing privileges. Yet the oil company has a home country, which could by legislation curtail at least excessive abuses by the company abroad. At least if the home country is promoting policies to support the interests of the oil company in international fora, it is clearly acting in discordance with the vital interests of the people in the drilling area. Thus it is not only international rules but also the actions of individual nation-states, which hinder the interests of such particular groups as the residents of oil-drilling areas. Moreover, only a local government could effectively curtail the company's conduct. But as long as the government is dependent on the investments available from the company, it has in practice very little negotiating power. The excessive power of capital is not a problem directly linked to the concerns Pogge articulates.

When we recall that it is global institutions and not necessarily global basic structure we are discussing here, we should also note Pogge's analysis on the double standards on which global institutions and domestic institutions are assessed. Pogge points out that if the global economic reality were reduced to a single country, it would fail to meet even the minimal criteria of economic justice, which are accepted widely enough to deserve to be called overlapping ideas. Thus it seems that even when lacking defendable grounds, many accept that the global economic order is fair, even though the same conditions would never be seen as fair in any domestic context.

The main problem is, as already mentioned that the relative importance of the global order cannot be analytically separated from the domestic orders. This is because most of the important negative consequences of the global order, as analysed by Pogge, are the impacts on the domestic orders. Pogge's illuminating examples are what he calls the resource privilege and the borrowing privilege. By these he means that any group that manages to seize the power in a country by any means are seen as the legitimate owners of the country's resources, and can thus sell its natural resources or take loans in the name of the country.

Bearing this in mind, it is also important to ask whether the global order can be reduced to domestic orders. While Pogge's point is indeed true and important, it is unsure if the borrowing privilege, for example, is an effect of the global order, in the sense that the global order is an autonomous system of rules. Rather, there are cases in which there are no finances allowed to a country (i.e. Cuba)[296], and there are cases in which the effects of the borrowing privilege has been subsequently abolished by cancelling the existing sovereign loans (i.e. Iraq)[297]. These cases are very much the result of political decisions made by one nation-state, the US, and so it seems that at least in several cases the effects on domestic policies are not that much results of a global order, but rather policies

296 Schwab 2000

297 Eskelinen & Sehm-Patomäki 2006

of one powerful nation-state, or in most cases, of several powerful nation-states. The problem seems rather to be that there are some governments with excessive powers to do arbitrary decisions (for example on resources and borrowing), rather than that the effects of the global order would always be negative.

## 4.6 Incomplete institutions and their scope

A very real problem in a theory of global justice is that is hard to define what ought to be demanded from different institutions. The scope of politics is always limited, even though it can always be argued that it ought to be expanded, and different institutions serve different, often partial and overlapping roles in the global economic and political system. The theory has to be able to produce a double-strategy by arguing what would a optimal institutional structure be like, while pointing out simultaneously how should the existing institutions be reformed in order to be closer to this optimal state.

The problem is that in the global sphere it is even harder than in a domestic sphere to keep up the Hobbesian ideal of the sovereign Leviathan as a model for governance. There is no, and very likely will never be, a sovereign global institution that could decide the political course for the whole world. While more equal policies are needed and it is important to point out the correct directions for their achievement, one has to be aware that there are severe limitations to the institutional structure on the global level. Each institution in functioning in some way on a global level is very restricted to only some aspects of justice, and it makes little sense to demand these institutions be effective in promoting global justice beyond their scope.

Take the standard Rawlsian ideas as an outline for domestic justice. By the Rawlsian ideas I mean that individuals are expected to be self-maximizing, but similarly taxed by domestic institutions so that their self-maximisation will contribute to the worst off becoming better off. Thus an ideal domestic order would seek such a balance as to maximise the economic assets received by the worst off, by maintaining a high enough taxation level without reducing the incentives for the well off to work hard. In an economically contained situation this strategy might work to some extent in generating optimal social justice – problems of relative poverty apart. But given a globalised economy, the best off do have opportunities to move their possessions abroad, producing only very little government revenue. Subsequently, the government will be in pressure to reduce the tax base in order to keep at least some the funds of the wealthy taxable. Given this capacity of the rich, the decision to diminish taxes is easily justifiable within the Rawlsian framework, since the worst off would suffer, would the wealthy decide to move all their assets abroad. Thus when the political capacity of a government is compromised, the Rawlsian theory seems to become an inevitably loosing strategy. This notion is even more relevant when taken in the context of developing countries, within which power

imbalances tend to be even stronger than within first world countries. In such contexts, even gross inequalities can be justified on the basis of the difference principle, since the economic elite can quite freely move their capital out of the country, and the poor are highly dependent on the few jobs available. In such contexts, it is worth considering Brian Barry's question, is political philosophy merely a matter of justifying inequalities?[298]

Or take the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as an example. The most heated political debates have focused on the question of what would be the just political outcomes of WTO negotiations. While some radicals have demanded the abolishment of the WTO altogether, perhaps the most important question, the correct role for a global trade rule institution, has been quite unattended. A major problem for justice within the WTO has been that different players have brought in issues in the WTO that quite clearly do not belong to the scope of the institution, such as patents[299]. It is often unclear, are the demands for justice within the WTO demands for enlarging or diminishing its scope.

One of the "leading free-traders", Jagdish Bhagwati, has been quick to point out this problem. Bhagwati criticises feminist arguments that the WTO resolutions should be gender-sensitive by arguing that while there may be some truth in the accusations, the argument is all and beyond the scope of the WTO negotiations: "Many of us are right to ask for a renegotiation of that [] agreement because of problems [...] were not anticipated at the time that agreement. But to demand that this agreement [...] be reexamined and redesigned specifically from the viewpoint of women's welfare seems about as compelling as saying that the removal of potholes from New York's roads needs to be subjected to a prior examination whether women are more likely to fall into them"[300].

While I disagree with the bulk of Bhagwati's arguments, it is quite true that the demand for justice is unclear if it does not address the question of what should belong to the scope of a specific political institution or negotiation. In the example above, it is not clear if the women's association's demand is that the WTO ought to be an institution that oversees the gender effects of trade. While this of course is a valid argument, it ought to be explicated, or argued instead that there are different institutions to oversee this issue, and/or argue for the abolishment of the WTO because of unjust gender effects it generates.

Because there is no single all-encompassing institution – and for a good reason it could be said that there could not be – it is a problem of justice in its own right concerning which matters belong to the scope of which institution. In addition, it has to be asked what is the correct power balance between institutions. For example, do trade rules overrule labour rights conventions, or vice versa. Without addressing these questions, theoretically justly functioning institutions can generate unjust outcomes because of the incorrect scope and/or power balance of these institutions. For example, discussing patent rules as

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298 B. Barry 2005; 201

299 see f.e. Shiva 2001, Jawara & Kwa 2003

300 Bhagwati 2004; 87

trade agreements while trade treaties practically overrule the treaties on indigenous peoples' rights on their traditional knowledge, will very likely lead to the phenomenon of "biopiracy".

## 4.7 Empirical relevance

The problem of empirical relevance hardly stops at global institutions. It is also highly relevant in the matter of domestic institutions, especially in the developing countries. While any reform of institutions globally or domestically has to be based on some empirical assumption of the consequences of this reform, these assumptions become extremely difficult when taken in the social contexts of developing countries. Typically, in many countries much economic activity belongs to the sphere of "informal economy", thus being often beyond the scope of policy reforms and often even empirical measurements. But not only is the informal economy important, even more important are the informal social networks and bonds of trust prevalent in a country. As the economist William Easterly has pointed out in his critique of outside economic interventions, it often worsens the situation if an existing informal system of trust is distorted by establishing a dysfunctional formal system[301].

The ethical problem of institutional reforms is thus apparent. When talking about reforms that will have an effect on such a serious issue as extreme poverty, how close approximations of outcomes can we be satisfied with? The impossibility to always control all the outcomes is a problem, and it gets worse as the consequences of a decision become less well anticipated. As the consequentialist argument has to be taken seriously at least to some extent, and we have to refer to the *likely outcomes* instead of *desired outcomes*. For example an institutional system can be created that is designed to distribute some income to the poorest people in a society by direct cash transfers. But if the cash were likely to end up in the bank accounts of corrupt officials[302], what would be just, or right? There is always a balance between the likely and desired outcome.

Practically, the problem arises from for example the reality of the "dual economies" of the poorest countries. While the local elite functions within the official economy, the poor have typically their own informal systems of exchange, most of which is not even registered in the official figures of production and trade. This creates an immediate empirical problem. If we do not have proper knowledge of the informal "second economy", there is a significant risk that political actions designed to be just, will fail because the knowledge of the situation and outcomes of the policies are based only on formal data, i.e. data on the "first economy".

In the cases of undesired consequences, the case is typically such that people in power will find a way of benefiting from certain institutional reforms

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301 Easterly 2006; 60-61

302 Bhagwati 2005

in any case. This is clearly seen in the case of corrupt officials and businesses, but applies to several fields of politics, such as development policy[303] or cash distributions. Yet this does not lead to the conclusion that institutional reforms are futile. Rather the demand for institutional reforms has to be accompanied by the demand of equalising power positions within societies. If poverty also means not being able to affect political decisions and not being able to voice one's concerns, the poor are very unlikely to benefit from institutional reforms. Thus, political and economic power is also relevant in within countries in which poor people live.

So any consequentialist argument has to come with the understanding that empirical knowledge of the situation might not be completely accurate, since social science itself often reflects the "official" situation. Also the distributive systems might not function as they are meant to function, and there has to be some knowledge also about the likely outcomes of the systems.

## 4.8 Basic structure: the WTO as a practical example

The problem from which I started in the discussion of the basic structure concerned whether the core problems of global social justice are problems of the injustice of the global institutions or the behaviour of agents, such as nation-states, within these institutions. To illustrate this problem, I will discuss next a practical example, the World Trade Organisation. This institution provides a good example not only because of its significance in the global sphere, but also because Pogge gives it as an example of the implicit global basic structure[304], so it can fairly be seen as part of this.

If we analyse the WTO as an institution, it seems to be very democratic and fair indeed. All decisions are made by consensus, so that each party must accept the agreement. Also the WTO has an impartial dispute assessment body, which in principle guarantees that trade disputes are settled without one party getting an unfair standing in such disputes.[305] Thus it would be easy to conclude that the WTO is highly democratic, and properly institutionalises the ideal of the "level playing field" as far as institutions go. This conclusion is further strengthened by the fact that the dismantling of the WTO system is perceived to lead to a plethora of bilateral negotiations, in which the more powerful developed countries would almost certainly gain on the expense of their poor trading partners[306].

Yet these conclusions prove to be hasty, when we note that not all trade agreements are made within the WTO. Thus, knowing that they would be in a very difficult position in bilateral negotiations, the poor countries have a strong

303 Berkman 2007
304 Pogge 2002; 15
305 Moellendorf 2002
306 Jawara & Kwa 2003

incentive to stick to the multilateral framework (ie the WTO). This knowledge can be used as a negotiating tactic by the rich countries, who have been willing to accept only certain terms, and threatened to withdraw to bilateral negotiations exclusively, if the developing countries refuse to meet their conditions.

The democratic virtues of the WTO are thus severely weakened by the fact that there are other possible and overlapping arenas for the same purpose, and that there is no consensus on what is the actual scope of the WTO. A theory of fair negotiations within such institutions should therefore take into account the fact that the WTO is far from being all-encompassing arena for resolving trade issues. A similar problem will arise in any institution with unclear and overlapping functions. An example of this are the UN economic institutions, such as ECOSOC. While it is one thing to discuss if their policies are correct, more important would be to show that they are outpowered by the World Bank, so the matter is not so much that of policy but that of balances of power between different institutions dealing with similar issues.

So there are two separate questions of metaprocedural fairness in trade, applying similarly to other issues of global policy: first, the fairness of trade negotiations in general, and second, the fairness of trade negotiations within the WTO as the most important institution of trade negotiations. These two remain separate questions as long as the WTO negotiations do not cover the whole field of trade negotiations. Practically, the possibility to negotiate outside the WTO frame allows for the most powerful players to use the WTO frame when it suits them and use this possibility as a negotiation strategy.

This is exactly what the first world countries are doing in the current situation. This is witnessed by an increasing interest in bilateral trade agreements with the developing countries, which allegedly allow the developed countries to use higher bargaining power than in the multilateral negotiations. It is also likely that the developed countries seek to proceed with regional agreements, similar to North America's NAFTA.

The notion that different capacities of agents make the playing field a lot less level, should be accompanied by the recognition of the possibility of "stepping out of the playing field". This is a matter of a notorious deviation from the ideal of a level playing field – some players have the ability to abandon the field altogether, and impose a totally different set of rules. Thus it seems that a prerequisite for fair results within the WTO frame would be that some mechanism would force also the more powerful countries to act within this frame exclusively. In the absence of such mechanism, threatening to leave the playing field of the WTO can be used as an argument in the WTO negotiations by the rich countries.

It is highly paradoxical to expect the poor countries to accept unfair outcomes from the WTO negotiations on the basis that only the WTO can produce fair outcomes. Rather, the trade negotiations ought to be carried out within a single forum, the parties not allowed to negotiate outside it. Alternatively, or additionally, the question of fairness ought to be reframed as a

matter of levelling the power imbalances, rather than looking for the best forum given the existing imbalances.

Another important aspect regarding problems of such institutions is that although there are rules and procedures governing the actions of agents and also the ways how the procedures are agreed on in the first place, there are very different possibilities in how to take part in the procedures. The problem of such incomplete or non-all-encompassing institutions is very visible in trade negotiations. Another issue regarding the playing field itself, rather than the rules within the field, is the matter of admission to the WTO. Not all the countries in the world are members of the WTO, but given the situation in the present world, most of the excluded ones are eager to become members. Yet the process of admission is often laborous, and there seem to be no transparent and reliable rules concerning the admission. For developing countries looking for admission, the process can typically take a decade or more. Even more alarmingly, the commitments expected from these countries are often significantly more demanding than commitments expected from existing members.[307]

Thus it seems that by focusing on seeking fair rules *within* the playing field, the system is left with a loophole regarding the question, how agents come to be players in the field at the first place (and, as mentioned above, what kind of opportunities they have to step out of the field and adopt a different set of rules altogether). These metaprocedural problems need to be reflected from the viewpoint of justice in addition to asking the substantial questions of fairness within the playing field. A coercive force with relevance to fairness in this context should be effectively coercive also in these issues of participation, not only in the issues of settling disputes when the players choose to act within the WTO frame.

But what exactly makes the WTO unjust? As mentioned, looking at the structure and decision procedures themselves, the organisation seems deeply democratic with its de facto individual country vetoing rights etc. Negotiation practices could be more transparent, yet this does not seem to be the main factor behind the produced injustices. Indeed, it is difficult to locate the causes on injustice within the WTO organisation, rather, it is the behaviour of negotiating countries in negotiations which makes the process unjust, together with a power imbalance between the countries participating. The more powerful countries can use aid as negotiating bargain, they can implicitly threaten to withdraw from negotiations, and so on. It is the problem of separate, overlapping playing fields which seems to be the problem, rather than the playing field of the WTO itself.

But how does this fit Pogge's idea that we are dealing with an unjust global basic structure? Pogge makes a distinction between the problem of justice and the problem of morality: "In particular, we must keep sharply distinct [...] our subject, how the ground rules of a social system ought to be assessed/designed, from the (secondary) subject of how actors (individuals,

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307 Stiglitz & Charlton 2005; 157-163

associations, the government may and should act within an ongoing scheme whose terms are taken as fixed"[308].

So what are the causes of injustice in the system of global trade rules? A possible answer to this question would be that the causes are WTO's rules and decision-making procedures. But, as mentioned, the WTO itself has democratic formal procedures, with any member country being able to veto an agreement. It is difficult to locate the source of injustice in the institution of the WTO, because institutions and their powers, procedures and practices seem to be at best only a part of the reason for injustice. Instead, injustices are caused by how negotiators behave in the negotiations, i.e. at the metaprocedural level. Threatening to pull out of the WTO framework and apply bilateral trade treaties instead, blackmail by threatening to cut aid to disobedient developing countries and divide-and-rule tactics are common negotiation tricks in the repertoire of the rich countries[309]. But then, according to Pogge's distinction, this is exactly a matter of how countries "act within an ongoing scheme", rather than a symptom of the injustice related to the grounding principles of the institution.

Pogge highlights his view in several of his texts. In *Realizing Rawls*, he worries that Rawls' "narrow definition" of a basic structure presented in later works[310] hints that not all social systems have a basic structure – if they lack a proper institutional basis, for example. Therefore, Pogge noted that Rawls is led to a conclusion that either all social systems ought to have a basic structure or alternatively Rawls' theory has nothing to say about systems with no basic structure. According to Pogge's understanding, "any comprehensive social system has a basic structure".[311]

To give an example of the basic structure, how does institutionalised corruption relate to it? If, say, a factory-owner will get away from transgressing pollution standards by bribing an official, is this a matter of basic structure, given that everyone knows that this is a common practise? Pogge's distinction between a basic structure and how agents behave within the structure begs questions about where to draw the line between these two. This case is quite similar from the case of the WTO negotiations, in which a powerful player, say the EU, can threaten to withdraw from negotiations and use this threat as a negotiating tool. These issues are hard to discuss without reference to the concept of power.

Also, the notion of a basic structure defies the importance of the history. Ought we to not be aware of how they have come about? If there are two alternative basic structures, one which has come about democratically and the other that has been imposed on its subjects, the former will be better also considering the future justice of the system.

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308 Pogge 1989; 17
309 Jawara & Kwa 2003
310 Rawls 1978
311 Pogge 1989; 24

This is a real problem for the theory and needs to be taken seriously. So when discussing the "global basic structure" one has to have an adequate notion of what it consists of, what is the nature of its institutions, what the institutions capable are of and what they are not capable of. The WTO is symptomatic regarding this problem. Even in domestic social justice, the global order makes it possible for individual agents to undermine the domestic order. Whatever the institutions and the ideas of a basic structure, there is a problem of overlap. We might not necessarily be able to discuss the ideal basic structure independently of existing institutions.

It is also possible to argue that Rawlsian distributive scheme which is based on pareto-optimality, serves to justify inequalities unnecessarily. There is no reason why the pareto-optimal distribution would always be the optimal distribution. If equality is in itself relevant to wellbeing, inequalities caused by pareto-optimal divisions can prove to be far from optimal outcomes.

## 4.9 Summary and conclusions to chapter four

In this chapter, I have analysed global social justice from an institutional viewpoint. The underlying premise is that international arrangements have a significant effect on the prevalence of poverty, as they generate and enforce the existing power positions. Thus especially poor countries have a very narrow policy space, which easily translates as sustained poverty.

I have also taken up the problem of the scope of global social justice. The problem can be stated in terms of a global basic structure – to which questions and institutions does it extend? I noted that global social justice can be discussed by referring to the behaviour of individual nation-states or democratic principles, without necessarily referring to a global basic structure. Pogge's idea that a basic structure exists whenever people interact seems problematic. I also argued that the problem of speaking about global basic structure is that there are no holistic institutions and the existing institutions lack coercive forces, which allow agents in more powerful positions to use institutions and arenas suitable for them, and to dictate the agendas of institutions. Thus, while individual institutions can comply with the ideal of a "level playing field", the choice of playing fields makes the overall playing field a lot less level, so to say.

Thus there are three possible kinds of reforms in present distributive systems, which are all likely to be more important than reforms of global institutions as such. First, there is the need for redistribution of power. For this task, power positions have to be analysed – which people are under economic and political domination, which people or governments can affect the global agenda, which governments can use the institutional arenas which best suit them, what are the power relations between companies and individuals. Second, the behaviour of institutional agents within the "playing field" needs to

undergo a “revolution of motivation”, to use Cohen's expression. If there would be compliance to the principles of global social justice, different agents would not be so keen to promote their interests without taking into account the poorest sections of the global society. It is noteworthy that this problem does not belong to the field of social justice as defined by Pogge, who makes the distinction between the grounding rules of a social system and the behaviour of individual agents within the social system. Third, the playing field ought to be levelled by changing the relative power positions and scopes between existing global institutions. Yet all these, except the third point, are difficult to discuss by using the notion of a global basic structure. For this reason, I have suggested using the concept of global order to refer to power positions, which are not part of the notion of a global basic structure.

# V POVERTY AND HARM

I have in this text emphasised the notion of power in understanding and defining extreme poverty. This also relates to the issue, how are the subjects suffering from extreme poverty described, i.e. are they seen as passive and helpless objects of aid, or active subjects who for some reason or another are unable to meet their basic needs despite all their efforts to meet them. I have argued that it is the latter description that is more accurate as a basis for normative assessments. From this follows that normative enquiry should be focused on the question, what are these reasons unabling the poor to meet their basic needs. Here, the notion of inequalities of power surfaces. As argued, there are ways in which the poor powerful can channel the benefits from economy to themselves, under the general notion of development. In addition, the power structures extend to the field of intergovernmental matters, where we can see misuse of power positions taking place despite the virtues of institutions within which treaties are formed.

Naturally, I critical reader can wonder, if the totality of the phenomenon of poverty can be explained by referring to power positions. How does political and economic power relate to for example lack of access health care? This is yet quite obvious, if we accept the empirical idea that subjects suffering from poverty tend to struggle to meet their basic needs. For anyone suffering from a serious disease that can be cured, it is safe to expect that the subject will aim at getting access to the medicines. Why this does not happen, then, can be explained by referring to the subjects' relative positions locally and globally. The subject might be suffering from an excessively high inequalities in purchasing power within the county, political inability to voice her demands, or outside institutional pressure to the government of her country, such as World Bank demands to cut health sector spending as a part of a "structural adjustment" programme.

Yet it is not much of a normative argument to point out that human beings tend to struggle for better societal positions. We need an answer to at least two separate questions: first, what can we expect the subjects to aim for, and second, what can one legitimately expect. It is the latter question that withholds the normatively important issue. Namely, a subject can struggle to own a car, for

instance, but we would not say that a failure to do this would be a normative problem caused by unjust power structures (added with an answer to the first question that not everyone wants to own a car). Thus there has to be some baseline for goods we can expect anyone in absence of such goods to struggle to access, and about which it can be said than a failure to access them is a normative problem. Again, in vein of the discussion in chapter one, we can refer to relevant means of meeting basic needs. Accordingly, if someone is unable to access such relevant means to meeting basic needs, we can conclude that the person is being harmed, as she is prevented by some agent or structure from accessing them.

I will next turn to the problem of doing harm. This problem is specifically important, since harm seems to provide an intuitively strong moral case. We can safely say that causing harm to others is immoral and unjust. If an agent is harming another agent, the harming agent is breaching quite strong and binding negative duties with high moral priority. Because only fundamentally consequentialist theories take positive and negative duties as morally similar[312], the assessment of when others are harmed is a vital matter. Especially Thomas Pogge's recent work has sparked debate on the assessment of "the global order" from the viewpoint of negative duties[313], thus extending the traditionally libertarian preoccupation with negative duties to the realm of global justice, which has traditionally been focused on positive duties of aid.

Perhaps the clearest cases of harming are cases of harmful interference. Thus harm is committed if there is an act without which the situation would have been better for the person harmed than it is after this interference. This can be called the subjunctive understanding of harm, meaning that the present state is compared to a hypothetical situation in which the interference would not have taken place. Another way of understanding harm is the baseline definition, according to which harm is committed, when people are prevented from meeting an existential baseline, meeting of which is necessary in order not to be harmed. This is what I discussed in the very beginning of this chapter. There are surely conditions that are bad enough that we can conclude that the subject is harmed, if forced to live under such conditions. Taken the understanding of active subjects I argued for above, the demand of egalitarian minimum or "sufficient shares" overlap with the demand that others refrain from harming, perhaps some special cases such as orphaned children, disabled people etc aside.

As noted also in the beginning of the previous chapter, some criteria of social justice are minimum criteria by nature, rather than sufficientarian criteria. Refraining from harm clearly belongs to this category. Yet also other (subjunctive) kinds of harm can, and indeed do occur, to people who are above such a baseline. This has to be kept in mind when reading this chapter. The discussion of a baseline of not being harmed is not meant to imply that the failure to meet this baseline is the only form of harm which can take place.

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312 Singer argues this throughout his texts.

313 Pogge 2005a

## 5.1 Definitions and reservations

To intelligibly discuss harm as a moral notion, a few words of definition are needed. First, what do we mean by harm to others? Joel Feinberg has provided one useful definition. According to this definition, harming others means "interest-thwarting"[314]. So if another person has interests, which are thwarted because of other's conduct, the former is harmed by the latter. Yet from a moral point of view we have to further argue concerning which interests are morally meaningful. As people have interests that are unrealistic, (such as travel to Jupiter), pointed towards luxurious spending (fly a private jet to Hawaii on summer vacations), or merely reflect personal values (play chess on Mondays), it seems obvious that not all failures to meet ones interest are morally significant, or cause moral duties to others. Thus we have to start from a definition of vital interests identical to or closely resembling a list of basic human needs. In cases in which interests to meet basic human needs are thwarted, there definitely is a moral concern. So the notion of interest seems somewhat insignificant in the moral sense of harming, as we need to refer to other moral concepts to establish, when interests are morally significant.

When discussing harm, I will mean acts or conditions which are undesirable. While this might seem self-evident, there are cases in which harm can be justified, such as in cases of legitimate self-defence. Harming others to avoid worse harm can indeed be legitimate. Thus when using the concept of harm, I will use it as short for *illegitimate harm*. Another similar reservation relates to the fact that harm might occur with no morally responsible agent. We might be harmed in pure accidents, and indeed moral philosophers are well familiar with the notion of "blameless wrongdoing"[315].

If we recognise someone to be in a harmed state, we can conclude that some agent harms the person. So it is important to establish whether harm takes place in a given situation. Naturally, in almost all cases there are multiple agents, typically the local government, other governments, company/ies or so on. The moral responsibility for someone's harmed state can only be analysed by analysing a complex interplay of political decisions and power. Yet the main argument about harm is very strong in the moral sense: if an agent is harmed, all contributing agents have a negative duty to refrain from harming or contributing to this harm.

Surely, one could say, there are exceptions to this argument that a failure to meet one's basic needs means necessarily that one is harmed. Two obvious ones could be called "the Robinson case" and the "insufficient resources case". In the former case a person is simply so isolated from other people or any political community that an external agent cannot be held morally responsible for the person's existential state. In the latter case the situation is such that there is not simply enough vital goods, such as food, in comparison to the

314 Feinberg 1984
315 Murphy 2003; 23-26

population, and therefore lack of such vital goods cannot be seen as harm, as no political choice or distributive mechanism could save the whole population from their state.

Yet while the reservations have to be made that in such cases the argument about the relation between a harmed state and responsible harming agents does not hold, it has to be noted that these reservations are purely philosophical and theoretical. At the current situation, there are hardly any, if any, people who are not affected by the mechanisms of politics and economics with their global implications. Neither is the case such that there would be a lack of resources. On the contrary, for example food is abundant enough to be left rotting, fed to domestic animals, or converted into petroleum. Additionally, all countries suffering from malnutrition are net *exporters* of agricultural products[316], and for this reason the "insufficient resources" argument does not hold even locally.

A final reservation on the notion of harm I want to make is that the relation of harm to social justice can be questioned. In other words, is harming others unjust or simply wrong? It can be argued that harming is merely an ethical problem and not something social justice ought to be concerned about. This argument starts from a very Rawlsian understanding of social justice, in other words treats social justice as chiefly a matter of fairness. Yet social justice does not have to be understood in such a narrow way. Indeed, if poverty is seen as being harmed, i.e. being actively pushed below a certain existential baseline, this requires that there are political structures at least enabling this. And if political arrangements allow for pushing people into subhuman conditions, it is hard to see why this would not be a matter of social justice. Harm has to be understood here in the sense of being an arrangement or policy instead of or in addition to being an act.

## 5.2 Distribution and harm

How does social justice relate to harm? I will argue here that maldistribution as such can lead to harm. But maldistribution does not lead necessarily to harming. Maldistribution may be unjust, but this is different from harming, unless of course harming is defined so broadly as to lose its moral significance, in other words as any interest-thwarting. In a more meaningful sense, maldistribution causes harm only if it leads people to live under a baseline of sufficient level of goods. This can happen because while there would be enough goods for everyone, after others' over consumption there is not enough left for others to meet such a baseline. For example, in some African countries there is enough food produced, but as the best lands are reserved for production for export, there is not enough food for the local population produced in the

316 Moore Lappe et al 1998; 9-11

remaining land area. Here, maldistribution of a good (land) leads to harming in a sense of failing to meet a very central human need (nutrition).

In a larger context, the global overuse of natural resources can be seen as an analogous case. As a minority of the global population consumes the vast majority of resources, there is not enough left for the less consuming majority to even meet a sufficient existential level. This argument of course includes the preclusion that global resources are limited. Yet there are no such limits to global resources as there are to, say, dividing a given sum of money – the resource pool cannot be drained to a limit, where there are simply no resources left. Rather, the impacts are felt in other ways, such as in increasingly common natural disasters, local collapses of ecosystems, and so on. Examples of this include climate change (clearly a result of over consumption), desertification as trees are cut for timber to be used in rich countries etc.

Alternatively, harming can take place because of the process of producing goods for others. Take as an example oil drilling and mining activities. Often, there are people living in drilling and mining areas who have other means of livelihood, such as agriculture, crafts or herding. Thus, oil or minerals are no good for them to be distributed, and getting a too small share of these goods is no distributional problem as such. The locals get typically nothing but often it is not a share of the oil that they want. Yet the processes of drilling and mining cause severe environmental damages, which affect people's livelihoods. They are thus harmed in the process of getting economic goods, but this is not exactly a distributional problem. Non-harming would mean refraining from bringing these goods to the sphere of economic distribution in the first place.

But even if this case seems an intuitively clear case of harming, because these people fall under a certain existential baseline? In most cases they are facing considerable difficulties in making a sufficient livelihood, problems of health, unwanted migration etc. But what they do not typically face is the loss of income, as the starting point is one of very low income, remaining stable in the process. Occasionally, some minor compensation may even increase their incomes. So a baseline of not being harmed cannot be defined by purchasing power alone. This indeed follows the argument on chapter one, according to which poverty cannot be defined by money metric – at least not alone. It is better again to refer to the relevant basic needs.

## 5.3 History and present

It seems evident that history of interaction between peoples has witnessed several cases of inexcusable harming of others, the effects of which are still present in the contemporary world. Yet what does follow from history causally, or what moral conclusions can be derived from history, are difficult philosophical problems.

The notion of harm in the context of global social justice easily summons the image of colonialism to the European mind. Indeed the European powers committed totally unacceptable acts, from slave trade to confiscating goods from the colonies and slaughtering people randomly. Yet condemning past injustices or demanding compensation (which indeed ought to be done) is a different matter from showing the injustices of the present world order, or demanding a more just order. The colonial legacy has often been argued to be the reason, why the present world is still based on harming others. For example Thomas Pogge refers to this legacy, by pointing out that we still enjoy the outcomes of "the great head start" of the colonial period. "We indeed cannot inherit the responsibility for our forefathers' sins. But how can we then claim plausibly the *fruits* of their sins?"[317] This can be understood as Pogge arguing that the present world system not only benefits us, but also continues harming the former colonial countries.

Yet the effects of colonial history are more complicated both causally and morally, than described by Pogge. First, not all the rich countries of today were colonial countries and not all the poor countries were colonised. Think of the Liberian former dictator saving public money to a personal account in Switzerland. Because of Swiss laws, a system in which public money can be stolen without fear of punishment is created. This system serves the Swiss economy and ruins African economies. But then, Switzerland was not a colonising country and Liberia was not colonised. Indeed, after the colonial period in the 1950's and 1960's, several economists expected the African countries to become rich, while Asia would stagnate – yet the opposite happened. This is not only because of internal policies; indeed, the political space of most African countries has been marginal after the 1980s, with detrimental policies forced to African counties. So there is harm committed, but it cannot be explained by referring to colonial history.

Some economic benefit to rich countries derives from the past injustices, since the colonial production patterns have remained intact in several countries of the third world. Indeed, where colonial history has most significant effects, colonial restructuring of production rather than a "head start" causes these effects. Yet it is questionable how relevant is violent and exploitative history in assessing the contemporary institutions. But the injustice of today is in many cases independent from this history, as the injustice would take place also in a counterfactual historical scenario. In other words, unjust institutions and practices would be unjust even if history had been different and they would have come about in the present form some other way. While the colonial past might explain some of the injustices of the present global order, they do not sufficiently explain it, and remedies to present injustices are more diverse than simply correcting colonial injustices.

A system can be unjust whatever its history. So duties of compensation and duties not to harm ought to be discussed separately. While these can be overlapping, they are not necessarily so. Just think of for example some former

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317 Pogge 2005b; 2

Soviet Union countries, which have fallen to the category of least developed countries and suffer from World Bank policies pushed to them. To quote Natalia Ablova, an activist and scholar from Kyrgyz Republic: "It may be true [...] that developing country debt owes to the legacy of colonialism. Yet it is a wonder that with the same colonial legacies many IFIs arrived in the countries of Eastern Europe, Russia, Caucasus and Central Asia, some of which can be categorized as part of the global North.[318]" Thus, for Ablova, it is more the conduct of certain institutions that creates injustice, rather than the continuation of some past unjust arrangement. This argument is not intended to downplay the crimes of colonialism – they were grave indeed and call for compensations. But Pogge's argument is vulnerable for empirical criticism. If one manages to show that the ongoing effects on colonialism are limited, there is little one can say to condemn the present injustices, if it is believed that injustices essentially derive from a common violent history.

In fact, the ongoing harms and illegitimate gains from colonialism seem not that much economic. For most colonising countries, the whole enterprise of colonialism was not profitable, when looking at the whole period, with all the costs of administration and warfare involved. What did happen, though, was that the colonial countries got a lasting influence and control over the production patterns, economic policies, trade and such in their former colonies. Political control has been exercised to serve the economic interests of the former colonisers later on. So essentially, it was a "head start" in power, rather than money, which continues to harm the global poor today. But power imbalances derive from other sources than history as well, as argued by Ablova.

The focus of the theories of global justice ought to be in the forward-sphere, rather than the backward-sphere. The main question is, what would be required of the political order and the agents' actions for them to be just and moral. This is what Bertrand Williams pointed out in his analysis of ethical discourse. Williams notes that the discourse on ethics has been too much concerned with judgemental problems, around the question of "how ought we to react to past wrongdoings?" Rather, according to Williams, we should ask the question rather in terms of "how ought we to act justly?"[319] Williams' argument deals mainly with ethics, but is applicable to the field of political theory. The question of possible compensations is relevant, of course, but it ought to be detached from the general matter of social justice globally.

It is important to make the distinction between *past harm* and *continuing harm*. While these historical sins were undeniably great, it is questionable to what extent past moral transgressions as such can be seen as harm, when discussing justice in the present world. While past harm calls for suitable compensations, in some cases it even is, contrary to Pogge's argument, not morally unacceptable to enjoy the fruits of past sins. Take for example the fact that everyone going to an X-ray and thus benefiting from this medical practice is actually benefiting from knowledge gathered from the Hiroshima

318 Ablova 2008; 23
319 Williams 1985; 7-9

bombing[320]. The case would indeed be very difficult is benefiting from this knowledge would somehow encourage further nuclear bombings in the future. Thus past harm is relevant for present harm only if it includes an element of encouragement to continue harming. With this addition, also colonialism is easier to discuss. As the former colonising countries have has the interest to keep natural resources flowing from the former colonies, they often have supported suppressive regimes who in turn guarantee the undisturbed flow of these resources (gold, oil, timber, etc).

How, then, do poor countries suffer from harm from outside, translating into harm for poor people? At least three ways can be identified. First, there are structures of ownership. Typically, the ownership of land and wealth is very concentrated in poor countries[321]. Thus such societies are very unequal, as discussed in chapter two. This is mainly due to the fact that there is a group of people who can benefit from the country's resources, and companies and governments of rich countries work to maintain this situation, as they need the resources. Second, there are external norms affecting the distribution of power in poor countries that have a negative effect on poverty. I am specifically referring to what Pogge calls the "resource privilege", namely that anyone who manages to seize power in a country is seen as legitimate holder of the country's resources[322]. This creates a strong incentive to seize power in a country by any means, which has a heavily destabilising effect, undermining the institutional basis of the country. Third, also the functions of basic institutions can be affected from the outside. For example corruption is typically caused by foreign arrangements making corruption possible (such as Swiss banking laws).

For recognising harm, we thus have two approaches that complement each other. On one hand, we can analyse the existential state of people living in a given country, showing that their falling under a certain baseline shows that they are harmed by some morally responsible agent(s), who could have acted in such a manner that these people would have had a possibility to meet this baseline. On the other hand, we can concretely show how distribution patterns in poor countries are effected by external means, to locate the agents responsible for harming.

## 5.4 Economy and harm

When discussing the problem, whether the current global economic order harms the global poor, Pogge refers to several statistics about poverty, focusing on the appallingly low income measures of the over 1 billion people officially labelled poor or extremely poor[323]. Pogge bases his argument on the idea that

320 Anwander 2005; 40-41
321 Moore Lappe et al 1998; 59-60
322 Pogge 2002; 22-23, 113-115
323 Pogge 2002

anyone lacking the means of secured existence is harmed by the present system, and that the global order could overcome these deficiencies, would there be political will to do so[324].

As has been thoroughly discussed in the preceding chapters, economic measures cannot be taken as signifiers of all aspects of poverty. The discourse on wellbeing of individuals is very different from the discourse on the "wealth of nations". Nations, or people, are yet often pictured as the subjects of theory of justice, as in Rawls' Law of peoples and in GNP per capita -type measurements. In recent discussions, Mathias Risse has been explicit about the assumption that it is the "wealth of nations" which is morally significant in regard to poverty. "[...] the question, what makes some countries rich and some others poor and volatile [...] Whether the global order harms the poor must depend on what makes things go well for them."[325] While Risse makes the effort to argue this point in philosophy, most economists take the presupposition as self-evident beyond the need for argumentation. A good example is Jeffrey Sachs' discussion on the possibility of ending poverty, in which Sachs follows the average growth of GDP per capita in nations.

Risse's argument is significant, since it is specifically intended as a counter-argument to Pogge's idea of harm. Risse bases his argument on the assumption that when there is growth, there cannot be harm committed, or at least this harm cannot be severe. This assumption breaks down to two separate premises. First, progress as such shows that there cannot be harm committed, at least not severe, since the movement is away from the state of "original poverty" (Risse does not use this term, though). Second, economic growth is a measure accurate enough in showing that progress has been achieved. The first notion, which I call the "improvement thesis" as an opposite to the "baseline thesis", I will discuss later. Regarding the second notion, I have earlier discussed the general problems related to economic measures, and what applies to poverty in regard to these problems, is likely to apply also to harm.

Jeffrey Sachs has presented statistics[326] about growth in different regions, for the purpose of finding solutions to poverty. These statistics show (apart from what Sachs intends to show) how commitment to the economic paradigm can cause distortions on the notion of harm. Sachs argues that economic inequalities derive from the fact that other countries progress *faster* than others, while all countries do progress (sporadic recessions apart), thus repeating old development ideas discussed in chapter two. Sachs takes the growth of GDP to mean that there is progress generally, and for example the number of undernourished does not seem to be relevant, or rather is expected to have a causal negative correlation with the GDP. Yet all the countries are part of the global economic system, which is based on the growth of GDP. Also, as discussed in chapter two, growth can only mean growth of the formal market economy, in expense of the informal economy and non-market exchange.

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324 Pogge 2002; 198

325 Risse 2005; 355

326 Sachs 2005; 25-31

Therefore it is too hasty to argue that economic growth generally implies progress.

The general indicators of the wealth of a nation leave aside cases in which there is general good and individual harm. The process of GDP growth accompanied with harm can happen in several ways. Typically, several processes which are known to result in a likely increase in GDP can mean merely harm to several peoples. This has been already discussed in the case of dams. Such projects cause weakened capabilities for the people to support themselves, especially for agricultural populations. Yet, these outcomes are not caused by the rise of the GDP, but they are caused by processes that are intended to cause a rise in the GDP. If the key to poverty reduction is seen to be the rise of the GDP, and similarly the moral baseline for not harming is defined in terms of the GDP, such obvious harms are unlikely to be seen as harm at all, but rather the opposite.

An illuminating example concerns colonialism. Even though I questioned whether the normative responsibility to refrain from harming today can be derived from colonial history, colonial history was in its time clearly a harmful practice to its objects. It is noteworthy that with a very few exceptions, the GDPs of the colonised countries *grew* during the period of colonisation. Subsistence production was shifted to high-volume production for exporting, often forcefully. Railways, ports etc were built[327]. From the economy's point of view things were going quite well, and yet simultaneously severe famines occurred and the countries were, no doubt, politically oppressed, with practices like slave trade going on. Indeed, it is this period of increased per capita GDP from which compensations are sometimes demanded, indeed for a good reason. What kinds of conclusions ought one to derive from these facts, if Risse's presuppositions are accepted? It seems that any available conclusion will be somewhat absurd, if the premise on the linkage between GDP growth and not harming is not refuted. The possible conclusions are the following:

a) The subjects of colonial power were not essentially harmed by colonialism, since there was economic growth. Political oppression, famines and such are irrelevant to harm. This argument seems to be refuted by the reality of colonialism as such.
b) Even though the GDP grew during the colonial era, it would have risen more, had harm not occurred. This conclusion is empirically infeasible, since the processes that led the GDP to grow, are often indistinguishable from the harming practices. (Such as using slave labour to build railways and make production forcibly focused on export to the colonising country). This leads also to incoherent conclusions, if GDP growth is taken to show that harm has not occurred. At least, then, there is need for further argumentation, in which conditions GDP growth and non-harming occur simultaneously, and these are not provided by Risse.

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327 Bhagwati 2005

c) People can be harmed by factors external to the GDP and economy, and the harm which occurred during the colonial era was of such nature. This leads Risse's argument to fail, since Risse presupposes that there is a strong connect between GDP and harm.
d) The GDP and income levels are not methodologically suitable for assessing harm (or progress, for that matter). This also leads Risse's argument to fail, for similar reasons to argument c.

Answers a) and b) seem problematic for the reasons noted above. Answers c and d, on the other hand, will lead Risse's argument on harm and the GDP to fail. I find nothing wrong with these two latter arguments. But interestingly, granting these arguments will lead to problems also for Pogge's argument. Even though Pogge discusses (quite correctly) incomes rather than national product, he often quotes economic indicators with the purpose of showing that the global poor are harmed.

Exaggerating the role of the GDP in poverty reduction also leads easily to a situation, in which we attribute moral meanings to the GDP, while the measure is all too broad to have any moral significance as such. If increasing the GDP is the key to poverty reduction and at existing poverty levels were are harming people, harm can be only avoided by increasing the GDP by all means. But GDP is increased by measures that would be highly dangerous to proclaim as morally feasible, let alone morally required. Several events of environmental destruction increase the GDP. Building nuclear weapons increase the GDP. Yet no one would seriously argue that as building nuclear weapons increases the GDP, we have the moral obligation to support building nuclear arms capacity in a poor country, since by doing so we would be not harming the poor, or harming them less.

The philosophical question is, is the notion of harm, with its connotations of intervention, applicable to cases in which no concrete intervention has occurred. In such cases, the matter is rather that the terms of co-operation are unfavourable enough to another party and forced to this party, for this party to suffer from disability to meet a minimum existential baseline. As Pogge argues, the situation of people suffering from poverty can be morally compared to the situation of slavery. To extend the analogy, as both are conditions in which people can be born, both are interventions against one's legitimate moral claims. But then, there has to be some agent keeping up this position.

It is worthwhile at this point to summon again the prior discussion on development as a change of form of social life. While, as argued, the notion of development has often been insensitive to the notion of destruction, mere destruction of previous forms of social life does not necessarily spell harm. Again, we have to add the notion of egalitarianism. To illustrate, think of two hard-working but decently managing peasants, A and B, who are pushed off their land because it is needed for industrial development. Person A ends up living in an urban slum, usually unable to meet his basic needs, and this condition gets further forced upon A's son A jr. Person B manages to get a job

with acceptable conditions, meets his basic needs decently, and further B jr manages to educate himself and live a comfortable life. Now it can be said that neither A's or B's eviction was right. Yet it can be questionable if B was actually harmed in the long run, and B jr certainly was not. On the other hand A and A jr certainly were harmed. Further, given the gross inequalities existing, it can very well be argued that B jr contributes to harming A jr, if unwilling to sacrifice his position to some extent. Thus, we need the notion of development with equality to make sense, which processes actually harm people.

## 5.5 Relative positions in development

As noted in chapter two, development is a global process: not only developing countries develop. Rather, acquiring a higher standard of living is an ongoing process in all countries – or at least it is the pronounced aim of all countries[328]. Yet material growth in developed countries is not insignificant for the wellbeing in developing countries. It affects international distribution of labour, for example. As being rich might preclude that others are poor[329], countries are not at different development levels independent of each others' development.

The disagreement between philosophers about whether or not the global poor are currently harmed depends on not only philosophical arguments on a baseline of harming, but also on the choice of an empirical background theory of economics. While there are of course a number of economic theories explaining world systems from slightly different angles, the major choice of empirical understanding can be presented as a choice between two major theories. I will call them the trickle-down theory and the dependency theory. The former theory refers to the classic economic idea, according to which it is good for everyone, if the economy is dynamic[330]. While this means large income and wealth gaps, yet the trickle-down effect causes everyone to benefit from the riches of some, in comparison to a situation in which "everyone would be poor". Trickle-down effects in practice mean for example incentives to work, job creation and an increased demand for services.

Dependency theory, on the other hand, argues that the wealth of some is dependent on the poverty of others[331]. This in what was discussed in chapter two, when referring to the development of underdevelopment -thesis. Practically, it means that economic growth of the rich countries has precluded the organisation of "underdeveloped" countries according to a market discipline, which enables the rich to enjoy cheap raw materials, lucrative possibilities for investment etc. The viewpoint sees development roughly as a continuation of the process justified by Locke: by arguing that increased

328 Lummis 1996
329 Lummis 1996; 68, 70-71
330 See f.e. Sowell 2001
331 Jomo 2006; 8-9; Ocampo & Parra 2006; 164-190

monetary value is beneficial to all, the production and social systems of poor countries can be transformed into a system yielding high profits for some and misery for others. Both trickle-down and dependency theory argue that there is a co-operative system, but disagree on if the system is mutually advantageous, how just are the terms of this co-operation and how voluntarily have they been settled. After noting the prevalence of extreme poverty and the power imbalances of intergovernmental arrangements, it seems that the dependency theory has stronger arguments on its side.

Dependency school's argument has been argued against by several economists, who note that there is no correlation with economic growth in the global north and economic recession, or slower economic growth, in the global south. This is indeed true. Also it needs to be noted that mere interaction does not spell harm. If people are poor regardless of the terms of co-operation, the rich cannot harm them. For them to be harmed, the terms of co-operation forced upon them have to such in nature that they generate or sustain the condition of poverty. What trickle-down theory argues is that economic co-operation is mutually beneficial, and therefore, even if poverty does exist, it cannot be caused by economic structures.

Mathias Risse calls this the "improvement thesis". This means that if improvement from an even worse original state is taking place, the agents contributing to this improvement cannot be harming via the same mechanisms. (Naturally, they can be harming in other ways). Pogge has argued against Risse's improvement thesis that it is not the point, where are we in comparison with the situation of the 1950s, for example, but rather, could we do better than this? Risse indeed grants what he calls the feasible alternatives thesis, meaning that harm is committed in a situation in which people live in substandard conditions, and "there is a feasible alternative institutional order under which radical inequality would not persist"[332]. If it can be shown that feasible alternatives with less premature deaths and poverty do exist, it follows that the present world order does harm the poor.

It is exactly the relevance of economic growth for poverty reduction, which is significant here. Does underdevelopment caused by development of others only take place when there is negative economic growth, as the mentioned economists would argue? The complexities of the linkage between economic growth and poverty reduction have been thoroughly discussed already. Here it suffices to note that the question is, is economic growth a good enough approximation for poverty reduction, for the argument aiming to refute the dependency theory to be accurate. Regarding the problems of the linkage discussed above even this seems problematic.

Also some scholars can argue from an economic point of view that slower economic growth in comparison to other countries shows that they are suffering from "developing others". This makes sense at least for the reason that growth always includes distributive problems. Yet the task of determining,

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[332] Risse 2005b; 367

what would be the level of growth if other countries would be acting in a just manner, is necessarily difficult.

Yet when looking at the criteria on harming, it is important to note that benefiting oneself does not necessarily mean harming others. It is quite easy to form the argument on harming in the way that these two are seen as necessarily appearing together as features of the global order. Pogge condems the present global order by stating, "we uphold a global order which harms the poor, while benefiting from it ourselves". One has to be clear that these phenomena are separate. Benefiting from a system does not mean that others are necessarily harmed, and being harmed by a system does not necessarily mean that others benefit, or that the system is upheld in order to benefit. This is particularly important in order to avoid the fallacy of claiming that benefiting from a harming system necessarily means that one is morally responsible for the harm done. For example several patients benefiting from modern medicine are indirectly benefiting from medical knowledge gained by Nazi doctors' experiments on live humans and information collected by observing the Hiroshima nuclear bomb. But what is important is that there are cases in which benefiting can imply directly harming others, namely cases in which scarce resources are distributed, with the awareness that getting more of the result will mean that others will fall under a baseline of not being harmed.

## 5.6 Risse's argument on institutions

Discussing harm in the way as has been done here, presumes that we can meaningfully discuss harm as mediated by an institution, rather than as direct harm. To establish how this takes place, I will discuss some features of the institutional structure of a country and how it can be affected. To do this, I will start from an argument by Mathias Risse, who aims to show by referring to institutions that the duties to stop harming the poor cannot be severe. I proceed by arguing that Risse's starting points are useful, while his conclusions are mostly fallacious.

In his argument about what causes the present poverty levels, Risse identifies what he calls the "institutional thesis", having first argued that other possible theses do not explain the phenomenon sufficiently well. Thus, according to Risse, the main explanation for why some countries are poor while some are rich is that the poor countries do not have strong and accountable political and social institutions. These institutions include the juridical system and land rights, the cohesiveness of society, but also for example "shared views about what are reasonable benefits and burdens arising from social co-operation"[333].

Risse quite correctly argues that the available natural resources within a country do not sufficiently explain the income level within the country. At least,

[333] Risse 2005b; 358

the relation is not that straight-forward. Yet the idea that material resources bring extra income to the economy seems plausible. Different resources have price tags, and when resources are sold, they provide additional income accordingly. But the role of resources can be even more complex. Actually in several developing countries vast natural resources seem to have a *negative* correlation with the prevalence of poverty, or overall economic performance. This is often because of political reasons: the quest to control the resources often creates political instability. It also provides an incentive for outside forces (governments, MNCs), to try to affect a countries political course, adding to the turmoil. Thus while such a primary natural resource as oil does bring significant additional incomes to a country like Norway, for instance, a country like Nigeria could have most likely enjoyed a politically more stable and less poverty-stricken reality without its oil reserves.

From the basis of this thesis, Risse concludes that the only thing we can do to alleviate poverty is to try to help with building institutions of good quality – and this is necessarily difficult to do from outside. Risse writes that "what outsiders can do to foster prosperity is limited by what they can do to help build institutions, and […] such limitations are plausibly quite severe"[334]. The argument rests on the notion that outside interference can only *help* building institutions, rather than having a negative impact on them. Yet in the core of the argument that poverty is caused by harm, is showing how external factors undermine social institutions in poor countries, and therefore Risse's argument is hardly a decisive counter-argument.

The assessment of institutional features of poverty needs to be elaborated in the light of the whole institutional structure. The discipline of development studies all too often focuses on the "development obstacles" within poor countries, thus creating a methodological bias by implicitly expecting the causal reasons to poverty to be always found in reasons within these countries[335]. In reality, the countries are very much affected by external institutions and political choices. If Risse's argument is correct, we have to accept the thesis that external factors do not affect the domestic institutional order for the worse.

Risse argues that external poverty alleviating measures being limited to helping to build institutions of quality. This is what he calls the field of "feasible alternatives". Risse writes, "this understanding of feasibility still does lead to an indictment of the global order if a case can indeed be made that not enough effort goes into […] implementing institutional change"[336]. This quote highlights Risse's belief that outside forces can only help with institution-building, and not damage the institutions, as Risse sees the only negative case being one of not putting enough effort to institutional change. Thus not doing enough means not helping enough, and the possibility of negative impacts on institutions is not even discussed.

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334 Ibid.

335 See f.e. Pogge 2002; 139-144

336 Risse 2005b; 376

This I find very odd, as the case can be, and often is that there is *too much* effort on institutional change, with negative outcomes. One only has to think of the World Bank's restructuring programmes, which have been efforts at balancing the budgets of poor and indebted countries, so that the whole institutional base of such countries has been restructured. Or about several mechanisms making the illegitimate flight of capital from poor countries possible and easy. So while the domestic institutional solution might be the ultimate mechanisms for distribution, these mechanisms can be heavily affected, especially in the negative sense, by outside agents.

## 5.7 Defining harm 1: Baselines

As noted, the economic indicators that are generally used for observing poverty measure quite exclusively production for market and official income. This shows a presupposition of economics: it implicitly sets the level of expectation to zero, from which "growth" begins – as GDP has typically been close to zero in historical times. But what does such zero level consist of, when we discuss the elements of survival, or elements of wellbeing? What can we expect people to have without the effects of global economy? Can we expect people in this imaginary state to possess means to obtain food? The economic paradigm leaves these questions open. What can we expect people to have in a state before growth? Indeed, hunger can increase while the economy grows, as noted.

Remember Marx's analysis discussed in chapter two. Marx criticised the tendency of economic measurements to universalise the present mode of production. While in the process of capitalist growth there are new forms of activity and new spheres of social life brought into the domain of circulation of money ("subsumed" in Marx's term), the economy grows. While a part of economic growth is typically genuine growth, meaning more intensive production, another part of it can always be explained by capital's necessary tendency to subsume new areas of social life. Social functions and exchange systems get money forms. "Zero" level of expectation can thus consist of rich forms of interaction, as well as poverty. Because of this dual nature of growth, the economic output seems a bad indicator for a "baseline". Growth does not start from a zero level of output, but from a zero level of *formal market output*.

So other conceptual apparata are needed for defining a baseline. An alternative for such a "baseline of legitimate expectation", used by for example Pogge, is the concept of the state of nature. The use of this concept was common prior to the prevalence of the economic discourse. Indeed, if we go back to European political theory prior to the birth of economics, the description of a "state of nature" looks quite different to contemporary thought.

The most often utilised philosophical tool for assessing harm in early modernity was the idea of a social contract. The social contract was expected to

be advantageous for all parties involved, and indeed this was the very justification of the contract. The argument for the legitimacy of a political system was straight-forward: if a group of people, or an individual, end up in a state of society being worse off than they would be in a state of nature, such people are harmed by the political structures, and the existing social contract ceases to be legitimate. So defining "state of nature" was a matter of describing the minimum level of goods men could legitimately expect to possess.[337] Rawls refers to this tradition when arguing that a society is a "system of co-operation for mutual benefit".

The need for a moral baseline applies to any notion of harm. For example if a mob beats me on the street, they quite obviously are harming me. But even to say this, we have to agree that one has a right to avoid physical injury.

The arguments about what people can be thought to have possessed in a state of nature was very different from a description of universal poverty. John Locke, for example, described the state of nature to be already a state of social co-operation, and made some effort to emphasise the notion of self-preservation. Locke argued the society should not *deprive* men of basic means of subsistence, "meat and drink"[338]. But if this is a matter of deprivation, it also has to be assumed that men do possess the means to obtain "meat and drink", if they are not deprived of them. For Locke, even the invention of money does not justify depriving men of these basic means. On the contrary, the legitimacy of government and the economy rests on the criteria that self-preservation is not threatened.

So a state of nature can be seen as a state in which men possess the means of self-preservation. Consequentially, if one lacks the very essential means to maintain her life, it can be concluded from this viewpoint that the present system is morally wrong and indeed such person is harmed. A relevant baseline for not being harmed then would be not a state of "original poverty" of $0 income, but a state in which men possess the relevant means of subsistence – whatever these might be in different social contexts. (Of course the economically and politically relevant means of subsistence vary a lot between different social contexts, and cannot be reduced to a universal "poverty line"). Anything below this level is a strong indication that the person is harmed by the political structures, and that the legitimacy of the political system is questionable.

The idea of self-preservation, oddly, seems to be more widely held in the context of states rather than individuals. According to very common ideas in international relations, states have the right to self-preservation, for example by defending themselves against foreign military aggression. The justification is based on the fact that foreign military aggression can lead to state to be taken over, and thus vanish. If one accepts this, it is quite extraordinary if one does not take the same principle to apply to individual human beings, who are, after

337 Pogge 2002;137-139
338 Locke 1960; 303-304

all, the primary agents of morality[339]. And very essential in the self-preservation of an individual human being is access to nutrition.

The idea of progress also includes beliefs about the (post)colonial subjects' "original state". Even though no such original state of affairs can be located, these ideas are significant for subjunctive assessments of harm, in other words, would the people be better off if some earlier arrangement would have continued undisturbed. By assuming that the starting point of progress was a more or less Hobbesian state of nature, the colonists could easily justify their presence.

So there are two ways of assessing a moral baseline for not being harmed. The first is moral, meaning that it is discussed in moral terms, such as basic needs. This I already referred to at the beginning of this chapter. The second is historical – given the actual history, what expectations are realistic? To some extent these have to overlap, if the problem of unrealistic expectations is to be avoided. As already pointed out, if there are not enough resources for all, not having enough resources cannot necessarily be a case of being harmed. While it can be argued that history is of no relevance for harm, the case for the baseline is considerably stronger if it seems plausible from both moral and historical baseline. The problem of state of nature baseline is that it confuses these two. It remains unclear, if state of nature is a description of a historical situation of a moral ideal.

As noted, from a moral perspective history does not matter, since history can be a history of harming others. For instance, if someone in the 18th century would have argued that there have always been slaves, and the slaves do better than they historically did, this would not have been a sufficient argument to conclude that slaves are not harmed. Pogge discusses this problem polemically, asking us to imagine a situation in which the slaves' position was significantly improved. "Do they [the improved conditions] weaken, *in any way*, the slaves' moral claim to legal freedom? Or do they support, *in any way*, a moral claim by the citizenry [...] to perpetuate the institutional order that facilitated and enforced the enslavement of blacks?"[340]

In this case, the relevant moral baseline stipulates that a lack of personal freedom shows that the person is harmed. But when it comes to meeting basic needs, what does history tell us? Studies have revealed that for example hunter-gatherers were quite well fed, and indeed did not spend more than four hours a day collecting food, leaving a lot of eatable food uneaten, as they preferred more savoury meals[341]. Similarly many nomad peoples have been able to maintain a healthy diet by precautionary measures that have maintained their livelihood during difficult times[342]. So it is at least doubtful, if historical reality can be legitimately seen as a state of constant hunger and misery.

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339 Ochieng'-Odhiambo 2005; 99-100, 105-107
340 Pogge 2005a; 58
341 Sahlins 2005; 3-19
342 Arnold 1988; 48-50

Of course, people did starve historically, too. Yet one has to look for relevant reasons for this hunger. It seems that the causes have rarely been the peasants' inability to produce food, or natural factors. Rather, hunger was more often caused by high taxation by feudal lords, and warfare, ie political reasons, which can well be understood as harm[343]. Thus it seems that most hunger in history can be explained as generated by harm. Usually hungry people, including in Europe, have been peasants, since peasants were and are easiest to control politically. Hunger has often been purposefully used as an efficient tool for political submission[344]. Of course, hunger is not the only basic need, so this argument that we are referring to historical harm instead of a morally neutral starting point, is to some extent preliminary.

The moral question thus is, could the poor have fed themselves, historically and presently, if given the chance? Could they access decent housing, education, health care and such without overt power imbalances that keep them poor? Given the existing resources and power imbalances, it is difficult to answer no.

## 5.8 Defining harm 2: Examples

What does it mean that someone is harmed? It is one thing to discuss the implications of harm already committed, and another to discuss refraining from harm[345]. Refraining from harming or from contributing to harm is a very minimum requirement of ethics and social justice. Yet, there is need for clarification of the notion of harm. By rough categorisation, being harmed can mean either a failure to meet a moral baseline, or being under worse conditions than before, because of some act or arrangement by an other agent.

I will start by the latter case. Imagine that person A lives in a house she has built herself and works at village B, looking after her family by gaining the income. Because of an extension of a mine, A's house will be demolished and access to village B restricted to mineworkers only, causing existing jobs to vanish. A is forced to move to another location far away. There, with considerable efforts, A builds a new house for her family and manages to get a job, yet a more physically demanding one with considerably lower salary. This salary is yet just enough for her to feed her family, although making ends meet is a constant struggle. In such a case, A can be seen to be harmed by the extension of the mine. This can be seen as harm in the "interest-thwarting" sense[346]. It would be in A's interest to remain in her house and keep her job. This would be highly important for both her and her family's overall wellbeing.

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343 Arnold 1998; 52-57
344 Ibid., 97-99
345 Williams 1985
346 Feinberg 1984

Another way of defining harm is one regarding a baseline for harm. Referring exclusively to a baseline, the scenario above would not have necessarily counted as harm. In this scenario, we are not referring to person's preferences, but a minimal level of certain goods constituent of decent life which any person can expect to possess. Consider again an example. Person B is constantly malnourished because of inadequate salary she receives as a sharecropper. Neither can she afford essential medication in case of illness, schooling for her children or other such basic goods. As the landowner C, whom B works for, is very wealthy, he could choose to pay B enough to meet such basic needs, yet C chooses not to. In this scenario, B's working conditions have never got worse, rather they have been always similarly inadequate, or perhaps they have even slightly improved at some point. C pays B as well as C's father already paid B's father. In this case, even without any decrease in B's living standard, C is harming B, because of B's failure to meet a minimum baseline of decent life and C's obvious role in bringing about this situation.

In B's case, there is an easily definable agent, the landowner, who causes the harm, as defined by the baseline notion, to B. We can imagine the situation of B with no individual landowner C with such a dominant position. Perhaps B is receiving her modest income from several sources, by working for several employers. No matter how much she would extend her working day, she is unable to make ends meet. The political system explicitly or implicitly legitimises the system. In such a case it can be said that the political system harms person B, and this can be shown by referring to her failure to achieve a material minimum required for decent life.

While case A might be intuitively more appealing to some for showing that harm is committed, the subjunctive understanding of harm leads to difficulties related to the problem, what kinds of interests are relevant in this scenario. Consider the case of person D, who enjoys playing golf with his friends on Sundays. Because of a discovery of valuable minerals in the soil, a mining company buys the land of the golf field that is closest to D's home. Consequently, D has to spend an additional 2 hours driving each Sunday to reach the second-closest golf course, while it would be in his interests to spend that two hours of his day in the pub with his friends. We would not consider D's interests being thwarted as alarming as we would consider A's interests in her case, and definitely would not think of the interests thwarted being "vital".

In referring to harm as interest-thwarting, we note that we need a background theory of what kinds of interests are significant enough that their thwarting can be considered as the person being harmed. Also, a similar theory ought to inform what kinds of interests are significant enough to be considered even though the agent whose possible harm we are considering does not actually have such significant interests, as in the case of B, who might well have adapted to his situation, seeing it as natural. Consequentially, the theory of will end up resembling very closely, if not being identical to, a baseline theory of harm.

## 5.9 Defining harm 3: Negative rights

Harming, by definition, means clearly a breach of one's negative duties, and there have to be corresponding negative rights. When identifying key goods of human wellbeing, there is some conventional wisdom of what belongs to the scope of negative rights and what to the scope of positive rights. While the philosophical distinction refers to distributional patterns (ie is something taken away to an agent or given to her), typically, anything material, typically acquired via the market falls in this outlook to the category of positive rights. Yet there are good reasons to question this conventional wisdom, and rather argue that anything vital for human rights spells to some extent negative right. This, again, reveals our understanding of the agent. I will take nutrition as an example of this definitional problem.

Some contemporary human rights researchers, such as Rolf Künnemann, make the distinction between the right to food and the right to feed oneself. This distinction is highly relevant. The right to food implies simply that one gets enough food; the right to feed oneself that one is not deprived of means of getting nutrition. This is an important distinction, since the choice of perspective implies how we regard hungry human beings. Are they merely recipients of food, or active subjects? The empirical description of the situation can be equally important as the moral arguments.

According to Künnemann, "the key term of human rights is not the absence of deprivation. The key term is [...] the absence of oppression ... Oppression literally means 'pushing people down' below a certain existential threshold or 'not allowing them to come up' to attain this basic human status"[347]. "The states' obligation is not to provide a basic status to people as 'objects', but to enable them as 'subjects' to acquire the basic status"[348]. Thus if there is a negative right related to adequate nutrition (being able to feed oneself), it translates as refraining from pushing the subjects below this existential threshold, rather than making the effort of lifting people above the threshold (providing food).

This distinction is important since it allows us to discuss the lack of means to nutrition as a violation of a *negative* right. Why should nutrition be seen as a positive right? Typically everybody uses their freedom to obtain food, be the means getting paid for doing philosophical research or by cultivating land. Hungry people do their best to "come up" from below this existential threshold. The matter is more than simply a choice of words. The right to feed oneself is a liberty-right, and a liberty-right can only be breached by actively denying the subject her possibility of practising this right. If a negative right (liberty-right) is breached, there has to be some agent actively harming the rights-bearer.

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347 Künnemann 1998; 168

348 ibid., 171

In his discussion of national welfare systems in a national context, Jeremy Waldron has argued for a similar approach. In his "two stories of charity" Waldron points out that meeting basic human needs can be seen, depending on the viewpoint, as letting the poor help themselves, rather than giving to the poor. In Waldron's stories a needy man finds a shelter and food belonging to another person. In the first story the food is given to him, in the other he is not prevented from helping himself to food. On the other hand, in the first story, choosing to deprive the man of food would be caused by the owner not doing anything; in the other, by the owner using force to throw the man out[349]. Now the question is, which of the two stories is analogically more accurate in describing the case of poverty?

Yet the right to feed oneself says yet nothing about the legitimate means to feed oneself. If I steal your food, I am feeding myself, yet I am not practising a legitimate right. Here an important aspect of Waldron's argumentation should be notified. Waldron argues that creating effective welfare systems are a way of making sure that violation of laws is *not* justified. If someone going hungry steals food, we might be uncertain about whether the person actually did wrong, given that no effective welfare systems are in place. If the right to feed oneself by legitimate means is in place, this uncertainty ought not to bother us – we know that stealing is illegitimate.

But what does it mean to see hunger as matter of the agent being deprived of the means to feed oneself? The notion has to be extended further from cases of direct confiscation of food. A typical case, and a good political starting point, of letting one feed herself, would be guaranteeing peasants' access to land. At least if lands have been arbitrarily confiscated at some point, the means to feed oneself have been unjustifiably weakened until some plausible form of land reform has been carried out. This is recognised by most scholarship on hunger. "For a considerable number of countries there is hardly any serious expert who believes that these countries will be able to implement the right to feed oneself for the rural masses in the foreseeable future without an agrarian reform"[350]. To fail to proceed with such measures means clearly upholding a political system in which people are not allowed to feed themselves.

## 5.10 Progress versus baseline

As shown before, some philosophers argue in favour of an "improvement thesis" as an attempt to show that harm cannot be committed. It is of course positive, if the trend is towards a better situation – given that relevant things are measured. Yet a positive trend says nothing about if a minimum standard has been met. It is logically important to make the distinction between a trend and a moral baseline. The point of this distinction is that people may be

349 Waldron 1993

350 Künnemann 1998; 175, see also Moore Lappe et al 1998; 92-94

harmed, even though their situation is improving. The relevant comparison, therefore, is the comparison between the present situation and a relevant moral minimum, rather than between the present situation and a past situation at some point.

To show two different approaches to this issue, I will make short quotation's from Thomas Pogge's and Jagdish Bhagwati's writings. Both discuss a similar kind of issue with examples they think of as relevant, but see their examples very differently in terms of moral status. Pogge's comment is a reply to Mathias Risse, who argues that the positive trend in income shows that the global poor are not harmed. Pogge writes:

"Imagine [...] a human world whose inhabitants have just sprung into existence. In this world, the more powerful whites impose an institutional order that facilitates and enforces the enslavement of blacks. This order and its imposition are unjust. [...] At this point, Risse's doppelgänger enters the scene, arguing that this conclusion about the imaginary world without history cannot be simply transferred into the actual world of 1845, where the citizenry of the United States was imposing an institutional order that facilitated and enforced the enslavement of blacks. The actual world was different, says the doppelgänger, because it had a history: [...] the nutritional situation of slaves had steadily improved, and brutal treatment, such as rape, whipping, and splitting of families, had also declined.[...] Do they [the improvements] weaken, in any way, the slaves' moral claim to legal freedom?"[351]

Bhagwati, on the other hand, refers to the idea of locally relevant alternative, in arguing that for example the consequences of multinational corporations' increased activities in a country have to be discussed by referring to the locally relevant alternatives to these activities. Stipulating this scheme of relevant alternatives, Bhagwati goes on to exclaim: "Now, if there were slavery elsewhere and the workers were whipped daily, as the Romans did with their galley slaves, then the fact that the multinationals were whipping them only every other day would hardly turn away the critics!"[352], meaning that the critics really ought to turn away at the sight of this improvement. The critic concerned with justice and morality could of course ask, why should it turn away the critics, because whipping is a practice that is immoral. Bhagwati seems to suppose that there always is a set of locally relevant alternatives, which are highly restricted, and such a whipping example is similarly based on the presupposition that a scenario without whipping would not be a "locally relevant alternative".

Remember the discussion in chapter three about realistic alternatives and how the existing power imbalances affect them. The notion of locally relevant alternatives suffers from the same possible bias. It is a problem of definitional power as such, what alternative situations are taken as "locally relevant". The notion, in order to be feasible, cannot be restricted to locally *existing* alternatives. Yet how far should relevant possible alternatives extend, is a

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351 Pogge 2005b; 57-58

352 Bhagwati 2004; 172

problem which cannot be settled. But Bhagwati's notion seems to rely on given alternatives. Using his example, why would it be impossible to merely quit whipping the galley slaves?

The matter, ought the present situation be compared with a set of locally relevant alternatives, a previous historical position or a moral baseline, is discussed also by Amartya Sen. Sen argues that the real question of justice is not, whether the poor are or are not getting marginally richer. Rather, the question is about justice within the distributive system, and it is out of point to compare it with any other system[353]. Sen highlights his position by what he calls "the family analogy": "To argue that a particularly unequal and sexist family arrangement is unfair, one does not have to show that women would have done comparatively better had there been no families at all, but only that sharing benefits is seriously unequal in that particular arrangement. [...] Likewise, one cannot rebut the charge that the global system is unfair by showing that even the poor gain something from the global contracts and are not necessarily made poorer."[354]

Following Sen's argument, it could be argued that progress, whether real or statistically distorted, is irrelevant to the underlying question of social justice. The fairness of each distributive system can be judged only by looking at the system itself, rather than previous systems. This is especially important to note since the goods and burdens are distributed in very different ways in different distributive systems. For example, in other systems nutrition might have been more secure, while in others it has to be purchased from the market. Some systems do produce more, but are totally dependent on economic currents in far-away countries for the survival of a high number of citizens. Progress between such systems is very hard to compare, and all comparisons will rely on somewhat problematic data.

## 5.11 Summary and conclusions to chapter five

Harm can be analysed in several ways. We can make the distinction between the subjunctive sense of harm and the baseline sense of harm. The prior means that a person is currently worse off than she would be, if some event had not taken place. This notion can be done with or without reference to the personal preferences. The latter means that an individual fails to meet a baseline, under which any agent can be seen as harmed by someone/something, as this someone/something is preventing the person from assessing goods, which any person can be expected to struggle to access.

Subjunctive sense of harm seems as the clearest case of harm. Yet such cases do not say anything about if the harm is serious; it can well mean that a person is incapable of doing something that contributes to her wellbeing, but

353 Sen 2004; 112-113
354 Sen 2004; 113

has little if any moral significance. There are several such cases, which cannot be assessed as morally very serious, as interests can be trivial and pointed towards luxuries. Especially when discussing poverty, it seems that we cannot merely refer to such cases of being harmed.

Yet it is quite difficult to define, where to set a baseline, under which an agent is necessarily harmed. Pogge's idea of referring to basic human rights here is one feasible option; I have mainly referred to relevant means for meeting one's basic needs. Others would include some kind of notion of "state-of-nature", meaning an imaginary state in which no interference would have taken place. Noteworthy in the baseline notion of harm is that improvement as such makes no difference to if harm has been committed. As noted with Pogge's slavery analogy, it is the baseline rather than any current trend that is decisive in the moral assessment.

Harm does not follow directly from other's benefit. This can be shown with several examples of benefiting from past harm. As there is no causal connection between benefiting and harm to others, merely showing that one is benefiting by a system or event does not means that this harms others. Thus Pogge's argument, stretching the fact that "we" benefit from the current world order, is not morally conclusive when it comes to establishing that harm is committed. Yet a clear connection between benefit and harm is evident in cases in which limited resources are distributed. With global levels of consumption of material resources reaching alarmingly high levels, increased consumption can directly cause harm elsewhere by limiting the available resource base. While high levels of consumption do not causally mean that harm in the baseline sense takes place, rising levels of consumption make this more likely.

As noted already in the beginnings of this chapter, the notion of harm provides one minimum criterion of global justice. If it can be seen that no harm to others is committed, one minimum criterion is satisfied, yet this is far from sufficient criterion. Other criteria derive from for example egalitarian concerns and equalising power imbalances, discussed in the previous chapter. Together these form a framework of poverty alleviation, as defined in chapter 1.

# VI AGENTS AND DUTIES

So far, I have analysed poverty and how it relates to power and harm. But referring to injustice in itself does not suffice, as the theory has to also answer the remedial question, who ought to do what. Namely, we are facing the problem of moral duties. It has to be asked, who or what are the agents of justice. This leads to the general problem of social ontology. Are the agents of justice merely human beings, or do nations states, companies, organisations and so forth qualify as subjects of justice, meaning that they potentially have duties and rights. If so, how are these subjects different from individuals when it comes to their duties and rights? Also related to this question is the problem of achieving agency: how do people (or institutions) become subjects of justice in the first place?

In chapter four, I noted that often injustices in the global sphere are brought about also by the conduct of agents acting within the existing institutional structure or "playing field", and the existing power relations, rather than merely injustices of the institutional structure or the playing field. Such a notion places an extra importance on the notion of duties of agents. This was yet in the context of discussions of the conduct of nation-states and their representatives. The duties of individual agents are necessarily different, as the conduct of an individual has different significance on phenomena such as global poverty.

Apparently not all problems relating to poverty can be solved without changing the institutions within the country in question. While the local institutions are always the imminent agents causing the harm, external institutions and policies doubtlessly affect these often to a great extent. Yet there are several positions on what the precise role of these external factors are. Of course the impact of policies external to the poor countries have to be seen in the correct scope. Poverty can well be created by domestic measures. It would be difficult to seriously argue that poverty in North Korea, for example, would be created, or even contributed to, by externally caused harm. National policies can seriously harm people and create obstacles for escaping poverty. This fact makes it difficult to discuss the role of the global order by merely looking at the

number of people below an existential threshold. It is fair to say that such people are harmed, but the role of external features is not necessarily great.

## 6.1 Agents of justice

When discussing the responsibilities of agents, the issue of who ought to do what seems to divide philosophers writing on the issue in two schools. I will call them individualist and institutionalist. The former schools argue that it is with individual morality that we ought to be primarily concerned. Thus, problems of global poverty and justice are primarily problems of lacking individual contributions of especially charitable giving[355]. The institutional school, on the other hand, argues that only changing institutional patterns and agreements can bring about lasting change. According to the argument, the world order has been formed to serve the interests of powerful nations, and this is reflected in world politics, world economy etc[356]. Thus the institutional structures of the present world are heavily biased against the poor nations and poor people. Thomas Pogge and Andrew Kuper[357], among others, have defended this position.

These differences in analysis of requirements of justice lead also to differences in analysis of distributing responsibilities. Practically, large institutional changes changes of ethos in governmental level, in addition to shifts in the existing power balance. Institutional changes can also be seen as a different strategy from change of ethos, if "the basic structure" and morality are analytically contrasted[358]. Yet, as noted in the chapter on four, the conduct of individual agents within the coercive institutional structure can be equally important, or even more important, than the institutional structure itself, given the complexity of the global playing field. Thus, responsibilities of individual agents are important. It seems that if the conduct of individual agents are based on self-maximisation and this is seen as legitimate, the institutional order will end up being unjust, no matter what its institutional virtues[359]. This leaves the problem to be formulated as, whose conduct ought to change? Whose conduct we ought to be concerned with?

In any theory of justice, it is important to have a theoretical understanding of who are the relevant agents or parties. In other words, who are the agents with conflicting interests to be solved, and who can claim rights or goods and on whom can duties be imposed. While traditional theories of justice start from the assumption that relevant agents in the field on justice include only individual human beings (who are always the ultimate subjects of justice), a

355 Singer 1972, Unger 2000, Cullity 2004
356 For example Hurrell 2007
357 Pogge 2002, Pogge 2005a, Pogge 2005b, Kuper 2002
358 Cohen 2000; 130-132, Baynes 2006
359 Cohen 2000; 130-132

global theory of justice calls for a more complex social ontology. In some theories, like in Rawls' Law of peoples, it is the nation-states which are seen as the only players in the field of global justice – although Rawls prefers to call them "peoples".[360] Yet Rawls' theory runs into problems by abstracting the theory so that individual human beings have a role only as part of a people[361]. Therefore, it seems that both individuals and nation-states need to be regarded as players in the field of global justice.

Some philosophers have wondered, if even this is enough. Most notably, Onora O'Neill calls for a theory of justice that would accommodate all agents that have the power to further the causes of justice. O'Neill argues that duties ought to be distributed also to such players as non-governmental organisations and corporations, which can be even more powerful than official governmental structures especially in the so-called "failed states". According to O'Neill, "it is the specific capabilities of agents and agencies in specific situations, rather than their abstract capacities or their aggregate power that are relevant to determining which obligations of justice they can hold and discharge"[362]. Especially international non-governmental organisations can have a great role in being an agent of justice, if the formal state power is weak.

O'Neill's position reflects an understanding of justice, though, according to which it is material distribution and securing of basic rights which social justice is mostly concerned about. Yet the problem of justice is not merely a problem of distribution. While delivering goods to certain areas with acute famine, say, is a crucial task, this concerns "only" humanitarian aid. In a wider setting, there are two separate, yet practically overlapping, questions. First, how do different agents distribute goods. And second, how are the rules governing the distributive patterns created and what are the underlying power structures.

While the first can be answered by referring to distributive patterns, the second question cannot be intelligibly discussed outside the context of power. For example, we can ask how the World bank should act in order to promote fair distributions of basic goods in Africa, noting empirically that the World Bank has very much power concerning this problem. On the other hand, it is a fair question, why ought the World Bank have such a great power over politics and lives in Africa, as it has today? O'Neill's theory seems to lead to taking the existing power positions as empirical observations and deriving duties from them, rather than questioning the legitimacy of the existing power positions. This approach faces the problem of implicitly justifying the existence of such power structures as the power of multinational corporations over poor people. If it can be argued that such power structures ought not to exist in the first place, it is questionable how O'Neill's strategy could inform social justice.

O'Neill's strategy might be justifiable indeed in the short term. Also for example Lisa Fuller has argued that a strategy of relying on NGOs as agents of justice as the most politically feasible strategy, arguing that institutional

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360 Rawls 1999

361 Nussbaum 2006; 238-255

362 O'Neill 1986; 189

reforms are attractive only in ideal theory[363]. Indeed, if an NGO is capable of distributing goods in an area where the government lacks this capacity, will, or both, it seems necessary to reconsider the responsibilities of that particular NGO. Yet a serious question arises, namely, how can it be prevented that such temporary solutions do not become permanent? If an NGO is seen as responsible and government is not, what will be needed for the responsibility to shift to the government? After all, no matter how good-willing an NGO is, it's functions are more dependent on its funders' than the recipients' hopes. Additionally, O'Neill seems to consider as a matter of justice only the distribution of goods, rather than political participation. Does justice really take place, if you are given certain goods valuable for your life, without ever giving you a say on issues concerning you?

What is correct in O'Neill's argument is that corporations are not always held properly responsible of their actions in the present order. The role of corporations in political philosophy is largely invisible. Several theories of political philosophy, and especially economics, assume the agents of justice and market exchange to be largely individuals. This supposition conceals the fact that much of economic activity is controlled by large corporations, which have the rights of "artificial persons", but do not have the corresponding responsibilities on their actions. The abbreviation "ltd" means, in fact, "limited liability". Yet it is unclear, how the corporations ought to realise these responsibilities. If it means that we are mainly pointing out that responsibilities exist, we are not getting far. It is very different to argue that corporations have responsibilities, than arguing that political structures ought to be designed so that the responsibilities or corporations are realised.

If poverty is understood as a problem of lack of power, it is exactly power which needs to be addressed. Thus the matter turns out to be a question of achieving agency, meaning how the impoverished could create an ability to demand changes in the current system. In this case, the most important duty for others is to refrain from hindering this attempt by enforcing the existing order. Being an agent of justice in indeed a twofold problem, meaning not only responsibilities of the rich, but also rights of the poor – this is what "agency" intuitively means. So it has to be asked, how does one become an agent of justice? Regarding the matter of agency, I believe it is useful to contrast O'Neill's account of agents of justice with Rainer Forst's theory[364]. While O'Neill seeks the agents of justice by asking, which are the agents capable of delivering goods necessary for meeting basic needs and basic human rights, Forst asks how do individuals become agents of justice, meaning being in a position to claim goods and rights from the government or other institutions. Forst points out that acts of charity or mere distribution of goods do not suffice in creating agency. Agency means being able to claim rights and being in power to define oneself and one's position. Forst makes his argument by picturing an imaginary trial of social justice, in which repressed workers are given options of lawyers.

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363 Fuller 2005; 293

364 Forst 2005

Non of the humanitarian arguments seem plausible to capture the situation – the worker would need power to frame the problem in his own vocabulary, ie become an agent of justice.

## 6.2 Practical example on O'Neill's argument

To illuminate and further elaborate O'Neill's position and its possible problems, I will take a practical example, which is as little fictional as possible. Take the Niger delta area, which is an oil-drilling area with local rural populations, mostly ethic minorities, which have had very little political power in the country ruled by military dictators and corrupt governments. These peoples are not only very poor, but their surrounding environment has also been seriously damaged by constantly leaking oilpipes. This can be seen as harm to these people for a good reason, since it leads not only to compromising health but also to food shortages, as agricultural lands are destroyed. Practically, all oil-drilling activity is the monopoly of the Shell Corporation, which retains its powerful position in a very close co-operation with the local government and local economic elite, which in turn benefits substantially from this co-operation.

Now think of a situation in which there is a food shortage in the delta. Whose responsibility would it be to bring food to the villagers? The Shell Corporation has the equipment for moving in the region, and indeed the funds, maybe more so than the local government. The case is very clear from the basis of O'Neill's theory: if the corporation is the only agent with the logistical capacity to bring food to the area, it clearly has the duty to see that food is brought. If the responsibilities are divided on the basis of actual capacity, and we accept that duties ought to be assigned to also other agents than exclusively governments, there is no question about the conclusion. Indeed, this would be perhaps necessary to avoid a temporary local food crisis.

But then, where are we getting at? It is very unlikely that even if the villagers would get food distributed by the corporation, they would see the situation as just. This is because the direct reason of the food shortage is because of the company activity. Additionally, the co-operation between the corporation and the government have excluded them from both economic benefits from oil drilling on their lands and possibilities to affect political decisions. It is fair to say that without Shell corporation they would be better able to support themselves. Indeed, Pogge used exactly Nigeria as an example of how the global order encourages "predatory" governments coming to power and holding on to it[365].

So it seems that there is at least another duty the corporation holds, which is the negative duty not to act so that the livelihoods of the local population are harmed. This negative duty holds prior to the positive duty to provide food to the population. While this positive duty can to some extent be seen as

[365] Pogge 2002; 142-143

compensatory to the harm done, such positive acts typically do never fully compensate for the harm done. This is also yet to say nothing about the larger political context. The questions related to this include, why ought such corporation be the only agent with power to provide food – why this situation ought to be accepted. Additionally, the whole political system of oil revenues lead to political marginalisation, as shown by Pogge[366].

O'Neill's argument seems to run into a dilemma: it is in any given situation very appealing, perhaps even showing the only morally acceptable strategy, yet it always fails to bring about social justice. This is because of the reason provided earlier: the agents living in poverty are only seen as potential receivers of goods, not as active political agents. Similarly, the only role related to distributive justice for corporations, governments and such "agents of justice" in this theory is seen as providers of goods, never that of refraining from harming others. It is important to note that it is perhaps the most important question, who has the power to do what, and there are many cases in which the fact that some company is the only agent able to deliver goods shows an injustice as such. So O'Neill's problem is that she starts from accepting as a given fact a root cause for poverty.

## 6.3 Autonomous agents

From the viewpoint of social ontology, the main problem can be stated as follows. If we believe in an universalistic ethic, and I see no reason why we should not, we have to take individual human beings as always the primary agents of justice. However agents are affected by some institutional solution, be the agents nation-states, corporations, NGOs or whatever. The positions of such agents can only be instrumental to the enhanced wellbeing of the primary agents of morality. Yet the fact is that actual distributive structures and institutions affecting the lives of individuals are mainly at nation-state level, and as much "global governance" has been discussed, there is not in sight such a world-order in which the nation-state would wither or even significantly loose its importance.

The problem of global justice is often reflected as a problem of autonomy of states (or peoples, in Rawlsian terms). From this viewpoint, the problem is rationalised in lines of "ought the nation-states themselves decide, how do distribute their resources (and how to organise the government etc)". The question forms an inevitable dilemma. On the other hand, autonomy seems to be an important value for moral theory as such, on the other, autonomous decisions on the use of resources tend to uphold the problem of poverty, which we ethically ought to do something about.

Indeed, the main problem is the distribution of goods within "third world" nation-states. Yet the notion of autonomy in regard to national policy

366 Ibid.

does not seem to correspond with reality. The actions of different agents (governments, corporations, individuals) affect the available resources and distribution of resources in third world countries. It is exactly the vulnerability to outside powerwhich gives a third world country its disadvantaged standing. The main question is therefore not *if* outsiders ought to try to influence the domestic distribution of a third world country. Rather, it should be asked, how to cease using such power.

Additionally, it can be questioned, *whose* autonomy is being promoted. The respect for autonomy can imply very different policies, depending on whose autonomy we are speaking about. The respect of national autonomy can lead to conclusions, in which highly repressive governments are accepted as legitimate players in the international sphere. By referring to national autonomy, even such repressive governments which are implicitly supported by the international order can be paradoxically accepted in the name of autonomy. The implicit support can mean several kinds of measures of contribution, discussed in the previous chapter. The practical result can be strengthening of the colonial scars, as the dysfunctionalities of the governmental system in poor countries and the rule of local elites are seen as an autonomous choice. If, on other other hand, respect for autonomy means essentially individual autonomy, normative conclusions are possibly very different. From this viewpoint, international incentives have to be thought from a very different viewpoint.

These two views of autonomy initially seem as contrasting, but this is not necessarily the case. This is because affecting the political structures within third world countries has mainly taken place in the form of promoting authoritarian leaders. This has been because of cold war politics (for example Zaire), securing the flow of cheap resources (for example Nigeria), or creating an "attractive investment climate" (for example China). Thus respect for autonomy can take place either in the form of political non-intervention, or by promoting the autonomy of the suppressed groups. Giving incentives for authoritarian governments to stay in power and calling for their autonomy is a breach towards both of these understanding of autonomy.

## 6.4 The nature of duties

What is the nature or basis of our duties towards the impoverished? The most common starting point for answering this question has been the distinction between positive and negative, or in Kantian terms, perfect and imperfect duties[367]. This distinction has been discussed already when analysing the notion of harming the global poor, as an analysis of the moral situation, alternative to seeing the problem as a breach of a positive duty, failing to assist the global poor. (Below, I will discuss responsibilities rather than duties. The

[367] Stratton-Lake 2004; 19

interchangeability of these concepts can, of course, be debated.) This is not a typical either/or –question, since the advocates of the theory of negative duties do hold that there are additional positive duties. Yet negative duties do place a stronger moral obligation on us, and if there are political patterns, which can be identified as bringing about breaches of negative duties, these patterns ought to be remedied seriously. Do we fail to remedy global poverty (because of incapability or unwillingness), or do we actively produce poverty and inequality?

The difference between negative and positive duties is sometimes in ethics called the doctrine of doing and allowing. An illuminating way to demonstrate the difference are Kai Draper's example cases, called "no heroics" and "shield"[368]. In the "no heroics" scenario, "a deadly arrow is headed right at Jones[...] the arrow will kill him unless you sacrifice your own life [...] Your choose to preserve your own life". In "shield", "the arrow is headed at you. The arrow will kill you unless you pull Jones in front of you. You choose to preserve your own life". Draper's example are, intendedly, extreme cases, and typically doing and allowing are not matters of life and death to the moral agent in question. Yet Draper's examples highlight the moral difference between action and inaction, disregarding the outcome of the situation. Although a rigid consequentialist might argue that as the moral status of an action is determined by its outcome, there is no difference between these scenarios, it seems intuitively correct to argue that there is at least some difference in the actions.

Another, and more analytical way of putting the same issue is the distinction made by Christian Barry. Barry identifies three reasons for holding an agent responsible for other agents' condition. (Apart from such responsibilities, people have primary responsibility for their own condition, and the responsibilities discussed here start from the presupposition that outside responsibility is relevant). Barry calls these association, capacity and contribution principles[369]. The association principle means having duties for the reason of belonging to the same community. This is a very common idea of justifying duties, which cosmopolitans have dismissed as nationalism. As there are several ways how non-members of a community can affect severely the conditions of people within a community, the community principle seems to allow for committing harm to others with no remedial responsibility assumed. This was discussed when referring to the Roman democracy.

Similarly, the association principle seems to hold to some extent (but only some), as there are some duties exclusively towards members of a closed community. Some duties are indeed derived from exactly community membership, such as membership in a family or association. Similarly to the notion of personal responsibility, responsibilities do not stop at national or other community borders, but it has to be asked, to what extent are responsibilities such that they only extend to one's community. These boundary-exceeding responsibilities then have to be analysed in more detail. As

368 Draper 2005; 253
369 C. Barry 2005

in Barry's categorisation, the major reasons for being responsible for others' plight are capacity and contribution. I will analyse these now in more detail.

The capacity principle means the notion, as Singer puts it, "if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening [...] we ought, morally, to do it"[370]. Such "can implies ought" -principle, supported also by for example Gerhard Øverland[371], makes no reference to the agents' role in causing the deprivations to be addressed. In several settings used frequently as examples in ethics, this principle seems intuitively strong. If I see a swimmer who is about to drown, the causal chain having lead to the situation is irrelevant from the viewpoint of my moral responsibility – I ought to rescue the swimmer since it is in my power to do so. Yet it is questionable, if causal mechanisms can be seen as irrelevant, when it comes to for example causing deprivation by imposing unfair agreements on others. The principle also faces a problem of limitless responsibilities. Practically, any individual in the global North would be morally responsible to share one's wealth until living in poverty oneself. (This is what Singer has been criticised for claiming).

Contribution principle is what is relevant when discussing harm to other agents. This means that an agent has remedial responsibility on the basis of having somehow been responsible for bringing about harm. In Barry's analysis, the sufficient condition for having remedial responsibility on the basis on contribution is that the agent's conduct has been causally relevant in bringing about the condition of another agent. Such conditions are easy to apply to individual cases of bringing about harm, yet the principle has been used to morally assess larger institutional structure. Most famously, Pogge argues that we contribute to the suffering of the global poor by actively upholding an unjust global order.

David Miller has argued that we ought to make the distinction between moral and causal responsibility. One can be causally responsible of another agents' harm or deprivation, even if one is not morally responsible – as in the case of an accident. Similarly, one can be morally responsible without being causally responsible, as in the case of having failed a duty to oversee that an accident does not take place. In Miller's example he takes his son and the son's friend to a park, and is unattentive while the son injures the other child in a boisterous game. So it seems that at least principally there can be contribution to others' harm without having a causal role in contributing to harm[372]. In world politics, examples of industrial disasters come to mind. For example Union Carbide, inc. was morally responsible for bringing about the death of thousands of residents of the city of Bhopal, as in was the company's responsibility to oversee that the toxic waste was properly storaged and handled, even though the causal blame might be on the Indian workers at the factory site[373]. While Miller's analysis is significant as such, it seems uncertain if

370 Singer 2000; 107
371 Överland 2005
372 Miller 2005; 455-457
373 LaPierre & Moro 2002

his argument avoids the notion of "causally relevant" used by Barry. A failure to see that an accident does not take place is not a causal reason for the accident, but might be causally relevant.

## 6.5 Capacity and agency

Barry's analysis is also partially grounded on the negative duties vs positive duties -debate. As When Singer argues that even though our duties are positive in nature, we have strong moral reasons for distributing away most of our income, he is taking a strong position in favour of the capacity argument. As mentioned, recently also Gerhard Øverland has defended this position by arguing that when assessing duties towards the poor, the severity and acuteness of the problems is more important in assessing our duties, than our actual role in contributing to the problem. Indeed, one can find examples of cases, in which a positive duty is stronger than a negative duty[374].

Øverland identifies two possible understandings of the moral significance of contribution. First that a "contributor to harm, rather than some bystander, has a stronger duty to assist those who are victims of his or her conduct", and second that "a contributor to harm has a stronger duty to assist those who are victims of his or her conduct, rather than to assist so other needy people"[375]. Øverland goes on to argue that contribution is not necessarily the primary reason for action when extreme poverty. He takes the severity and urgency of need to be a more important criterion for addressing the need, than the question, to whose plight have we contributed most.[376]

It is noteworthy that Øverland uses the word "to assist" when referring to suitable remedies, even though the duty to assist is exactly what positive duties, rather than contribution, brings about. (Although in a footnote he remarks "institutional reforms could very well be required[377]). Yet different kinds of duties bring about different kinds of remedial responsibilities. We have to make a distinction between moral relevance and remedial relevance of contribution.

By moral relevance I mean, whose condition should be addressed (the "who" question). By remedial relevance I mean that we always ought to look for right kinds of solutions to remedy the problems related to aspects of world poverty (the "how" question). After making the point that we have moral duties to alleviate poverty, often very unspecified ideas about how we ought to do that, are presented. Simply put, harming calls for refraining from harm, while failing to assist calls for assistance. As Øverland calls for assistance, it is quite natural to seek for problems which can be remedied by assistance. If we accept the notion that the poor are harmed by some political power structures

374 Satz 2002; 51-53
375 Øverland 2005; 301
376 Øverland 2005; 306
377 Ibid., 300

and arrangements, it is not "assisting" which ought to be done, but dismantling the harming structures. The only cases of harming in which Øverland's argument is relevant without question are cases of harm without responsible agents. In other cases, pointing out priorities of assistance is not significant, but it also has to be shown, how is assistance relevant for remedying harm. Or alternatively that assistance is relevant compensation for. Quite often, it is not.

This leads us back to the example from Nigeria provided above. Identification of the suffering people does not yet tell us, what to do. Practically, they can be either provided food or similar assistance or their situation can be improved by improving the environmental conditions caused to them by oil drilling by refraining from drilling, improving the quality of the pipes, or so on. As mere identification of the suffering does not guarantee the correct analysis, failing to analyse the harming practices causes a serious risk of prescribing inefficient remedies for poverty. The responsibility to refrain from harming is quite independent from the responsibility to assist.

How an individual is responsible for contributing to actions of a company, is of course unclear. When considering reasons for acting in the benefit of the impoverished, the reasons are similarly linked to what ought to be done. If, for example, consumer support for an unethically acting company causes indirect harm to local population, one ought to refrain from supporting such a company. This is en ethical duty unrelated to the general duty to assist.

This notion is highly important, since it reflects the idea we have about our duties, as well as the idea we have about poverty. The analysis of poverty informs directly the analysis of remedial responsibilities. Why are people poor? Is it because they have not received enough external aid, or because they are kept poor or pushed to be poor by some political forces or agents, as discussed in the previous chapter? If we want to discuss intelligibly our moral relation to other people, it is of great importance, do we understand these people as active or passive subjects.

When talking about remedial relevance, some important points need to be made. First, as the common phrase in ethics goes, ought implies can. If we ought to alleviate suffering, this means that it is in our power to do so. Singer puts this point explicitly: "if it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance, we ought to do it"[378]. Yet it is important also to discuss, how do we come to have this power. As much as how we use the power, it should be troubling, why have we come to a position, in which it is in our power to decide, if someone in a faraway country should live or not?

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[378] Singer 2000; 168

## 6.6 Excuses for not acting in accordance with responsibilities

Disregarding the difference between responsibilities to refrain from harming and responsibility to assist, we can discuss general ethical motivation to alter one's behaviour to act according to one's responsibilities. Ethical motivation can well be intuitive, as well as be grounded on arguments. It needs to be established that there are quite binding duties to alter one's behaviour in order to alleviate global poverty. When seeking grounds for moral action, several criticisms of stringent duties surface. A spectrum of different ideas is offered to explain, why there is no duty to act in the case of global poverty. These ideas may be comforting, but as I intend to show, they are difficult to defend. Thomas Pogge has presented his own list of typical counter-arguments; yet I will present a somewhat different list of arguments. The list includes what I take to be typical excuses for not altering one's behaviour, analyse them and point out their deficiencies. These excuses are quite a strong part of our everyday thinking, and deconstructing these believes is thus necessary. Analytically, I will follow the distinction of grounds of responsibility provided by Barry; each reason for moral action has its corresponding counter-arguments.

There are two reservations I want to make. First, the list of the excuses is of course my list and necessarily incomplete. Someone else might want to add yet another argument of the list, or formulate the ideas in a different manner. This is something I cannot help; I only can argue that according to my understanding, these arguments are the most typical ones.

Second, arguments that I find to be beyond the scope of (rational) morality are excluded. When arguing in the field of ethics, some things have to assumed, such as the existence of normativity in the first place and certain degree of rationality. There are, certainly, a wide list of arguments of against global responsibilities that don't fulfil these conditions. These would include for example cynical, Nietzschean ”every man for himself” arguments that question morality in the first place, or arguments by extremist sects ”morality is futile, since doomsday is tomorrow”. These, I believe, need not to be discussed here.

### 6.6.1 No association: “Internal problems”

The matter of where the responsibility lies is of course an important problem. A very commonly held idea is that sovereign national states are responsible for relieving the plight of their own citizens. This idea is strongly internalized in the idea of the system of national states. It is often argued that several problems which people face are ”internal problems” of the countries, and thus the responsibility must be a attained to these states.

This idea presents the world system in a very idealised form. The states are thought to be sovereign, and self-containing. Yet this is very far from the reality of the world. It is also difficult to argue convincingly that the governments are responsible for their lack of resources, especially if this is due

to unfair global arrangements. Moreover, the ”ought implies can” -thesis ought to hold also here: if some governments do not have the resources to provide even a minimum of decent life for its citizens, they cannot be held responsible for this.

It is also noteworthy that governments can have conflicting commitments. Take a case, in which a government has an international responsibility to service its debts, a general responsibility to protect private property and a moral responsibility to provide health-care to its citizens. If all these commitments cannot be kept, how ought the government to decide, which of the commitments is to have priority. If we argue that the government has the prior moral responsibility for seeing that the basic needs of the citizens are served, then these basic needs ought to have priority in government functions as well. Practically, external agents push heavily to prioritise international commitments, such as debt repayments. Poor countries are often poverty-stricken for the very reason that they cannot prioritise their responsibilities to their citizens over international pressures. Thus the argument of “no association” turns out to be an argument for refraining from harming.

Yet if moral theory starts from the idea that responsibility is a matter of power and influence, these questions need to be analysed. I would suggest what Nancy Fraser calls “the all-affected principle”[379] to serve as the starting point, rather than an a priori theory of states as always responsible agents. Hence what Pogge calls explanatory nationalism[380] could be avoided. Also, it is very questionable if a poor country can be seen as responsible for its lack of resources. While there might of course be political mistakes, which partly explain this lack, any way external processes cause this situation ought to be corrected, given that the lacking resources would be needed for causes of high moral priority[381].

### 6.6.2 No contribution: Nature and politics

Next, I want to take up the argument I believe to be the most common one in everyday thought. It is the matter of distorting the idea, which things belong to the realm of politics (and therefore, to the field of at least someone's responsibilities), and which things are plain accidental or natural.

We certainly all would agree that there are lot of harm, unfortunate and regrettable events and so on happening to people, for which no one is morally to blame. If I hit a passer-by on the street with my bicycle, I might be blamed for carelessness. Yet, the passer-by has suddenly and carelessly appeared in front of my bicycle, I might have done nothing wrong, yet causing the injury. Thus, a case of pure accident is a case where harm can be done without anyone being to blame.[382]

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379 Fraser 2005

380 Pogge 2002; 15

381 Sidgwick 2007; 436

382 Causation in itself may place some responsibility, but it seems intuitively clear that the responsibility is at least considerably weaker (cf Miller 2001; 458).

Yet in this example, there clearly is an agent (me), harming the passer-by, even though there is no moral responsibility for the harm involved. Yet also cases without any agent on which moral responsibilities can be placed, do occur. Typically, these are cases caused by natural calamities. A flood or drought can destroy a farmer's crop, people can get killed in an earthquake or landslide, and hurricanes can destroy people's property. In all these cases people do suffer, but there is no one who could be pointed out as agents responsible for causing this suffering[383]. Nature and politics can be seen as separate fields.

Friedrich von Hayek has made a similar argument regarding redistribution. According to Hayek, there are spontaneous orders and planned organisations[384]. A planned organisation is an organisation like the army of an office, and in this context questions concerning distribution can be intelligibly asked. On the other hand, a spontaneous order is like the nature. Hayek famously compared the distribution of income with the nature. As is a case of natural calamity, a low income can be regrettable or unfortunate, but it would be unintelligible to ask, whether it is just. Thus, for Hayek, no agent is morally responsible for the distribution of purchasing power.

I will not go in detail to Hayek's argument, but I wanted to present it in order to highlight the power of the idea of the non-political nature. As Hayek says, we might feel sympathy or compassion towards the victims of a natural disaster, we might want to help, but the matters of justice are not an issue there. Yet, what is important to note that pure "natural" phenomena are extremely rare, if even existent at all. Almost any "natural" disaster has an element of politics in it, although there is a general tendency not to see this particularly clearly.

Remember the discussion in chapter one on how apparently "purely natural" are politically conditioned. My point was that we have always to look for relevant explanations for events, rather that immediate explanations. Imagine again the unfortunate passer-by who gets hit by my bicycle. Now imagine that the passer-by ends up dying, and the doctor who performs the autopsy declares that the death was due to fractured bones and internal bleeding. This can well be a true statement about the case. Yet it says nothing about the reason what caused the internal bleeding. The relevant explanation to the death has not been offered, only an immediate explanation. This might well do within the field of medicine, but if I were to blame for the death, the juridical field would have to look for the relevant reason.

These analogies might seem quite far from the issue of responsibilities regarding global problems. Yet, in a closer inspection, similar problems arise within most natural catastrophes. Now if there is a severe drought in Ethiopia and several peasants end up dying, what is the relevant explanation for their

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383 By responsible agents I don't mean only human beings, but any agents that can bear moral responsibility, such as governemnts, NGOs, companies etc. Some people of course refute the possibility of non-human agents having responsibilities, but at least I don't want to rule out that possibility at this point.

384 Hayek 1973; 9-11

death? One could, of course, point out only to the drought and explain the event as purely natural. But on a closer analysis, there are lots of political issues at play.

If there is a severe drought in central Finland, we don't expect anyone to starve to death. The agricultural sector would suffer financial losses and the price of food would be likely to rise, but food supply from abroad to the food stores would continue, and thanks to our high purchasing power, it is unlikely that anyone starves. Similarly as in the case of the homeless, there are political mechanisms that determine who suffer and who don't in the case of similar natural disasters.

It seems that the effects of the political mechanisms do not strike us mostly since there is a strong cultural inclination to view the third world countries, especially Africa, as being ”closer to nature”. This is part of not only the European way of thinking in which “culture” and “nature” are often forcefully demarcated as dichotomous entities, but also the colonial way of thought. Part of the ideology of the distinction between culture and nature was always to label “nature” as “lower”, irrational, feminine etc.[385] But as it has been argued, in cases of poverty it is very difficult to show a case of no agent responsible for harming, especially if we start from the analysis of poverty provided in chapter one.

### 6.6.3 No capacity: The Malthusian argument

One way of arguing against responsibilities to address poverty is the “malthusian” line of argument. Thomas Malthus, a figure of the 18th century, based his argument on the necessity of controlling population. Malthus argued that food production increases arithmetically, while population increases exponentially, if unchecked[386]. This has been understood as a moral justification for letting the poor starve and vanish. Malthus in fact recommended birth control, and not only “death control” measures, but his analysis can be used to justify actions of a harsher kind. The argument thus points to the direction that even though we have the capacity to remedy poverty now, we do not have the capacity to prevent a greater evil from occurring in the future because of this remedial effort.

Neo-Malthusian scholars have exclaimed the point that death due to starvation might be necessary to avoid overpopulation and environmental destruction. The argument is typically put in utilitarian terms: even though death of human beings is bad in itself, it might be necessary in order to avoid even greater suffering in the future. Garrett Hardin puts this argument by the “lifeboat analogy”. In the analogy, people are “adrift in the sea”: the wealthiest people are in the lifeboats, while the poorer ones are desperately trying to get in the already overloaded lifeboats. Here, the argument is not so much about food production but ecological destruction: Hardin argues that as the ecosphere

385 For an analysis of the power of these dichotomies, see Plumwood 1994
386 Malthus 1999

cannot support the prevailing amount of people, the population must decrease by any means, in order for humanity to avoid considerably higher suffering in the future.[387]

These arguments can be dismissed for two good reasons. First, if we base a moral theory on such premises, which allow the death of human beings, we are on a highly slippery slope[388] towards accepting any atrocities as necessary or justifiable on utilitarian grounds on the basis of anticipated future events. The second reason is empirical. Malthus' theory about the relation between population growth and the production of nutrition was clearly fallacious, as it could not foresee technological innovations of food production. As discussed before, the problem currently is not the amount of food produced, but its distribution[389]. Regarding the ecological arguments, the neo-Malthusian position seems to be blaming the wrong people and thus being not only a moral argument but also an exercise of power. In general, the people responsible of high rate of population growth leave a very small ecological footprint, i.e. they consume very few natural resources. According to purely ecological logic, population growth is unlikely ever to reach such levels that the Africans, for example, would be more ecologically destructive than the residents of Northern nations, given the current consumption levels.

## 6.7 Ways of harming

The notion of harm becomes more complex, when applied to the moral assessment of the political and economic institutions. It is unclear, how the institutions "do" harm, although it is quite clear how they allow harm to be done. "Doing", in practice, has to be understood as contributing to harm actively. Contribution can mean creating political conditions, in which harming is lucrative for other agents, typically leaders of third world countries. More analytically, harm can be committed in the following ways:

a) Causal relevance. For example Christian Barry has suggested that in order for an act to qualify as contribution to harm, it ought to be causally relevant to harm committed. By this Barry means that "the assessed conduct was a necessary element in a set of antecedent conditions that was sufficient for its occurrence". Barry adds that the conduct, in order to qualify as harm, should not merely to have permitted a causal sequence, but initiated, facilitated, or sustained it.
b) Providing the means. In practical terms, doing harm requires certain means. These means include arms, equipment for controlling citizens and such, and often trading these means to harm are a profitable business to

387 Hardin 1996
388 On the notion of slippery slope, see f.e. Lamb 1988
389 Moore Lappe et al 1998; 25-40

several companies and countries. Yet it is less clear, how the global order in itself enforces providing these means. Here, it seems that the failure to act to stop such trade, logically an omission, can count as a breach of a negative duty that is, contribution to an act of harming.

c) Establishing incentives. Thomas Pogge's argument that the global order harms the poor via such mechanisms as the borrowing privilege and the resource privilege are examples of this mode of contribution to harm. Here Barry's argument tends to get somewhat fluid. Does establishing an incentive qualify as harm according to Barry's criteria? Incentive is hardly a necessary element. It does not necessarily initiate or sustain it, even though it can be said to facilitate the harm. An incentive merely provides self-maximising agents with a reason to carry out harmful practices.

d) Failing to promote the interests of people beyond a feasible standard of living. Having established that people are harmed when they are forced to live below a certain existential level, other agents can be thought to contribute to their harm, if they fail to promote the interests of these people when they could. For example, if certain international treaties could be formulated so as to lift people beyond the existential level of not being harmed, but are rather formulated so as to serve as compromises of all parties interests, the treaty can nevertheless be seen as an act of contributing to harm.

In addition, or in consequence of, economic incentives to companies also promote inequalities. To give a recent example, the rising demand for timber has caused several companies to start eucalyptus plantations in countries like Brazil, causing evictions to poor farmers with the consequent loss of livelihood, and general tightening of the land ownership situation. Generally, consumer activity in the global North leads to promoting the interests of the well-off of the poor countries in highly tense conflicts.

Of course, as far as these failures to comply with one's duties refer to individual choices not typically associated with moral duties, there arises the problem of how responsible can we take individuals to be about processes they do not know very well. On a very general level, a consequentialist would argue that people are always responsible for the outcomes of their actions – as Singer explicitly says. Yet practically the situation is complicated by lack of knowledge about the outcomes of one's actions and the indirect nature – the outcomes are often incentives for harm, rather than harm as such. I will come back to these reservations.

## 6.8 Charity

Singer defends a strong utilitarian position, claiming that since we ought to act so as to reduce extreme suffering when it is in our power to do so, and since

distance in itself has no moral significance, we morally ought to give our possessions to charity, until we live on the fringe of survival ourselves. Others, such as Garrett Cullity, have sought to defend arguments softer than what Cullity calls "the extreme demand", referring to Singer's position. Cullity argues that we are morally entitled to spend on life-enhancing matters, such as our education or enjoyment of the arts[390].

Charity only exists in a setting of a very unjust redistribution of power; thus the aim of the theory should be to answer the question: how could this situation be overcome? Usually, individual problems of redistribution begin once distribution has failed. But this distribution has failed for a reason, and these reasons can be found, assessed and fixed.

The utilitarian problem is that we cannot separate our actions from the wider context and the anticipated actions of other agents, if we are truly interested in the outcome. It is clear that inaction on the part of others does not ease our moral obligations in life-saving situations. If a swimmer is drowning and I notice the situation along with A and B, the inaction of A and B and the fact that we have a shared responsibility does not diminish my personal responsibility to rescue the swimmer. But in matters of aid, the question is likely to be more complicated than merely a matter of inaction. There might be negative consequences of increasing aid. The governments of poor countries might be willing to cut back public services, when they see charities overseeing them. They might even choose to deliberately impoverish their own citizens in order to qualify for more aid. So inaction has to be distinguished from disincentives. Think of the drowning swimmer case again. If I saw A and B rushing to rescue, and would have the foreknowledge that my rescue effort would lead to A and B to swim back to the beach and leave the effort to me alone, it could be morally best in a consequentialist sense for me to refrain from acting. If we are really interested about the consequences, we cannot refer to mainly our personal good intentions.

Singer's example, or moral analogy, for discussing moral responsibilities, is what he calls the "shallow pond" example. Singer discusses omitting to give to charities by suggesting an analogy of a child about to drown in a shallow pond. The passer-by is morally obliged to help the child, even though this may be an inconvenience, such as getting one's clothes muddy. Similarly giving to development charities causes minor inconvenience in the form of loosing money, but saves human lives.[391]

The problem with assisting people in distant countries is that they are far away. This is not to refute universalism, but to show a practical feature of the situation. The difference between the child in the pond and a dying child the third world is that the child in the pond can be lifted up by the passer-by. As for the child in the third world, the potential helper will always act through an agency. It can be queried whether the actual agent doing the assistance are the individual, or the agency? In "*Famine, affluence and morality*" Singer says that

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390 Cullity 2004

391 Singer 1979; 165

relief agencies can take the donation to distant parts of the world almost as easily as taking them beyond the corner. But here Singer undermines the facts. Assistance is far from being that easy, as was discussed in chapter two.

One option is to provide people with services, which typically are maintained by governments, such as health care, primary schooling etc. But then the question arises: why do the local governments not take care of these functions? The obvious answer is that they do not have the resources to do so. Therefore, development work is fully justified as a temporary measure. But one has to acknowledge that it is always better if the local government runs these services. This is because of two reasons: accountability and cost.

Governments are primarily accountable to their own citizens, while international development agencies are primarily accountable to their funders. If I give money to an agency running health services in India, I will justifiably demand them to do a good job and spend the money wisely. But then, why should it be me making the demands about health care in India, rather than the Indians needing health care? Also, any function run by an international agency with northern salaries is inevitably lot more expensive than a function run by the local government. The power question, of to whom an organisation is accountable, is bound to show up in outcomes.

An incorrect remedy is likely to lead to quite unintended outcomes. If we, for instance, conclude that people go hungry since we have failed to comply with our positive duties, we will easily end up concluding that it is out moral responsibility to provide food the hungry. Yet, as is well known by development experts, the outcomes of direct food aid have sometimes (yet not always) been disastrous. With free food pouring into a country in which the majority lives on farming, this necessarily means difficulties to sell the food and general drop in income of the peasants, thus causing further malnutrition.

For example, Andrew Kuper and Dale Jamieson have pointed out that Singer's ethical theory is not based on any political theory and it does not note the context-specific differences of situations of the lack of basic goods. Kuper points out that there has to be political demands and ideas of a more just society, if want is to be overcome. An institutionalised system of charitable giving would not be a real solution. Kuper goes on to argue that following Singer's suggestions could even make the situation worse[392]. Jamieson notes that it is impossible to understand the problems of distribution in any place if the local context and the history of the situation are not understood. Singer's argument portrays the victims of hunger as non-agents, as only lack of something as their morally meaningful characteristic[393].

But aid is not delivered sporadically or simply when people choose to make donations. Aid institutions are, on the contrary, intensively present in the poor countries, often practically a part of the institutional structure of the country. Aid is not direct, but mediated through these institutions and partly supporting the institutions rather than the target population. It would be a hard

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392 Kuper 2002

393 Jamieson 2005

case to show how aid is more direct than economic transactions, or especially how it is more direct in a way to make a moral difference.

## 6.9 Consequentialist and deontological reasons

Even though the utilitarian/consequentialist formula of maximizing happiness seems to be unambiguous even to the extent that it has been accused for fantasies of creating a science of morality, conclusions derived from the utilitarian formula seem to be sometimes greatly varying. Take the issue of population. Some neo-Malthusian thinkers (such as Garrett Hardin[394]) have proposed that aid ought not to be given to the hungry, not because of its dysfunctionality, but because its functionality. In their view, letting the poor die would lead to most suitable results by a utilitarian metric, since population growth without natural checks will grow even faster than the possibility of food supplies, leading the ever greater suffering. Even though this seems to contradict Singer's position completely, he has shown some signs on being insecure about the relevance of this argument, by recommending channelling aid to countries with strict population control measures. Others have pointed out that if the utilitarian logic would be taken literally, a very large population with a life just worth living could be better than a small population with high wellbeing, since the aggregate welfare of the former would be greater[395]. This is not of course presented as a genuine argument, but a paradox.

The neo-Malthusian argument is based on premises that do not stand up to scrutiny empirically, but still the debate shows how difficult it is to draw concrete conclusions by an utilitarian logic. Any utilitarian idea of a good act (or morally obligatory act) depends on a great number of ideas about the political, economic and social circumstances. A utilitarian must therefore either depend on the best available knowledge, or the present knowledge. This is not without relevance. When discussing highly complex issues, it is likely that arduous studying is required to get to know, which act will be most likely to be morally best in the given situation of world poverty. It is necessarily a difficult question, can such knowledge be expected from individuals – and to what level knowledge can be expected in the first place? If I donate money to a charity that will end up making things worse because of incompetent planning, have I committed a wrong act? The problem of the "bad Samaritan" is a problem for ethics that extends far beyond the field of development aid. But the case might prove interesting in regard to the ethical duty to assist. If we have a strict duty to assist, how does the case that our money sometimes brings *negative* overall consequences weigh ethically? If the duty to assist is defended on merely consequentialist grounds, should not the individual be blamed for the shortcoming of the project he has supported? Even Singer will eventually have

394 Hardin 1996
395 Parfit 2004

to restort to more deontological viewpoint, making donations in good faith and assuming that the donations will make a positive difference. The argument implicitly rests on trusting the agency. This is very well shown when Singer asks why would Amartya Sen be on the board of Oxfam, if he does not believe that it does any good[396].

Development agencies with private funding also feel the effects of motives. It is a different case, if people donating money want to feel good about themselves, or if they feel ethically obliged to donate. The agencies react to the "markets" when seeking funding. The want of donation-givers to get something out for themselves has led for example to the phenomenon of "child adoption" programmes. The way aid is carried out in these programmes is likely to be worse than if people simply would donate the money without expecting something in return.

## 6.10 Indirect life saving

The strength of Singer's argument, and its intuitive appeal, lies on the fact that it refers to directly life-saving purposes. But if we are, as any consequentialist ought to be, primarily concerned about best outcomes, we have to accept some realities of development aid. And an important one of these realities is that aid is at its best in cases, when it is less direct. Real changes take time, and no not typically fall down to short-term projects. One of the very real problems of development is exactly the tendency to try to foster development through projects. But why is this so, if there exist more effective ways? Quite simply it is because development agencies are expected to be accountable. They want to show the people and governments funding them that they are really "doing something" with the money they get. If they were to use the money in ways likely to be best for long-term development, they would be short of direct results.

So the matter is, after all, not that easy for a consequentialist. Can anyone be expected to function ethically without getting any direct information of the outcomes of his contributions? Or is a consequentialist trapped in the situation where he receives information by sacrificing something on the way? Probably the only way to get around the problem is to admit that we are not talking about *directly* life-saving consequences. Rather, we are making choices on trusting and supporting certain agents functioning in developing countries. Here Singer shows some practical wisdom: he has decided to trust Oxfam[397].

Indirect life saving is also ethically complicated for yet another reason. This is the reason that the people, whose lives are at danger, are not identifiable. Singer analyses this problem by using an example of a salesman who learns that he sells contaminated food, which will kill a certain percentage of its eaters,

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396 Singer 2002; 128

397 Singer 2002a

and yet carry on to sell it. The consequent deaths would not take place if the salesman would refrain from selling his product.[398] While the moral point arising from the salesman case might be clear, I believe that indirect life saving is an ethically more complicated task. This is because we are not talking only about unidentifiable victims; we are talking about statistical human beings. It is a quite different thing to kill someone whose identity is not known to you in advance, than to produce or allow a statistical risk. Why so? The reason is that statistical human lives are at risk everywhere. Rearranging traffic systems on a highway can save for example ten lives a year, statistically. As these lives are valuable beyond measurement, it would seem that with Singer's logic the government should be held morally responsible for the deaths of anyone who gets killed in a car accident. But this seems counter-intuitive, not least for the reason that the government always has to prioritise its spending. For example, the same money spent in cancer research can save twelve statistical lives a year in the future.

Most likely money spent on poverty reduction in the third world will be most cost-effective in saving statistical lives, so it ought to be preferred to some extent over new traffic systems and cancer research. But by now, the ethical argument has been severely reshaped. We are not anymore talking about saving lives; we are talking about prioritising some statistical lives over others. And this reshaping is necessary to avoid the *reductio ad absurdum* -conclusion that people ought to take action whenever statistical lives can be saved.

It seems that statistical lives are morally less significant than real identifiable human lives. But this does not mean that there would be no injustice implied in the global situation. Rather, the injustice is the fact that statistical lives are so cheap in some places of the world. If human beings die because they do not have access to malaria medication, the cost of which is 50 cents a dose, the medication ought to be supplied, even though the people are statistical, i.e. we do not know exactly who will be infected with potentially lethal malaria. Yet the question is, is assistance the best way to save statistical lives?

## 6.11 Power

It is necessary here to recall the discussion on power. What would be best for poverty relief would be that the poor and marginalised in the developing countries would get more political negotiating power, and thus be able to demand more and voice their concerns better. But then, if you want to be effective in poverty reduction, this is exactly what you ought to do, rather than being merely "humanitarian". Without strong political subjectivity the poor are left to the mercy of the charitable.

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398 Singer 1979; 165

Poor people primarily need political changes. Land holding rights are extremely important. For many the problem is that the present system of land acquisition in most of the third world is designed for producing agricultural items for export, such as coffee, tea, soya, or tobacco, rather than letting landless peasants produce food for themselves. People are thus not allowed to feed themselves, which is shown by the fact that there are about 500 million landless peasants in the third world. Another important matter is that the third world governments are often undemocratic and corrupt, which is partly supported by institutions of the global order. But these are problems that development projects cannot remedy.

Political changes are also necessary, because only political changes make it possible for people to exercise their political rights and claim new rights. Aid does not provide rights, which are the key to avoiding vulnerability. It is not enough to get fed today; one has to be able to count on having been able to get fed tomorrow too. Escaping poverty thus requires that people can claim their basic rights. A functioning social security system, for instance, can be seen as a kind of mechanism providing the right to basic income. What aid can provide is always more insecure, as it is "assistive" by definition, and given by nobleness, not because the recipient is entitled to it. A very real problem related to assisting poor people in distant countries is that mere assistance often does not alter the structural reasons causing poverty. You can be morally praised for saving a life. But if the life of the same person and of several other persons in similar situations is at risk immediately after your life-saving act, the situation is bound to get morally complicated. It seems that we encounter a situation in which we inevitably fail to comply with our moral duties. The only way to affect the situation is to attempt to alter the reasons behind the situation in the first place.

## 6.12 The moral status of an incentive

The duties of either wealthy individuals or wealthy nations seem a difficult issue to discuss. As noted above, it is fair to say that the poorest individuals are harmed by existing political structures. Harming can be seen as a moral assessment of their existential condition, being pushed below a baseline of meeting needs required for decent life of even self-preservation. But the question of what kinds of moral duties this creates for the wealthy agents is far from settled. An assessment of how do we bring contribute to bringing about these conditions is needed, in addition to more pure moral assessment of how duties ought to be divided between different agents.

The notion of harm presupposes an agent who harms. While there are cases in which undesirable events take place without clear responsible agents, this does not apply to harming. In cases of severe poverty, it seems that locally functioning agents are primarily responsible for harm committed. If it is the

political system that harms the people, it is primarily the local political system that is responsible for its policies. This applies most visible to the distribution of rights, but the distribution of goods is also such a matter.

Equally, it is clear that the global order, other nation-states and individuals in other nation-states affect such local political orders. When this can be seen as contributing to harm, these agents share a moral responsibility for harming. But how are we to distinguish, when such contribution takes place? Thomas Pogge, who has written extensively on the issue, merely refers to some particular aspects of the global order that contribute to predatory dictators getting and staying in power. While Pogge shows a clear insight on pointing out these features of the global order, he concludes that negative duties follow to rich individuals and governments because of benefiting from and upholding this global order. Thus it can be understood that a failure to promote more just arrangements suffices to show the contribution of rich individuals to the harm.

The problem regarding contribution is that causal linkage between the agent contributing to harm and the agent being harmed is not clear. The notion of causality does not capture the essence of the way rich individuals contribute to harm to those living in poverty in impoverished countries. Namely, the essential feature of influencing others' conditions via an economic and political system is the notion of creating an incentive. For example living a lifestyle based on high oil consumption, directly (gasoline) or indirectly (consuming goods the production which requires large amounts of gasoline), an individual creates incentives for oil-producers to produce more. This may lead to oppressive governments sticking to power to secure oil revenues, polluting drilling in indigenous peoples' lands etc. But the key word here is *may*. There is no direct causal linkage between the consumer's actions and the harm committed, merely it makes harm more likely and gives the harming agents reasons to carry on committing harm.

The centrality of incentives rather than direct causality is a challenge for traditional moral theory. Moral theory has traditionally supposed, as Barry does that there has to be a causal linkage between act and harm. In the case of an incentive, there is rather a linkage between the act and the likelihood of harm. Perhaps in some way paradoxically, the creation of an incentive seems to have moral status, even if no one acts according to it. This is similar to the notion of risks: subjecting others to excessive risks (health risks, for example) is wrong as such, even though the risk would never materialise. Creating an incentive will affect the choosing position of a possible harming agent, yet it would be an overstatement to argue that there is a causal logic, since in this case we would implicitly presuppose that the actual harming agent has no moral responsibility and acts according to causal necessity. This, for sure, would be absurd, since it would denounce the free will of such agents. Rather, the moral status of an incentive ought to be divided into two sub-questions: the moral status of *creating* an incentive and the moral status of *acting according to* an incentive.

The creation of an incentive can happen in several ways. As mentioned above, incentives can be created via the market system, purchasing certain goods which give an incentive to those benefiting from its production to carry on with the current production patterns or expand production. Indeed, the market system is penetrated with incentives. With a high purchasing power, it is difficult not to provide harmful incentives. Here G.A. Cohen's theory comes to mind again. As we noted, Cohen suggested that would the difference principle be taken seriously, it ought to be applied also to personal conduct, practically meaning the willingness of the rich to accept lower incomes. Also the power question becomes here relevant again: how did we end up in a situation, in which it is in our power to so strongly affect the possibility of others to meet their vital needs. An individual's role in levelling inequalities of power might be severely limited, but it still can be an individual's duty.

Second, as analysed by Pogge, creating incentives can happen by upholding a political system that provides certain morally negative incentives. The duty of an individual agent can be stated in terms of refraining from providing harmful incentives. This can practically mean individual everyday behaviour, as well as trying to affect the "global order". As noted in chapter four, the motives and balances of power of individual agents, in this case governments, within the institutional frame of global justice can be highly important in regard to justice. But the motives of governments, and their ideas about how strongly they want to push their agenda and how eager they are to control the policies of developing countries, is also something individuals within these countries have their say about.

## 6.13 Summary and conclusions to chapter six

When discussing individual duties caused by global poverty, it has been popular to refer to duties to give money to charities. This approach has been criticised in this chapter for failing to address the structural power imbalances, and making unrealistic expectations about the efficiency of charity. Rather, starting from the viewpoint of power imbalances causing poverty, and the notion of harm analysed in chapter 5, I have argued that the most pressing duty towards the impoverished is to refrain from contributing to harming them. This, in Christian Barry's terms, means showing duties to exist on the basis of contribution (instead of capability or association).

The argument that duties towards the impoverished are chiefly negative duties, calls for different kinds of remedies than positive duties. Thus the problem is less a matter of priorising, of whom to assist, but of finding correct remedies. If the problem entails inequalities of power and mechanisms preventing the poor from accessing vital goods despite their efforts, overturning such phenomena is what is important. Aid can be important in some, albeit restricted, cases, but this is a different discussion altogether.

If the problem of poverty is seen in terms of power, the discussion on agency should focus more on how could individuals suffering from poverty achieve agency, rather than on dividing distributive duties between institutionally capable agents. When it comes to institutions, the conclusion of chapter four are more to the point: levelling down power balances is an important question on all levels of the global "playing field".

This is yet not to argue against the position that we have stringent duties to consider our conduct on the basis of responsibilities brought about by global poverty. I have defended this position by showing, how most common theories against this position tend to fail. Yet these duties do not typically come in the form of assistance, but in the form of acting as an economic and political agent.

# SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The discussion of this text has touched the definition of poverty, critiques and redefinitions of development, equality and its "currency", locating injustice in a international setting, definition of harm, and agency and duties of the wealthy. Yet the main question of the discussion has been all along, what is poverty and how it can be overcome? While I have, at occasion quite severely, criticised the charity approach to global poverty, I strongly share the convictions of the authors on the subject that global poverty calls for action. What has been disputed here, are the reasons for this action and what this action practically means.

I began by arguing that while it is easiest to define poverty by absolute criteria, the definition ends up being too narrow, and runs into problems of context-specificity. I also argued that poverty can be only meaningfully understood as a social relation, and for that reason we have to be aware of the relative element always present in the phenomenon. Thus I suggested an approach to understanding poverty, which starts from the notion of absolute basic needs, but admits that the relevant means of meeting these constant needs depend on the social setting and expectations of individuals. Thus, there is always an element open to dispute in the question, what are relevant means of meeting basic needs, and how should we conceive a sufficient quality of meeting such a need. Addressing this problem requires reference to equality in general.

After noting that the societal context of poverty cannot be overlooked, I discussed the most common remedy to such problems, namely development. I pointed out that development as it is understood is a confused concept with a history that could be seen as ideological, and that development often has resulted in a worse rather than a better situation, when it comes to levelling inequalities. I especially criticised the belief in growth in overcoming poverty, as growth often benefits only the well off in the society, potentially even causing harm to the worst-off. After having pointed out some dilemmas of development, I ended up arguing that development should be seen as a description of a change in social form, in need of a normative addition that

requires that a process ought to promote equality, if it is to count as development. From this viewpoint, many of the processes labelled development are about something else.

In the next chapter I analysed the notion of equality. I pointed out, why it is infeasible for a theory of justice to accept Rawls' idea of a "realistic utopia". I then discussed the notion of egalitarianism from the viewpoint, what ought to count as the "currency" of egalitarian justice. This was followed by the discussion in the following chapter on international injustice and how to locate it. I argued that international arrangements are relevant for the problems of imbalances of power and poverty generally, and discussed, how we can locate the prevailing injustices. Here, I argued that the injustices seem to be located more on the conduct of individual agents within the institutional frame, than the frame itself.

In the fifth chapter I took up the issue of doing and causing harm. I discussed two possible ways of harming, i.e. the subjunctive sense and the baseline sense. I argued, that while harm in the subjunctive sense is often a serious moral matter, it is not necessarily so, and certainly it does not overlap with the problem of poverty. For this reason, I focused on the baseline sense and its definitions. The baseline sense of harming was defined as the level of means of achieving basic needs any person can be expected to aim to access, and can legitimately expect to possess. With this definition, a failure to meet such a baseline is clearly a matter of being harmed. On the basis of the discussions of chapters one, three and five it can be seen that there is a significant overlap between the notions of not being harmed in the baseline sense, sufficient equality, and avoiding poverty.

Finally, I discussed duties of individual agents given this framework. It can be concluded that individuals have a stringent duty to alter one's behaviour so that global poverty is addressed. But this is not a call for charity, but to stop harming and address the existing power imbalances and the conduct of agents (nation-states, corporations etc) within the global frame. I especially analysed the problem of creating and upholding incentives, which can be seen as a contribution to harm as such. The duties of individual agents are negative duties, yet duties calling for action.

Along the way of this discussion, an important starting point has been the empirical understanding of agency. As traditional theories of charity see the moral subjectivity of the impoverished people relevant only in the sense, if they get goods and other forms of assistance from outside or not, I have started from an active idea of agency. This means that I believe it to be more accurate to see the impoverished people as active agents. Indeed, most people living in such conditions make a tremendous effort to meet their basic needs despite of the circumstances. This view of agency must make a difference in theory of justice, as we ask, why do the poor remain poor? According to the view I supported, this is despite their efforts.

It seems to some extent self-evident that when talking about severe problems it is highly important to carefully seek the correct remedies. Yet in the

case of global poverty, the analysis of the duties brought about by poverty in the field of philosophy has routinely referred to ”assistance”, in practice development aid in the form of official or charity agency aid. Thus issues of assistance, compensations, and refraining from harming are lumped into one category, which fails to be the correct remedy in most cases. As I have argued above, if it is seriously claimed that poverty is caused by an active process of harming, the remedies need to be reactions to the harming mechanisms, which aid typically is not. Even more alarmingly, aid recently has become to mean ever less projects and ever more political control of the poor countries by experts of international institutions. Be the intentions good or not, such curtailing of policy space in poor countries is bound to make the power imbalance worse.

All in all, it is quite puzzling how it can be that the existing inequalities are maintained. How can it be that active, creative and laboring people in different parts of the globe recieve goods to such different extent as a reward for their efforts, and how can it be that such a situation is seen as normal? It seems difficult to me to explain this without reference to a wide web of power manifest in several levels. This means both geographical levels, from despotic landowners in developing countries, to gross misuse of power within the world institutions. It also means use of power on levels of both politics and economics. Indeed, the failure to claim that economic power ought to be legitimised, such as political power has to be, has allowed for gross misuses of economic power globally, while this has been seen as normal in everyday political discourse.

It is understandable if my quest for the essence of poverty (what people lack if they are poor) and relevant remedies to poverty leaves the reader wondering, can anything decisive be said about the duties of individuals in rich countries. Additionally, the theory seems to be prescribing individuals to do more than can be fairly expected, as the possibilities to affect institutional structures are necessarily limited. Charity has not been a popular response to poverty without a reason: it is an easily accessible option for those wanting to make something to ease the plight of the poor. It is a considerably more difficult task to address political and economic institutional distortions of conduct and incentives. Yet redistribution is needed, and distribution never exists as an abstract entity; rather, usually only active agents who can claim their rights and for whom institutions are accountable see distributions take place as is prescribed.

# YHTEENVETO

Tässä tutkimuksessa tutkitaan globaaliin (äärimmäiseen) köyhyyteen sisältyviä eettisiä ongelmia yhteiskuntafilosofian näkökulmasta. Keskeisenä tutkimuskysymyksenä on, mitä köyhyys eettisenä käsitteenä tarkoittaa, ja kuinka äärimmäinen köyhyys liittyy epäoikeudenmukaisuuteen. Perusargumenttina on, että köyhyys äärimmäisissäkin muodoissaan on sosiaalisten järjestelyjen tulos, eikä niinkään ”alkuperäinen” tila tai eettisesti onnettomuutta vastaava tila. Tältä perustalta köyhyyttä ja sen tuottamaa kärsimystä tutkitaan sosiaalisen epäoikeudenmukaisuuden ongelmana, ja köyhyyden poistamisen moraalista velvollisuutta vahingoittamatta jättämisen negatiivisena velvollisuutena.

Tutkimuksessa myös analysoidaan kriittisesti kehityksen käsitettä, jota perinteisesti tarjotaan juuri rakenteelliseksi ratkaisuksi köyhyyden ongelmaan. Tutkimuksessa esitetään, että kehitys prosessina mahdollistaa köyhyyden muodon muuttumisen köyhyyden poistumisen sijaan. Tästä syystä kehitystä eettisenä käsitteenä arvioidaan uudessa valossa, erityisesti sosiaalisten hyvien ja taakkojen jakamisen prosessina. Köyhyyttä tutkitaan myös tekemällä erottelu absoluuttisen ja suhteellisen köyhyyden välille. Tässä yhteydessä esitetään, että köyhyyden absoluuttisesta luonteesta huolimatta perushyvien saavuttamisen välineet ovat sosiaalisesti suhteellisia. Tästä syystä myös äärimmäinen köyhyys on ymmärrettävä kontekstista riippuvaisena ongelmana.

Köyhyys ongelman määritellään tutkimuksessa epäoikeudenmukaisten valtasuhteiden tulokseksi, mikä näkyy sekä paikallisella että kansainvälisellä tasolla. Paikallisesti valtasuhteet näkyvät esimerkiksi ihmisten haavoittuvaisuudessa sekä siinä, miten kehitykseksi määritellyn prosessin hyödyt jaetaan ja kenellä on ylipäänsä valta määritellä jokin tapahtuma kehitykseksi. Kansainvälisellä tasolla huomiota kiinnitetään siihen, että epätäydellisten ja osittain päällekkäisten instituutioiden todellisuudessa voimakkaimmat toimijat voivat käyttää tätä institutionaalista kehystä itsekkäiden päämäärien ajamiseen, riippumatta yksittäisten instituutioiden ”sisäisestä” oikeudenmukaisuudesta.

Köyhyyttä tutkitaan myös vahingoittamisena siten, että äärimmäinen köyhyys ymmärretään tilana, jossa henkilön negatiivisia oikeuksia rikotaan. Tätä määrittelyä tuetaan empiirisellä käsityksellä siitä, että ihmisten voi olettaa pyrkivän perustarpeiden tyydyttämiseen sen sijaan, että odottaisivat passiivisesti apua ulkopuolisilta. Sen sijaan historialliset vääryydet erotetaan tämän päivän aktiivisesti vahingoittamisesta.

Tämän käsittelyn tuloksena velvollisuudet poistaa äärimmäistä köyhyyttä ymmärretään velvollisuutena olla osallistumatta vahingoittamiseen, sekä valtasuhteiden tasaamisen velvollisuutena. Käytännössä näiden velvollisuuksien täyttämisen tapa on hyvin erilainen kuin hyväntekeväisyys. Tässä viitataan ensi sijassa kannustimien ylläpitämiseen. Samalla kuitenkin argumentoidaan, että nämä velvollisuudet ovat sinänsä hyvin voimakkaita.

Asiasanat: Köyhyys, kehitys, etiikka, yhteiskuntafilosofia, globalisaatio, vahingoittaminen, globaali oikeudenmukaisuus.

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