

A Global Resources Dividend^{1*}

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- Article 25: Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care.
- Article 28: Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Radical Inequality and our Responsibility

One great challenge to any morally sensitive person today is the extent and severity of global poverty. We are faced with hundreds of millions born into abject poverty and remaining poor, dependent and uneducated all their lives.² These persons are so poor and so cut off from minimally adequate nutrition, hygiene, and medicines that some 20 million of them routinely die each year of starvation or easily curable diseases.³ Most of these deaths occur in ordinary times, where extreme poverty makes persons highly vulnerable to even very minor misfortunes. Being so routine as well as temporally and spatially dispersed, this suffering is barely perceived by the rest of the world. We are more familiar with famines and epidemics triggered by photogenic catastrophes, such as cyclones, earthquakes, draughts, or (civil) wars. But even in these cases, the root cause of most of the suffering is the poverty of those affected. Among the rest of us, draughts and earthquakes do not trigger famines and epidemics (cf. Sen 1981).

The circumstances of the global poor contrast sharply with those of many others who are vastly better off in most respects, such as personal security; rights, freedom, and opportunities; political influence; income, wealth, and leisure time; sanitation and hygiene; life expectancy and

infant mortality; and access to education, health care, food, clothing, and shelter.⁴

There are two ways of conceiving this privation as a moral challenge to us. One might assign a positive responsibility to us, based on the fact that we could improve their circumstances: Since they are truly suffering and we are so much better off, we should sacrifice some of our own time, energy, and wealth so as to help them.⁵ Alternatively, one might ascribe a negative responsibility to us, based on the fact that we participate in, and profit from, the unjust and coercive imposition of severe poverty.

These two views differ in important ways. The positive formulation is more broadly applicable, and it is thus easier to show its relevance. All that needs to be shown is that they are very badly off, that we are very much better off, and that we could relieve some of their suffering without significant losses to our own well-being. But this ease comes at a price: Some who accept the positive formulation nevertheless feel entitled to focus on leading their own lives without bothering with worthy causes, especially when the demands these causes make on them are significant. Many feel entitled, at least, to support good causes of their choice — their church, neighborhood council, or alma mater, perhaps, or medical research, animal rights, or the environment — rather than putting themselves out for total strangers half a world away, with whom they share no bond of community or culture beyond the very tenuous one of a common humanity. It is of some importance, therefore, to investigate whether we might bear a negative responsibility for world poverty by participating in its unjust perpetuation. This is important for us, insofar as we want to gain a moral orientation in this world, and important also for the poor, because it is likely that global poverty would not continue so persistently if we more affluent world citizens ascribed a negative responsibility for it to ourselves.

Some believe that the mere fact of *radical* inequality can ground a claim of negative responsibility. The modifier “radical” may be defined as involving five elements:

- (1) Those at the bottom are very badly off in absolute terms.
- (2) They are also very badly off in relative terms — very much worse off than many others.
- (3) The inequality is persistent: It is difficult or impossible for those at the bottom substantially to improve their lot; and most of those at the top never experience life at the bottom for even a few months and have no vivid idea of what it is like to live in that way.
- (4) The inequality is pervasive: It concerns not merely some aspects

of life, such as the climate or access to natural beauty or high culture, but most aspects or all.

- (5) The inequality is avoidable: Those at the top can improve the circumstances of those at the bottom without becoming badly off themselves.

It is clear that the phenomenon of global poverty exemplifies radical inequality as defined.⁶ But I do not believe that these five conditions suffice to ground more than a merely positive responsibility. And I suspect that most citizens of the developed West — those I want to convince — would also find them insufficient. They might appeal to the following parallel: Suppose that we discovered persons on Venus who are very badly and much worse off than we are, and suppose we could help them without great cost to ourselves. One could say, of course, that by refusing such help we would become participants in the coercive maintenance of an unjust state of affairs — even profiteers, by embezzling the aid we were required to give. But those who allow any moral significance to the distinction between positive and negative responsibility will hardly find this charge convincing, because we do not in this case seem to contribute at all to the perpetuation of the radical inequality. This point could, of course, be further disputed. But let me here accept the Venus argument. Assuming that radical inequality is not a sufficient condition for a negative responsibility by those at the top for the circumstances of those at the bottom, let us then seek out more plausible bases for negative responsibility.

Obviously, radical inequality is not a necessary condition for negative responsibility either.⁷ I will here, however, confine myself to radical inequalities by asking under what conditions a radical inequality manifests an injustice for which those at the top share negative responsibility. I see three plausible approaches to this question, which invoke, respectively, the effects of shared institutions, uncompensated exclusion from the use of natural resources, and the effects of a common and bloody history. These approaches belong to diverse and competing philosophical traditions. We need nevertheless not decide among them here, if, as I shall argue, the following two theses are true. First, the conditions for assigning a negative responsibility for injustice, as specified by all three approaches, are met by the existing problem of global poverty, which therefore manifests what might be called a *core injustice*. Second, the status quo can be reformed in a way that all three approaches would recognize as an important step in the direction of a just world order.

If these two theses can be supported, then there is hope for a coalition, focused on the topic of global justice, among the adherents of

the most important approaches in Western political philosophy. This coalition would express a limited consensus,⁸ according to which the present world order is grievously unjust and would become considerably more just through the introduction of a Global Resources Dividend.

Three Grounds of Negative Responsibility

The Effects of Shared Institutions

The first approach⁹ puts forward three additional conditions:

(6) Everyday conduct of those at the top often strongly affects the circumstances of those at the bottom in a way that shows that both coexist under a single scheme of social institutions.

(7) This institutional scheme is implicated in the radical inequality by avoidably producing the poverty of those at the bottom, in this sense: It is not the case that every practicable institutional alternative would also generate such severe and extensive poverty.

(8) The radical inequality cannot be traced to extrasocial factors (such as genetic handicaps or natural disasters) which, as such, affect different human beings differentially.

Present radical global inequality meets the sixth condition in that the global poor live in the context of a worldwide state system based on internationally recognized territorial domains, interconnected through a global network of market trade and diplomacy. Thanks to our vastly superior military and economic strength, we citizens of the developed countries enjoy a position of overwhelming political dominance in this system and, through this system, we also dramatically affect the circumstances of the global poor — via investments, loans, military aid, trade, sex tourism, culture exports, and much else. Their very survival often depends decisively (e.g. through the price of their foodstuffs or their opportunities to find work) upon our demand behavior, which may determine, for instance, whether local landowners will grow cash crops (coffee, cotton, flowers) for export or food for local consumption.¹⁰ It is quite impossible to trace the effects of even a single one of our buying decisions, because these effects produce further effects indefinitely and also interact with the effects of billions of other decisions. So I am not

claiming that we are responsible for the effects of our individual economic decisions and ought to make such decisions in light of all their ever so remote effects. Such a demand would be completely unrealistic. Nor am I making the dubious and utopian suggestion that global interdependence should be undone by isolating states or groups of states from one another. Rather, the relevance of the sixth condition consists in bringing out that — in sharp contrast to the Venus case — we are causally deeply entangled in the misery of the poor and cannot extricate ourselves from this involvement so long as their misery continues.

The seventh condition involves tracing the circumstances of individuals in an explanatory way to the structure of social institutions (rather than merely to the conduct of individual or collective agents). This exercise is important insofar as feasible alternative institutional frameworks differ in morally significant ways in how they affect the lives of human beings. The idea is not easy to grasp when social institutions endure over long periods, as the core features of our global institutional scheme have done.¹¹ Their constancy makes us experience these features as natural and unalterable, like the physical core features of our planet, and thus renders their moral significance all but invisible to commonsense and often to political philosophers as well. Thus we speak of good and bad luck when someone is born into a rich or poor country or family just as when someone is born well-endowed or handicapped. And we often do not notice that this parallel between social and natural factors holds only with respect to the starting positions persons occupy within a given distribution, not for this distribution itself. The distributional profile of genetic endowments is not — not yet, anyway — under human control; but the distributional profile of social benefits and burdens can be considerably reshaped through global institutional reform.¹² We tend to be blind to this possibility, because the constancy of our global order — the lack of observable alternatives elsewhere in space or in time — makes it quite hard to appreciate and hard also to ascertain how particular institutional reforms would affect human lives.

The explanatory importance of social institutions has been powerfully illustrated recently by numerous domestic regime changes, in the countries of Eastern Europe for example, which have shown how institutional choices (e.g. between socialism and capitalism) can have a dramatic impact on the distribution of income and wealth, education and health care, rights and liberties, and hence quality of life. But, curiously, being familiar with the idea on the national level has made it even harder to appreciate its application on the global level. Dramatic differences in standard of living across countries draw our attention to local factors — such as national institutions, cultures, resources, climates, environments, levels of development, and the like — that help

furnish country-specific explanations and/or explanations of international variations. But these national factors do not tell the whole story. Country-specific explanations (e.g., of persistent poverty) do not add up to an explanation of a global rate of incidence (of poverty) — just as explanations of particular suicides do not add up to an explanation of the suicide rate (Durkheim). And the obvious fact that national factors are important for explaining *where* poverty occurs does not entail that these factors are also important for explaining how extreme and how widespread poverty is worldwide.¹³ These reflections lend at least some initial support to the idea that we should connect the severe poverty of people in Nigeria, Bengla Desh, and Brazil, say, not only with such obvious local factors as tyrannical rulers, climatic hazards, and ancient hatreds, but also with our global institutional framework. This framework will prove important for explaining morally significant global rates and levels. These cannot be explained by national factors alone, because the effects of national factors are strongly influenced by global factors and because national factors are themselves shaped within, and partly by, their global institutional context. I will do more to show the importance of global institutions in Section 3, where I will sketch an institutional alternative that would have quite different distributional effects and would also exert different influences upon the development of national institutions and cultures.

Global poverty meets the eighth condition insofar as the global poor, if only they had been born into different social circumstances, would be just as able and likely to lead healthy, happy, and productive lives as the rest of us. The root cause of their suffering is their abysmal social starting position, including the social context into which they are born, which does not give them much of a chance to become anything but poor, vulnerable, and dependent — unable to give their children a better start than they had had themselves.

When the three additional conditions are met, then it makes sense to call those who are very badly off in absolute and in relative terms radically deprived. Here the word “deprived” indicates that they do not merely lack what they need to lead a full human life, but that what they need is withheld from them through human agency. These persons are not merely poor and often starving, but they are being impoverished and starved by our common institutional arrangements, which inescapably shape their lives. They are deprived of what they need ultimately by us, the more powerful and advantaged participants in the framework of global economic institutions, because we — whether intentionally or not — impose this framework upon them rather than some feasible institutional alternative that would not generate such severe and widespread poverty.

This thought brings out why (according to the first view) global pov-

erty has the special moral urgency we associate with negative responsibility, why we should take it much more seriously than otherwise similar suffering that arises from genetic handicaps, natural disasters, accidents, addiction, or in the absence of interdependence. The reason is that the distribution of social positions within any social system is significantly affected by how this system is structured and organized, by its ground rules or social institutions, which we create, shape, and uphold and also can modify significantly through institutional reforms.

The first approach can be presented in a consequentialist guise, as in Bentham, or in a contractarian guise, as in Rawls or Habermas.¹⁴ In both cases, the central thought is that social institutions are to be assessed in a forward-looking way, on the basis of their effects. In the current international order, some 1.3 billion human beings are born into a social starting position in which their life prospects are extremely low. Their misery could be justified only if there were no superior institutional alternative under which this sort of misery would be avoided. If, as I will try to show, there is such an alternative, then the misery of these persons can be ascribed to our global institutional scheme and therefore, in the last analysis, to ourselves. Even Charles Darwin writes, in reference to his native Britain: "If the misery of our poor be caused not by laws of nature, but by our own institutions, great is our sin."¹⁵

Uncompensated Exclusion from the Use of Natural Resources

The second approach adds (in place of conditions **(6)-(8)**) only one condition to the five of radical inequality:

- (9) Those at the top enjoy significant advantages in the use of a single natural resource base from whose benefits those at the bottom are largely, and without compensation, excluded.

Our current world is characterized by a highly uneven appropriation of wealth from our planet. Affluent persons today employ and consume vastly more of the world's resources (fossil fuels, minerals, air, water, land-use, etc.) than the very poor, and they do so unilaterally, without giving any compensation to the global poor for their disproportionate appropriation. Yes, the affluent often pay for the resources they use, such as imported crude oil. But these payments go to other affluent people, such as the Saudi family or the Nigerian kleptocracy (who can use these funds to entrench their undemocratic rule), with very little, if anything, trickling down to the global poor. So the question remains: Why should members of a global elite be entitled to

use up the world's natural resources on mutually agreeable terms while excluding the global poor from the benefits?

Defenders of capitalist institutions have developed conceptions of justice that support rights to unilateral appropriation and discretionary disposal of disproportionate shares of resources while accepting that all inhabitants of the earth ultimately have equal claims to its resources. Such conceptions are based on the thought that a practice permitting unilateral appropriation of disproportionate shares is justified if all are better off under this practice than they would be if such appropriation were limited to proportional shares.

This pattern of justification is exemplified with particular clarity in John Locke and Robert Nozick. Locke is assuming that, in a state of nature without money, persons are subject to the moral constraint that their unilateral appropriations must always leave "enough, and as good" for others, that is, must be confined to a proportional share (Locke 1689, §27 and §33). This constraint, the so-called Lockean Proviso, may however be lifted with universal consent. Locke subjects such a lifting to a second-order proviso, which requires that the ground rules of human coexistence may be changed only if everyone will be better off under the new rules than under the old, that is, only if everyone can rationally consent to the alteration. And he claims that the lifting of the enough-and-as-good constraint through the general acceptance of money (Locke 1689, §36), which does not exist in the state of nature, does satisfy the second-order proviso: A day laborer in England feeds, lodges, and is clad better than a king of a large fruitful territory in the Americas.¹⁶

It is hard to believe that Locke's claim was true in his time. In any case, it is surely false on the global plane today. Hundreds of millions are born into a world in which all available resources are already owned by others. It is true that many of them can rent out their labor power and then buy natural resources on the market on the same terms as the affluent can. But their educational and employment opportunities are almost always so restricted that, no matter how hard they work, they can barely earn enough for the survival of their family and certainly cannot secure anything like a proportionate share of the world's natural resources.¹⁷ While the global poor are thus largely excluded from natural resources, condemned to watching helplessly as the affluent distribute the abundant natural wealth of this planet amongst themselves, they do get their proportional share of the burdens resulting from the degradation of our natural environment — an disproportionate share even, in that they generally lack the knowledge and the means to protect themselves. Many of the global poor are today just about as badly off, economically, as human beings could be while still alive. It is then not true, what according to Locke and Nozick would need to be true, that all strata of humankind, and the poorest in particular, are better off with universal rights to unilateral appropriation and pollution than without the same; and our world, therefore, does not meet the

requirements for lifting of the Lockean proviso. The exclusion of the poor from a proportional resource share therefore manifests an injustice which we citizens of the affluent states, in collaboration with the “elites” of the poor countries, are imposing by force. To accept this exclusion from a proportional resource share voluntarily would be rational for the global poor only if they were compensated for it by being effectively guaranteed an adequate share of the benefits that others derive from their unilateral appropriations. I will investigate this possibility further in Section 3.

The Effects of a Shared and Bloody History

The third approach adds one condition to the five of radical inequality:

- (10) The social starting positions of those at the bottom and those at the top have emerged from a single historical process that was pervaded by massive grievous wrongs.

Conquest and colonization, with severe oppression, enslavement, even genocide, have destroyed or severely traumatized the native institutions and cultures of four continents were destroyed or severely traumatized. This is not meant to be an argument for reparations. I am not claiming (or denying) that those whose ancestors took part in these crimes bear some special historical responsibility or that those whose ancestors were victims of these crimes have an historical claim to restitution. The thought is rather that we should not tolerate quite so radical inequalities in social starting positions if the allocation of these positions depends upon historical processes in which all important moral (and legal) rules and principles were massively violated. Even if (the two preceding subsections notwithstanding) radical inequality is morally acceptable when it comes about pursuant to “rules of the game” — perhaps pursuant to libertarian ground rules that permit unlimited unilateral appropriation — which are morally at least somewhat plausible and are observed at least for the most part, such radical inequality cannot be considered morally acceptable when such rules were in fact massively violated through crimes of all kinds, whose momentous effects can obviously not be surgically neutralized decades and centuries later.¹⁸ A morally deeply tarnished history should not be allowed to result in *radical* inequality.¹⁹

Friends of the current socio-economic distribution sometimes invoke the claim that standards of living, in Africa and Europe for example, would be just about the same if Africa had never been colonized. Even if this claim were both clear and true, it would still be ineffective against

the argument I have sketched, because this argument applies to persons and not to continents or societies. If world history had progressed without colonization and enslavement, then there would perhaps now be affluent persons living in Europe, and poor ones in Africa. But these would be, in any case, different persons from the ones who are now actually living there. We can therefore not tell starving Africans that **they** would be starving, and that **we** would be affluent, even if the crimes of colonialism had never occurred. Without these crimes there would not be this now existing radical inequality which consists in the fact that **these** persons are affluent and **those** are very poor.

Having found this existing radical inequality unjust on account of its genesis, the third approach will draw the same conclusion as the other two: that we, the more affluent, have a negative responsibility and duty to stop collaborating in the coercive maintenance of this inequality.

A Moderate Proposal

Let me now try to sketch a practicable modification of the present global order which can be backed by all three approaches. This sketch is directly required to support my second thesis: that the *status quo* can be reformed in a way that all three approaches would recognize as an important step in the direction of a just world order. But it is also needed to close gaps in my argument for the first thesis (that we share a negative responsibility for an unjust *status quo*): The sketch should show that the existing radical inequality can be traced to the structure of our global economic order (condition (7)). And it should also show that condition (5) is met; for, according to all three approaches, the *status quo* is unjust only if we can improve the circumstances of the global poor without therefore having to share their fate.

I am orienting my reform proposal toward the second approach, because the other two approaches would support almost any reform that would improve the circumstances of the global poor. The second approach narrows the field by suggesting a more specific idea: Those who make more extensive use of the resources of our planet (these coincide roughly with the affluent) should compensate those who, involuntarily, use very little. This idea does not require that we conceive of global resources as the common heritage of humankind, advocating that they be controlled through a global democratic process and that their full value (determined through resource auctions, perhaps) be divided equally among all members of the human species. My reform proposal is far more modest than this in that it accepts the existing state system²⁰ and, in particular, leaves each national government in control of the (persons and) natural resources of its territory. Modesty is important, because the proposed institutional

alternative should be feasible, that is, both realistic: capable of gaining the approval and support (esp. in the wealthy countries) that is necessary to implement it — and also practicable: capable of sustaining itself (by eliciting enough cooperation and support from its participants) in the world as we know it. I hope that my Global Resources Dividend, or GRD, satisfies these two desiderata by staying reasonably close to the institutional arrangements now in place and by being evidently responsive to the moral concerns implicit in all three approaches.

The GRD proposal envisions that states and their governments shall not have full libertarian property rights with respect to the natural resources in their territory, but can be required to share a small part of the value of any resources they decide to use or sell.²¹ I call the payment they are required to make a dividend partly to obtain a fair hearing for my proposal by avoiding the odious connotations of “tax” and “fee.” But these words also fail to fit with a central idea of the second view, which is to be incorporated into the proposal: The word “dividend” is to suggest that the global poor own an inalienable stake in all limited natural resources.²² As in the case of preferred stock, this stake confers no right to participate in decisions about whether or how natural resources are to be used and therefore does not interfere with national control over resources, or eminent domain. But it does entitle its holder to a share of the economic benefits from the use of the resource in question, if in fact the decision is to use it. The Saudis, for example, would continue fully to control their crude oil reserves. They would not be required to pump oil or to allow others to do so. But if they chose to do so nonetheless, they would be required to pay a proportional dividend on any crude oil extracted, whether it be for their own use or for sale abroad. This idea could be extended to limited resources that are not destroyed through use but merely eroded, worn down, or occupied, such as air and water used for the discharging of pollutants or land used in agriculture and ranching. The dividend could be applied even to the use of limited resources that can be reused indefinitely without deterioration (metals), but a one-time charge at the time of extraction is obviously much less cumbersome.

In light of the vast extent of global poverty today, one may think that a massive GRD would be necessary to solve the problem. But I do not think this is so. Current radical inequalities are the cumulative result of decades and centuries in which the more affluent societies and groups have used their advantages in capital and knowledge to expand these advantages ever further. These inequalities demonstrate the power of long-term compounding rather than overwhelmingly powerful centrifugal tendencies of our global market system. It is then quite possible that, if radical inequalities have once been eradicated, quite a small GRD may, in the context of a fair and open world market system, be sufficient continuously to balance those ordinary centrifugal tendencies of markets enough to forestall the reemergence of radical deprivation.

The great magnitude of the problem does suggest, however, that initially more, perhaps as much as one percent of the world's social product, may be needed, so that it does not take all too long until accumulated poverty is dismantled and an acceptable distributional profile is reached. To get a concrete sense of the magnitudes involved, let us then consider this higher figure, on the understanding that a lower one should be substituted, if this would better advance the interests of the globally worst-off in the long run or if, sometime in the future, less is needed to maintain a world free from severe poverty. A one-percent GRD would currently raise about \$300 billion annually. This is equivalent to roughly \$250 per person in the poorest quintile, vastly more than their current average annual income.²³ Such an amount, if well targeted and effectively spent, would make a phenomenal difference to them even within a few years.²⁴ On the other hand, the amount is rather small for the rest of us: comparable to the annual defense budget of just the United States alone (ca. \$250 Billion), and a good bit less than the market price (ca. \$420 billion) of the current annual crude oil production.

Let us stay with the case of crude oil for a moment and examine the likely effects of a \$2 per barrel GRD on crude oil extraction.²⁵ This dividend would be paid by the governments of the countries that own oil reserves and choose to extract them. They would try to pass along as much as possible of this cost, through higher world market prices, to the end-users of petroleum products.²⁶ Some of the GRD on crude oil would thus fall upon the Japanese, who have no oil of their own, but import a good bit. This point significantly mitigates the concern that the GRD proposal might be arbitrarily biased against some affluent societies, the resource-rich, and in favor of others. This concern is further mitigated by the GRD's pollution component (the Japanese pay the GRD on their fossil fuel emissions).

Presumably, not all of the cost could be passed along in this way, because a \$2 per barrel rise in the world market price of crude oil would entail a welcome reduction in demand, even if potential substitutes (gas, coal, uranium) were also affected: Higher energy prices provide incentives away from travel and high-energy transportation. With reduced demand, the new equilibrium price could end up less than \$2 above the current one, so that those who own and extract oil reserves would end up bearing some of the GRD burden. Reduced oil consumption would also diminish the GRD revenue from oil, which at present consumption levels (68.6 million barrels per day) would be \$50 billion annually. Even so, the crude oil example shows how nearly one sixth of even the high initial goal of one percent of the world's social product can be achieved — and comfortably so: at the expense of raising the price of petroleum products by about a nickel per gallon higher,²⁷ while the gains of those who own and pump crude oil would fall slightly.

The initial goal could thus be fully achieved by targeting a limited number of resources and pollutants. These should be chosen carefully, with an eye to all the collateral effects of such choices. Here the following desiderata come into play: While designing the GRD is inevitably difficult and complicated, the dividend itself should be easy to understand and to apply. It should, for instance, be based on resources and pollutants whose extraction or discharge is reasonably easy to monitor or estimate, in order to ensure that every society is paying its fair share and also to assure everyone that this is so. Such transparency also helps fulfill the second desideratum of keeping overall collection costs low. The GRD should, thirdly, have only a small impact on the price of basic foodstuffs and other goods consumed to satisfy basic needs. Thus, while some uses of land and water should presumably be targeted, one might specifically exempt water used for human consumption as well as land used in the production of basic staples. And the GRD should, fourthly, be focused on resource uses whose discouragement seems especially desirable in terms of conservation and environmental protection for the sake of our own and future generations. It should, for instance, target the extraction of nonrenewable resources liable to run out within a few decades in preference to that of resources of which we have an abundant supply; and it should target the discharging of pollutants that will persist for centuries in preference to the discharging of (equally harmful) pollutants that decay more quickly.

Intelligent targeting of GRD liabilities thus makes it possible — without major changes to our global economic system — to raise a revenue stream that is clearly sufficient to eradicate world hunger within a few years. What is perhaps surprising is that the collateral effects of raising this revenue may well be positive on the whole, on account of the GRD's benefits for environmental protection and conservation.²⁸ These benefits are hard to secure in a less concerted way because of familiar collective-action problems ("tragedy of the commons"): Each society has little incentive to restrain its consumption and pollution, because the opportunity cost of such restraint falls on it alone while the depletion and pollution costs of consumption are spread worldwide and into the future as well.²⁹

It may be objected that the global poor are also end-users of natural resources and of products associated with pollution, so that some of the GRD will, in the final analysis, be borne by them. However, since the global poor will continue to account for a very small share of global consumption and are the sole intended beneficiaries of the entire GRD scheme, they are bound to be far better off with the GRD modification than without.³⁰ They will, however, be subject to the same incentives toward conservation and environmental protection as the rest of us, and this is as it should be.³¹

Proceeds from the GRD are to be used for raising the world's min-

imum standard of living,³² toward the emancipation of the present and future global poor, toward ensuring that finally all human beings will be able to meet their own basic needs with dignity. Standard of living is then to be interpreted broadly. The goal is not merely to improve the nutrition, medical care, and sanitary conditions of the global poor, but also to make it possible that they can **themselves** effectively defend and realize their basic interests against the rest of humankind — compatriots and foreigners. This capacity presupposes that they are freed from bondage and relations of personal dependence, that they are able to read and write and to learn a profession, that they are able to participate as equals in politics and in the labor market, and that their status is protected by appropriate legal rights which they can understand and effectively enforce through an open and fair legal system.

Rules for the disbursement of GRD funds are to be designed so as to optimize their contribution to the stated goal in the long run. Such design (and, possibly, **redesign** in the light of practical experience) must, of course, draw upon the expertise of economists and international lawyers. But let me nevertheless make a few provisional suggestions so as to give some more concreteness to the proposed reform. The qualification “in the long run” indicates that smaller short-term benefits should not outweigh greater long-term costs. This means, in particular, that incentive effects must be taken into account. The political and economic elite of any poor country stands to gain from GRD funds in various ways (trickle-up) and therefore has an interest in ensuring that its country receives GRD funds. The rules should be designed to take full advantage of this incentive — making it clear to such elites that, if they want to benefit from their society’s receipt of GRD funds, they must cooperate in making these funds effective toward enhancing the circumstances and opportunities of the domestic poor.³³

In an ideal world of fully cooperating, just and efficient governments, GRD funds could be spent through the governments of the poorer societies. Those funds would enable these governments to eradicate poverty in their territories in whatever way is most effective: by maintaining lower (including negative) tax rates, higher tax exemptions and/or higher domestic spending for education, health care, microloans, infrastructure, land reform, etc. than would otherwise be possible. Insofar as these governments would actually do this, the entire GRD scheme would require no central bureaucracy and certainly nothing like a world government, as governments could simply transfer the GRD amounts to one another through some facilitating organization, such as an appropriately reorganized World Bank, for example. Acceptance of GRD payments would of course be voluntary: A society may, perhaps for religious or cultural reasons, reject greater affluence and may then democratically choose to renounce its GRD share for the benefit of poverty eradication elsewhere.

In the real world, corrupt governments in the poorer states would continue to pose a significant problem. Such governments may be inclined, for instance, to use GRD funds to underwrite indispensable services while diverting any domestic tax revenue saved to the rulers' personal use. Any government that behaves in this way should not be entitled to GRD funds. The whole point of the GRD is, after all, to secure for the poorest persons, not for the poorest states, their fair share of the value of natural resources. In such cases it may still be possible to find other ways of spending the targeted funds for the benefit of the poor in the country in question: by making cash payments directly to the local poor or their organizations or by funding development programs administered through existing UN agencies (UNICEF, UNDP, WHO) or suitable nongovernmental organizations (Oxfam). When, in extreme cases, GRD funds cannot be used effectively to reduce poverty in a particular country, then there is no reason to spend them there. They should rather be spent where they can make more of a difference in reducing poverty and disadvantage.³⁴

With regard to each GRD eligible country there are then the following possibilities: GRD funds may be allocated to this country, or withheld (to be allocated to others instead). If allocated, funds can be paid to the government or to (official or private) organizations, and can then be transferred directly to the poor or be spent on other poverty eradication measures. Mixtures are, of course, also possible. Decisions about these matters are to be made pursuant to clear and straightforward general rules whose administration is cheap and transparent. These rules are to be designed, and possibly revised, with an eye to optimizing their effects. In particular, a poor society that has shown greater effectiveness in eradicating domestic poverty should (other things equal) receive larger GRD shares; and the more effective its government has been in supporting the effort, the more of this country's GRD share should go directly to its government. This would give governments and national elites a strong incentive to work toward the eradication of domestic poverty. This incentive may not always prevail. In some poor countries there may well be factions of the ruling elite for whom this incentive would be outweighed by their interest in keeping their poorer compatriots destitute, uneducated, impotent, dependent, and hence exploitable. Still, the envisioned GRD rules will make it harder for such factions (which cancel or reduce the country's GRD share) to maintain themselves in power; and the incentive will thus shift the political balance of forces in the right direction: With the GRD in place, reforms will be pursued more vigorously and in more countries, and will succeed more often and sooner, than would otherwise have been the case. The GRD would stimu-

late a peaceful international competition in effective poverty eradication elsewhere.

This beneficial incentive must not be undermined by taking domestic income distribution into account in calculating GRD shares. It may seem that, of two countries with the same population size and *per capita* income, the one with more severe poverty (more poor people or poorer poor people) should, other things equal, receive a larger GRD flow. But taking account of this fact has the serious disadvantage of giving governments a perverse incentive secretly to tolerate, and even to promote, domestic poverty in order to receive larger GRD payments. This incentive is bad, because governments might act on it, and also because governments might, rightly or wrongly, be thought to act or be accused of acting on it (appearance and assurance problems). Countries' shares of GRD funds should thus be based only on their *per capita* income, so that, other things equal, countries that are poorer on average are entitled to larger shares.³⁵ In addition, effectiveness of national poverty eradication efforts is to be taken into account as discussed, and then, of course population size as well: For equal *per capita* income and effectiveness, GRD receipts should be proportional to population size.³⁶

This rough and revisable sketch has shown, I hope, that the GRD proposal deserves serious examination as an alternative to the *status quo* and to conventional development aid in particular. The latter has an aura of hand-outs and dependence. The GRD, by contrast, avoids any appearance of arrogant generosity: It merely incorporates into international law the moral claim of the poor to partake in the benefits from the use of planetary resources. It implements a moral right — and one that can be justified in multiple ways: namely also forward-lookingly, by reference to its effects, and backward-lookingly, by reference to the genesis of the current economic distribution.

While development aid is often viewed as redistributive, GRD payments should not then be conceived in this way. Calling them redistributive would suggest that they correct upon some initial distribution that, together with the institutional mechanisms generating it, is taken for granted and to be left in place. What I advocate, by contrast, is that we should recognize the existing economic institutions as unjust and should support their reform, aiming for modified institutions that would engender a different distribution of benefits and burdens and would thereby greatly reduce, if not eliminate, the moral need for corrective redistributions.³⁷

A related contrast to development aid is that GRD payments are a matter of entitlement rather than charity and — there being no matching of “donors” and recipients — are not conditional upon rendering political or economic favors to a donor or upon adopting a donor's favored political or economic institutions. This would greatly contribute to making any well functioning GRD scheme much more efficient than conventional development aid, which generally has far more to do with the political and economic interests of the donor country than with the fulfillment of basic needs in the recipient countries.³⁸

You may prefer to receive such comparative efficiency judgments

from economists rather than from a philosopher. If so, I agree wholeheartedly: I, too, would be very glad if economists were willing to teach us more about possible reforms of our global economic order which could effectively eradicate global poverty. The problem is that, on the whole, economists pay very little attention to this question, though they have much (conflicting) advice on what economic policies LDC governments should pursue within the existing global framework. Having said this, I should mention a proposal, somewhat similar to that of a GRD, which the Nobel laureate James Tobin has recently repeated at the international conference on global poverty in Copenhagen. He proposes a half percent tax on currency transactions in order to discourage currency speculation. The specific intent of the tax is to reduce speculative exchange rate fluctuations and thereby to enable national governments and central banks better to adapt their monetary policy to domestic economic conditions.³⁹ Even if this tax were to reduce the volume of currency transactions — which is currently about \$1.5 trillion *per day!* — by ninety-five percent, it would still raise \$137 billion annually. While acknowledging that “raising revenues for international purposes was not a primary motivation of my proposal,” (Tobin 1994b), Tobin does suggest that the funds should be so used (*ibid.*). It is quite possible that his proposal is pragmatically superior to mine, at least if massive clandestine exchange activity in offshore investment havens can be effectively suppressed. The funds might be cheaper to collect and the rich countries could be more easily won over to the proposal. On the other hand, the Tobin tax has no environmental pay-off and also lacks a moral rationale connecting payers and recipients (why should those who engage in currency transactions, of all people, be made to pay for global poverty eradication?). These differences pale, however, beside the shared conviction that such an institutional reform is feasible and should be attempted. The Tobin tax, too, would be a great gain for global justice. It is high time, in any case, that economists, jurists, political scientists, politicians, the media, and all of us seriously consider and discuss such proposals.

We must now deal with the objection that the GRD scheme would simply not work: Since the funds raised through the GRD are spent in the poorest countries and regions, many of the wealthier and more powerful states would lose by complying. The moral motives we can expect from the populations and governments of these states will not be sufficient in all cases to secure compliance.⁴⁰ And noncompliance by some would undermine others' willingness to participate. Instituting a GRD would therefore require significant further institutional reforms, including central enforcement mechanisms.

In response, I agree that the GRD scheme would have to be backed by sanctions. But sanctions could be decentralized: Once the agency facilitating the

flow of GRD payments reports that a country has not met its obligations under the scheme, all other countries are required to impose duties on imports from, and perhaps also similar levies on exports to, this country to raise funds equivalent to its GRD obligations plus the cost of these enforcement measures. Such decentralized sanctions stand a very good chance of discouraging small-scale defections. Our world is now, and is likely to remain, highly interdependent economically; most countries export and import between ten and fifty percent of their gross domestic product. None of them would benefit from shutting down foreign trade for the sake of avoiding a GRD obligation of around one percent of GDP. And each would have reasons to meet its GRD obligation voluntarily: to retain full control over how the funds are raised, to avoid paying for enforcement measures in addition, and to avoid the negative publicity associated with noncompliance.

Such a scheme of decentralized sanctions could work only so long as both the U.S. and the European Union continue to comply and continue to participate in the sanction mechanism. I assume that both will do this, *provided* they can be brought to commit themselves to (something like) the GRD regime in the first place. This condition, which is decisive for the success of the proposal, will be addressed in Section 5. It should be clear, however, that the refusal of the U.S. and/or the E.U. to participate in the eradication of global poverty would not alter the fact that conditions **(5)** and **(7)** are met. We citizens of wealthy countries can obviously not argue that, because we prevent any reform of the global economy which would reduce our advantage, the misery of the global poor is unavoidable and therefore manifests no injustice. To be sure, none of us can single-handedly reform the existing world order. But this incapacity supports no more than the following thought: There is a practicable alternative to the present world order under which the globally worst socio-economic position would be much better. The majority of the rich and mighty are however blocking the required reform. In view of the grievous injustice of the existing order, I should therefore try to convert my peers and use some of the resources that the present order puts at my disposal to mitigate some of its worst effects.

By sketching the GRD proposal in some detail, I hope to have clarified and made more familiar the idea that our global institutional scheme is involved in the production of radical deprivation. Faced with massive poverty, hunger, and abuse in the less developed countries (LDC's), we are tempted toward explanations in terms of differences in national institutions. And such explanations certainly have a role to play — in explaining, for example, why some LDC's have developed so much more rapidly than others. What I have tried to show is that we should not rest content with such

national explanations, that our global institutional framework also plays an important role in the production of radical inequality. This is difficult to see, for at least two reasons: There has never been a genuine succession of economic regimes on the global plane, as states have always been recognized as full and sovereign owners of “their” resources. And the available national explanations seem to do the explanatory job all on their own. My sketch of the GRD scheme is supposed to help overcome these difficulties. It constitutes a genuine (albeit hypothetical) alternative to the existing global economic framework. This alternative would, quite obviously, have very different distributional effects. It would also make a difference to what kinds of national regimes emerge, and in what frequencies. This shows that the existing global economic arrangements are involved in the production of radical deprivation, that world hunger and poverty cannot be explained by reference to national factors alone.

The Moral Argument for the Proposed Reform

By showing that conditions **(1)-(10)** are met, I hope to have demonstrated that current world poverty manifests a grievous injustice that can and should be abolished through institutional reform, for example, through introduction of a GRD. To make my argument as transparent and criticizable as possible, I will now restate it in the following six steps:

- A. If a society or comparable social system, regulated by a single set of social institutions, is characterized by radical inequality, then its institutional scheme is *prima facie* unjust and hence stands in need of justification. Here the burden of proof is on those who wish to defend these institutions and their coercive imposition as compatible with justice.

This first premise can perhaps best be defended by showing how very weak it is, in three respects: It applies only if the inequality occurs within one institutional framework, so that the everyday conduct of those at the top has a strong and lasting impact on the circumstances of those at the bottom (condition (6)). Moreover, the first premise applies only if the existing inequality is radical, that is, involves truly extreme poverty and extreme differentials in standards of living (conditions (1)-(5)). Finally, the first premise does not flatly exclude institutional schemes under which such radical inequalities persist, but merely demands that they be justified. And — seeing that social institutions are,

after all, created and imposed, perpetuated or reformed, by human beings — this demand can hardly be refused with any plausibility.

- B. Such a justification of radical inequality among the participants in an institutional scheme would need to show either:
- B1 that condition (10) is not met, perhaps because the existing radical inequality came about fairly: through an historical process that transpired in accordance with morally plausible rules that were generally observed; or
 - B2 that condition (9) is not met, because the worst-off can adequately benefit from the use of natural resources through access to a proportional share or through a superior substitute; or
 - B3 that condition (8) is not met, that is, that the existing radical inequality can be traced to extra-social factors (such as genetic handicaps or natural disasters) which, as such, affect different persons differentially;⁴¹ or
 - B4 that condition (7) is not met, because any proposed alternative to the existing institutional scheme either impracticable, that is, cannot be stably maintained in the long run; or cannot be instituted in a morally acceptable way even with the good will of all concerned; or would not significantly improve the circumstances of the worst off; or would have other morally significant disadvantages that offset any improvement in the circumstances of the worst-off.⁴²

This second premise, too, is quite weak, in that it demands of the defender of the *status quo* only one of the four possible showings and also leaves him the choice which to attempt. In particular, such a defender is free to try out each of the three criteria of justice introduced in Section 2, even though he can hardly subscribe to all three of them at once.

- C. Our current global institutional scheme meets the antecedent condition of premise 1.
- D. Our current global institutional scheme therefore stands in need of justification <from 1 and 3>.
- E. Current global radical inequality can be given no justification of forms 2a, 2b, and 2c. A justification of form 2d fails as well, because modifying the existing global economic order through the introduction of a GRD provides an alternative that is practicable, can (with some good will by all concerned) be instituted in a morally acceptable way, would significantly improve the circum-

stances of the worst-off, and would not have disadvantages of comparable moral significance.

F. Our current global institutional framework is therefore unjust <from 4, 2 and 5>.

Five Further Remarks About the Argument

in presenting this argument, I have not attempted to satisfy the strictest demands of logical form, which would have required various qualifications and repetitions. I have merely tried to clarify the structure of the argument so as to make clear how it can be attacked. To attack it from within, one would need to refute premise **3**, give a justification of forms **2a** or **2b** or **2c**, or show that my reform proposal does run into one of the four problems listed under **2d**. To attack it from outside, one would need to argue against the moral premises **1** or **2**, that is, one would need to show that institutional schemes within which radical inequalities occur sometimes do not stand in need of justification or can be justified in a way that differs from the four (**2a-2d**) I have described.

The conclusion of the argument is reached only if all ten of the conditions introduced in Section 2 are met. When this is so, then all three approaches agree in their assessment of current global poverty, which then manifests a core injustice in whose eradication adherents of different and competing moral conceptions can work together. Insofar as they approve this argument, advantaged and influential participants in the current international order will accept some shared negative responsibility for its injustice which gives them a strong moral reason to work with others toward its reform and toward protecting those victimized by this order from its worst effects.

Even if one accepts this reasoning in its entirety, one might still retort that we have competing moral reasons of a more particularistic kind as well, which make it at least permissible for us to give precedence to the fight against poverty and injustice at home, within our own country. I have three things to say in response to this common view.

Other things remaining the same, the introduction of a GRD would indeed reduce the standard of living of the poor in the developed countries. In the case of affluent countries structured in a just way this would pose no problem, because even the poorest persons in these countries would still be reasonably well off and certainly much better off than the (no longer quite so poor) worst-off in the poorer countries. There exist some economically unjust affluent countries in which some persons live in harsh poverty. But the responsibility for their poverty (and for its worsening after the introduction of a GRD) surely rests with those who are politically influential in these countries. For under the GRD pro-

positional, each society retains full sovereignty over its domestic economic system. If it wants to reform its economy so as to reduce domestic inequality, it is always free to do so through tax reforms, subsidies, incentives, and so forth. It would clearly be absurd to exempt *unjust* affluent countries from the GRD.⁴³ By doing so, one would confer a further gain upon the wealthy in these countries (over and above the gain they now presumably derive from the injustice of the national economic order they uphold). And one would also give the wealthy of any country an incentive to promote poverty and injustice at home so as to get their country exempted from the GRD.

It is true, of course, that we stand in special relations to some persons and are thereby more strongly bound — also morally — to them than to others. I have especially strong moral reasons to work for the education of *my* children, the success of *my* firm or university, and the justice and culture of *my* country. And, likewise, we and our government have especially strong moral reasons to promote the interests of our own society and compatriots, even if foreigners are worse off. I need not deny this claim, only to qualify it: Partiality is legitimate only in the context of a *fair* competition. This idea is familiar and widely accepted in the domestic case: It is perfectly all right for persons to concentrate on promoting the interests of themselves and their relatives, provided they do so on a “level playing field” whose substantive fairness is continually preserved. Partiality toward one’s family is decidedly not acceptable when we, *qua* citizens, face political decisions in which that playing field itself is at stake. It would be morally wrong, for example, even (or perhaps especially) if one’s children are white boys, to use one’s political influence to oppose equal access to higher education for women or blacks. Whenever we act politically — even merely as voters — we are to leave particularistic reasons aside and focus exclusively on justice and the common good. Most citizens in the developed West understand and accept this point without question. It should not be all that hard to make them understand that for closely analogous reasons national partiality is morally acceptable only on condition that the fairness of international relations is continually preserved, and that it is morally wrong in just the same way for us and our political representatives to use our vastly superior bargaining power to impose upon the global poor an unjust international economic order that tends to perpetuate their poverty and inferiority.⁴⁴

The problem of global poverty is not the only injustice in this world. And, so one may think, even if it is the worst injustice, we should be entitled to give precedence to other injustices that concern us more directly, such as the injustice of our own domestic socio-economic institutions. Now I accept that, as participants in some injustice, we have a

reason to give priority to the struggle against it. As a U.S. citizen one has, other things equal, more reason to work for the reform of U.S. institutions than for that of Canadian or Korean ones. But this priority is here irrelevant, because we are participants in both unjust institutional schemes: the global and the domestic. And — however one may want to conduct such comparisons — the injustice of our global order is surely vastly greater than that of our national one. And there is no moral reason, surely, for giving precedence to the reform of smaller over that of larger institutional schemes, when one is a participant in both.

Is the Reform Proposal Realistic?

Even if the GRD proposal is practicable, and even if it could be implemented with the good will of all concerned, there remains the problem of generating this good will, especially on the part of the rich and mighty. Without the support of the U.S. and the European Union, global poverty will certainly not be eradicated in our lifetimes. How realistic is the hope of mobilizing such support? I have two answers to this question.

First. Even if this hope is not realistic, it is still important to understand that present world poverty manifests a grievous injustice according to all the major Western approaches in political philosophy. We are not merely distant witnesses of a problem unrelated to ourselves, with a weak, positive responsibility and duty to help mitigate this problem (e.g. through occasional donations). Rather, we are — both causally and morally — intimately involved in the fate of the poor, in particular by imposing upon them an economic order that regularly produces severe poverty and/or by effectively excluding them from the benefits of natural resources and/or by upholding a radical inequality that resulted from an historical process pervaded by massive crimes. In light of this involvement, we have a strong, negative responsibility and duty to stop contributing to, and profiting from, the maintenance of the status quo, and also to help work out and implement plausible reforms. If no plausible and implementable reform can be found, then we may in the end be unable to do more than mitigate. But even then a difference would remain, because the point of our donations would then no longer be to help the needy but to protect victims of an injustice, in which we ourselves participate, from its worst effects and also to reduce the extent to which we profit from this injustice. And duties of this last kind are, of course, other things equal, much more stringent than those of the first.

My second answer is that the hope may not be so unrealistic after all.

My provisional optimism is based on two considerations. The first is that moral convictions can have real effects even in international politics — as even some political realists admit, albeit with regret.⁴⁵ Sometimes these are the moral convictions of politicians. But it seems rather more common that politics is influenced by the moral convictions of citizens (who influence, and are themselves influenced by, the mass media). One dramatic example of this is the suppression of the slave trade in the nineteenth century. After a massive mobilization of its domestic population, which was predominantly morally motivated, Britain was in the forefront of this effort, actively enforcing a ban on the entire maritime slave trade irrespective of a vessel's ownership, registration, port of origin, or destination. Britain bore the whole cost of its enforcement efforts and could not hope to gain significant benefits from it — in fact, Britain bore additional opportunity costs in the form of lost trade, especially with Latin America.⁴⁶ Such a mobilization may also be possible for the sake of eradicating world poverty, if two conditions are met: if the citizens of the more powerful states can be convinced of a moral conclusion that really can be supported in a convincing way, and if a path can be shown that makes only modest demands on each of us.⁴⁷

The GRD proposal satisfies the first condition.⁴⁸ As I have shown, this proposal can be broadly anchored in the three main (and mutually incompatible) strands of the Western intellectual tradition — which tradition matters most, seeing that most of the burdens (relative to the *status quo*) of the GRD would, directly or indirectly, fall upon the people of the developed West. And it also has the morally significant advantage of shifting consumption in ways that restrain global pollution and resource depletion in the interest of all human beings and of future generations in particular. Because it can be backed by these four important and mutually independent moral rationales, the GRD proposal is well-positioned to benefit from the fact that moral reasons can have effects in the world. If some help could be secured from other disciplines (economics, political science, law) toward translating, specifying, and defending the idea, then moral acceptance of the GRD may gradually emerge and become widespread in the developed West.

Eradicating global poverty through institutional reform also involves more realistic demands than a solution through private initiatives and bilateral development aid. To be sure, private donations and some development projects have prevented much suffering, while attempts at institutional reform have thus far led nowhere.⁴⁹ But it is not realistic to hope, I believe, that the problem of world poverty will be once and for all solved in the foreseeable future through an expansion of private initiatives and bilateral development aid. This does not mean, of course, that we should

shun donations or oppose development aid. It means only that we should also reflect on the possibility of a global order that would not engender in the first place the kind of massive and severe poverty which must then continually be mitigated through donations, development aid, and debt relief. Continual mitigation of poverty leads to fatigue, aversion, even contempt. It demands of the more affluent citizens and governments that they rally to the cause again and again while knowing full well that most similarly situated persons and governments contribute nothing or very little, that their own contributions are legally optional, and that, no matter how much they give, they could for just a little more always save yet another child from disease or malnutrition.

These last two factors may well be important for explaining the inefficiency of traditional development aid (mentioned in footnote 38). This inefficiency is not merely due to lack of good will on the part of the governments of the donor countries. It is due also to their competitive situation: Every affluent state must be concerned not to place itself at a competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis the others by granting purely altruistic development aid. And many therefore feel morally entitled to reject the demand for greater concern for the truly deprived by pointing out that their competitors, too, do not meet such demands. This hypothesis supports the optimistic assumption that the affluent states would be prepared, in joint reciprocity, to commit themselves to more than what they tend to do each on its own. Analogous considerations apply to environmental protection and the conservation of resources, with respect to which the GRD also contributes to a collective solution: When many parties decide separately in this matter, then the solution that would be best for all is not achieved, because each party gets (almost) the full benefit of its pollution and wastefulness while the resulting harms are shared by all ("tragedy of the commons"). An additional point is that national development-aid and environmental-protection measures must be politically fought for or defended year after year, while acceptance of the GRD regime would require only **one** — albeit rather more far-reaching — political decision.

The other optimistic consideration has to do with prudence. The times when we could afford to ignore developments in the "less developed countries" are over for good. The economic development of the LDC's will have a great influence upon our environment, and their military and technological development is accompanied by various serious dangers, among which those associated with nuclear, biological/genetic, and chemical weapons and technologies are only the most obvious. Here we must think not only of weapons and technologies that the more powerful states possess already, but also of those that will be developed in the next decades and centuries and will then presumably also find their way into the hands of other governments and groups. The trans-

national imposition of externalities and risks will more and more become a two-way street; and no state or group of states, however rich and mighty, will be able effectively to insulate itself from external influences: from military and terrorist attacks, illegal immigrants, epidemics and the drug trade, pollution and climate change, price fluctuations, and scientific-technological and cultural innovations. This is why it is increasingly in our interest, too, that stable democratic institutions shall emerge in the less developed regions — institutions under which governmental power is effectively constrained through procedural rules and basic rights. So long as large parts of the populations of these countries have barely the most minimal education, can often not even read and write, and also have no assurance that they will be able to meet even their most basic needs, such democratic institutions are much less likely than explosive mixtures of religious and ideological fanaticism, revolutionary movements, death squads, and politicized militaries. To expose ourselves to the occasional explosions of these mixtures would be increasingly dangerous and also more costly in the long run than the introduction of the proposed GRD.

This prudential consideration has a moral side as well. A future that is pervaded by radical inequalities and hence unstable would endanger not only the security of ourselves and our children, but also the long-term survival of our society, values, and culture. Not only that: Such a future would, quite generally, endanger the security of all other human beings and their children as well as the survival of their societies, values, and cultures. And so the interest in peace — in a future world in which different societies, values, and cultures can coexist and interact peacefully — is obviously also, and importantly, a moral interest.

Realizing our prudential and moral interest in a peaceful and also ecologically sound future will — and here I go beyond my earlier modesty — require supranational institutions and organizations that limit the sovereignty rights of states more severely than is currently the case. The most powerful states could try to impose such limitations upon all the rest while exempting themselves. It is quite doubtful, however, that today's great powers will summon the political will to make this attempt before it is too late — and doubtful also whether such an attempt could even then succeed. For they would thereby provoke the bitter resistance of many other states, which would simultaneously try very hard, through rearmament, to gain membership in the club of great powers themselves. For such a project, the "elites" in many LDC's could probably mobilize their populations quite easily.

It might then make more sense for all concerned to work toward supranational institutions and organizations that limit the sovereignty rights of all states equally.⁵⁰ But this solution can work only if at least a large majority of the states participating in these institutions and orga-

nizations are stable democracies, which presupposes, in turn, that the citizens of these states can satisfy their basic needs, can attain a decent standard of education, and are assured of a reasonable income.

The current geopolitical development drifts toward a world in which a steadily growing number of militarily and technologically advanced states and groups constitute a steadily growing danger for ever larger parts of humankind. Deflecting this development in a more reasonable direction realistically requires considerable support from those other eighty percent of the world's population who want to reduce our economic hegemony and participate in our high standard of living. Through the introduction of the GRD (or some similar reform) we can gain such support by showing in a tangible way that our relations to the rest of the world are not devoted solely to cementing our economic hegemony and that the poor of this world will be able peacefully to achieve a considerable improvement in their circumstances. In this way, and only in this way, can we refute the conviction, which is understandably widespread in the LDC's, that we will not give a damn about their misery until they have the economic and military power to do us serious harm. And only in this way can we undermine the popular support that aggressive political movements of all kinds can derive from this conviction.

This second consideration shows that the GRD proposal can also be supported by prudential arguments and might therefore succeed even if the political effectiveness of moral and ecological arguments were to prove insufficient. It is therefore of some moral importance to develop and present also the prudential arguments as clearly and as convincingly as possible.

Conclusion

We are familiar, through charity appeals for example, with the assertion that it lies in our hands to save the lives of many or, by doing nothing, to let these people die. We are less familiar with the here defended assertion of a negative responsibility, according to which most of us do not merely let persons starve, but also participate actively in starving them.⁵¹ It is not surprising that our initial reaction to this even more unpleasant assertion is indignation and even hostility, that, rather than think it through or discuss it, we want to forget it or put it aside as plainly absurd. At the very least we want to demand that an assertion that so dramatically contradicts the judgments of our common sense must be proved in every detail and with the utmost stringency.

I have not here been able to deliver so stringent a proof. It is extremely

difficult to estimate whether a proposed modification of our global order is practicable and, if so, what its long-term effects would be on the incidence of radical inequality. Economists may be able to offer more precise estimates on this score and to work out a more detailed reform proposal; but a stringent proof is not to be expected even from them. The morally reasonable reaction to this essay must nevertheless, I believe, be constructive. Even if its argumentation falls short of strict proof, it must raise considerable doubts about our commonsense prejudices, which we should in any case treat with suspicion on account of how strongly our self-interest is engaged in this matter. The great moral importance of reaching the correct judgment on this issue also counsels against lightly dismissing the assertion here defended. The essential data about the lives and deaths of the global poor in our current world are, after all, indisputable. In view of very considerable global interdependence, it is extremely unlikely that their poverty is due exclusively to local factors and that no reform of our global order could affect either that poverty or these local factors. No less incredible is the view that ours is the best of all possible global orders as far as poverty is concerned. We should work together across disciplines to conceive a comprehensive solution to the problem of world poverty, and across borders for the political implementation of this solution.

Endnotes

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² The United Nations Development Program reports that “about 1.3 billion people [24 percent of world population] live below the poverty line,” which is defined as “the income or expenditure level below which a minimum, nutritionally adequate diet plus essential non-food requirements are not affordable” (UNDP 1995, 16 and 223). This includes 350 million (or 40 percent of the population) in India, 105 million (10 percent) in China, 93 million (80 percent) in Bengla Desh, 72 million (47 percent) in Brazil, and about 300 million in Ethiopia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Indonesia (*The Economist*, British edition, June 25, 1994, 130). About 70 percent of the global poor are female.

³ If the U.S. had its fair share of these deaths, it would lose one million citizens a year to poverty — about as many every three weeks as it lost during the entire Vietnam War. In this century, many more premature deaths were caused by peacetime poverty than by all wars combined.

⁴ Though it is important to my argument that we are quite well off and very much better off than the global poor, I shall bypass the discussion how standards of living should be defined, compared, and measured. This topic has received a great deal of academic attention in recent years, most notably, perhaps, from Ronald Dworkin, James Griffin, Martha Nussbaum, Derek Parfit, John Rawls, Thomas Scanlon, and Amartya Sen. I avoid this issue not only for reasons of space, but also because I am certain that any plausible specification would sustain the claims I want to make. There is also the fear that all the debate about definition and measurement, and perhaps any encoding of inequalities in numerical terms, may perplex and diminish our appreciation of what would otherwise be an overwhelmingly obvious and monstrous fact. We read that the average income in some countries is less than one percent of ours; but this figure obscures the fact that many persons there cannot earn anywhere near this average income and must constantly reckon with the possibility that their children may die of simple diarrhea because they cannot afford a 15-cent oral rehydration pack. (Some 3 million children annually die in this way, another 3.5 million of pneumonia, 1 million of measles, and so on; see Grant 1993.) In any case, we must keep in mind that what, in this essay, I blandly call “poverty” has many aspects over and above low income and wealth.

⁵ This mode of argument goes back to Singer 1972. It has been developed further in Shue 1980, and Kagan 1989. Among the latest contributions, with detailed bibliographies, are Cullity 1994 and Unger 1996.

⁶ The first four points are amply documented by numerous intergovernmental and nongovernmental agencies and organizations. The fifth point can be substantiated through the institutional reform I will propose in Section 3, and also through the many successes in protection which organized citizens of developed countries have achieved by helping to supply seeds, wells, fuel-efficient stoves, and microloans, and by helping to spread basic capabilities (reading, writing, accounting, marketing, etc.) and basic knowledge (e.g., about hygiene, nutrition, prophylaxis, birth control, irrigation, and the law).

⁷ One may be negatively responsible for harms and injuries one has inflicted upon others, for example.

⁸ One might call this an overlapping consensus, but it differs from what Rawls has in mind by being on a higher level and also more concrete. Rawls envisions that the adherents of different conceptions of the good agree on an entire conception of justice together with the basic structure it entails under present circumstances (Rawls 1993a, ch.4). I envision that the adherents of different conceptions of justice reach a morally based agreement on a program for reforming a core injustice. This second model is especially important in contexts like the international one, where there is little chance for agreement on a full conception of justice. I would therefore like to develop this model further, especially by also taking account of moral conceptions prevalent in other cultures.

⁹ For a concise exposition of the first approach, see Nagel 1977 and perhaps also O'Neill 1974 and Pogge 1989, §24.

¹⁰ We tend to underestimate global interdependence because of its one-sidedness. Our circumstances are only mildly affected by developments abroad and hardly at all by developments in the poorer countries.

¹¹ Talk of "our global institutional scheme" sounds forbiddingly abstract, and I cannot hope to explicate this notion fully here. To convey at least a rough idea, one should mention, first and foremost, the institution of the modern state. The land surface of our planet is divided into a number of clearly demarcated and non-overlapping national territories. Human beings are matched up with these territories, so that (at least for the most part) each person belongs to exactly one territory. Any person or group effectively controlling a preponderant share of the means of coercion within such a territory is recognized as the legitimate government of both the territory and the persons belonging to it. It is entitled to rule "its" people through laws, orders, and officials, to adjudicate conflicts among them, and also to exercise ultimate control over all resources within the territory ("eminent domain"). It is also entitled to personify these persons against the rest of the world: to bind them vis-à-vis outsiders through treaties and contracts, to regulate their relations with outsiders, to declare war in their name, to represent them through diplomats and emissaries, and to control outsiders' access to the country's territory. In this second role, a government is considered continuous with its predecessors and successors: bound by the undertakings of the former, and capable of binding the latter through its own undertakings. There are, of course, various minor deviations and complications, as well as many further, more peripheral features of our global order, some of which have undergone significant change over time. (One important modification was the succession of international trading regimes marked by the agreement at Bretton Woods, which was associated with noticeable changes in overall prosperity and its distribution.) But its central and most consequential features have been remarkably stable for centuries. Much about the circumstances of the global poor can be understood by comprehending fully the role of only these central features.

¹² It is bad luck to be born into a family that is too poor to feed one. But that a quarter of all children are born into such families — that is not bad luck, but bad organization.

¹³ Drawing this false inference exemplifies a fallacy that used to be quite common, for instance, in the controversy over the heritability of IQ. But the point is now well understood. Even if genetic differences are by far the most important factor in explaining interpersonal differences in vulnerability to a certain disease, it may still be true that the overall incidence of this disease could be dramatically reduced through a change in the environment. And even if over 90 percent of the observed variation in female adult height in some village is due to hereditary factors (there being a very high correlation between a woman's height and the average height of her two parents), it is still quite possible that all woman villagers would be much taller if, when they were growing up, the village had had an adequate food supply or girls had not been disadvantaged vis-à-vis boys.

¹⁴ Habermas's commitment to this first approach is brought out in his universalization principle according to which social norms are to be assessed by considering what effects and side effects their universal observance would have upon the interests of each individual person (see Habermas 1983, 103).

¹⁵ Quoted in Gould 1991, p.19. This quote is remarkable, because Darwin is often claimed by those who find it either desirable or unavoidable that human life should be a competitive struggle for survival.

¹⁶ Locke 1689, §41 and §37; cp. Nozick 1974, 175-177 and chapter IV.

¹⁷ An important element in this restriction is the constraint on their freedom of movement which results from the fact that states successfully claim and enforce their right to exclude foreigners from their territory.

¹⁸ This is so not only because we cannot collect the necessary data about all these crimes and estimate their effects upon the present world, but also because different persons would have come to exist had these crimes not occurred (cf. Schwartz 1978 and also Parfit 1984, chap. 16).

¹⁹ Even Nozick suggests that in such a case Rawls's difference principle, which is focused on the eradication of poverty, may be a morally plausible solution (Nozick 1974, 231). He does however make this suggestion in the context of the assumption that the offspring of the victims of past crimes are likely to be overrepresented among the current poor. The third approach, as I have sketched it, is not committed on this point. It deems it unjust to allow innocent persons to be victims of radical inequality when this inequality came about through historical processes pervaded by crimes — even if these crimes had been committed by ancestors of the current poor. I believe that Nozick, too, would accept this point on reflection, because the kinship liability involved in denying it does not fit into his overall position. He would then agree with the central idea of the third approach: Radical inequality can be compatible with justice **only** if it came about pursuant to morally plausible rules that were actually observed.

²⁰ In contrast to Pogge 1992b, where the prevailing conception of sovereignty is criticized.

²¹ Compare the far more radical idea that on a Lockean account “each individual has a right to an equal share of the basic non-human means of production” (i.e. means of production other than labor which are not themselves produced: resources in the sense of my GRD), as presented in Steiner 1977, 49, and developed further in Cohen 1986, 87-95.

²² When first making the proposal (in Pogge 1994), I did speak of a “global resources tax” — misleadingly, as taxes (and fees) are not usually understood as payments deriving from (partial) ownership.

²³ It is difficult to estimate the average **per capita** income among the poorest quintile of world population. \$60 annually would seem to be a reasonable guess. Since the purchasing power of money (converted at market exchange rates) is about five times greater in the poorest countries, their annual **per capita** purchasing power would then be equivalent to that of \$300 in the rich countries. This squares with Dasgupta's statement that most in the poorest quintile have annual **per capita** purchasing power below \$275 and all below \$370 in 1985 dollars (Dasgupta 1993, 79f). With such incredibly low incomes it is not surprising that most in the poorest quintile, 800 million, do not get enough food (UNDP 1995, p.16). Note that estimates

in terms of annual income still understate the economic inequality. For, to earn these incomes, the global poor must generally spend a much greater proportion of their time at work than we do. So the inequality in incomes per hour is greater than that in annual incomes. The inequality is greater still when quality of work is taken into account as well. And it is further aggravated by the even more extreme wealth inequality — the global poor own essentially nothing of the world's wealth and thus have no reserves for even minor emergencies.

²⁴ Since part of this money would be spent (not merely *on*, but also) *in* the poorest countries and regions, its impact would be significantly enhanced by multiplier effects.

²⁵ Crude oil is traded in barrels, which are equivalent to 42 U.S. gallons.

²⁶ The collateral cost of raising the GRD would be quite small. No new administrative capacities would need to be developed at the national level, as national tax systems are already in place and oil extraction is already either taxed or nationalized. Global monitoring costs would also be low: Extraction and pollution activities are relatively easy to quantify and thus do not pose unmanageable assurance problems.

²⁷ We would also pay slightly more for any other goods and services that contain crude oil components. But, with few exceptions (such as airline tickets), these increases would be negligible.

²⁸ It may be thought that the GRD would have the collateral effect of dampening economic activity. But I don't see why it should. The funds raised through the GRD scheme do not, after all, disappear: They are spent by, and for the benefit of, the global poor and thereby generate effective market demand that spurs economic activity.

²⁹ Here I should concede that the rich countries could well hope to negotiate a (for them) cheaper solution to this collective action problem: We could institute a *national* resources dividend and try to induce other states to do the same. This would probably involve some side payments to less developed countries (LDC's). But these could be narrowly focused on their governments and rulers and would, in any case, need to include only those LDC's whose developmental decisions might otherwise adversely affect the global environment. We have seen this strategy at work in recent treaties under which some LDC governments have been forgiven some of their foreign debt in exchange for undertaking certain environmental initiatives in their territory.

³⁰ Even if we disregard multiplier effects and assume that only a quarter of total GRD revenue reaches persons in the poorest quintile, their average standard of living would still improve by over \$60 *per annum*, or double, compared to the *status quo* (cp. note 22 above). This improvement would simply overwhelm minor price increases.

³¹ Consider this analogy: If we taxed gasoline an extra 50¢ per gallon in the USA and paid the full revenue to the poorest 40 percent in the form of a flat tax credit, then the poor would certainly be much better off than before even if they stuck to their driving

habits. However, they would presumably not stick to their driving habits. They would use less gasoline and thereby make themselves even better off while reducing pollution and slowing oil depletion.

³² This minimum could be defined in terms of some substantial fraction of world population. The exact choice of fraction does not make much of a practical difference, as focusing on the poorest five percent, say, would rather soon bring them up to the level of the sixth percentile and would then begin improving the circumstances of an ever growing fraction of world population. Given the extremely heavy concentration of global income today, it is quite possible that adoption of the GRD reform would ensure that, in the long run, incomes at each of the bottom 60 or 70 percentiles would be higher than they would have been under a continuation of current institutions.

³³ This assumes, plausible, in my view, that the local costs of such rule design (that the circumstances of the poor are sometimes not improved at all, rather than a little) are outweighed by its global benefits (that national elites develop a stronger interest in the eradication of poverty, so as to qualify their country for GRD funds).

³⁴ The GRD scheme involves then a secondary conditionality: Obligations toward the global poor are primary and unconditional. Obligations toward the governments of poor countries are derivative. They can therefore be made conditional, but not arbitrarily so: An obligation toward such a government can be made conditional only upon this government's effectiveness in combating poverty in its territory.

³⁵ This could give governments an incentive toward keeping *per capita* income low. But this incentive would be overwhelmed by opposing interests: A government's power depends on its country's overall prosperity in many ways.

³⁶ Or perhaps proportional to the size of the adult population, if effective population control efforts might otherwise be discouraged.

³⁷ For a more extensive discussion of the term redistribution and its tendentious connotations, see Pogge 1989, 32, 34f, 238, 276, and Pogge 1992b, 52.

³⁸ There are various studies showing how development aid often benefits those capable of reciprocation, that is, the "elites" in the politically more important developing countries. In addition, such aid is often focused on expensive high-visibility projects in which firms of the donor country can profitably participate. For more on this theme and for relevant references, see the cover story "Why Aid is an Empty Promise," *The Economist*, May 7, 1994, 13-14 and 21-24.

³⁹ Tobin 1994a, Eichengreen 1995, cp. Tobin 1978.

⁴⁰ These claims might be supported by pointing to how lax many states have been about paying their much smaller membership dues to the UN.

⁴¹ It is important to realize that the unequal distribution of property in natural resources — unlike that of natural (genetic) endowments — is *not* such an extra-social factor. The geographical distribution of natural resources (e.g., that the Middle East holds a large part of the world's crude oil reserves) is, of course, an extra-social fact. But this fact does not *as such* affect different persons differentially, but does so only insofar as it is combined with another, clearly social, factor: namely with the fact that our global order assigns to national societies and governments exclusive rights to ownership and control with respect to natural resources on their territory.

⁴² Showings of types **(2b)** and **(2d)** will generally justify only the extent of existing inequality, not its allocation (i.e., the existing role distribution: that *these* persons are poor and *those* wealthy).

⁴³ Just as it would be absurd to grant affluent adults who do not feed their children well an exemption from their taxes.

⁴⁴ For a complementary argument, to the effect that unqualified partiality constitutes a loophole in our morality, see Pogge 1992a, 84-98.

⁴⁵ It is not a coincidence, I believe, that political realism had its heyday (with Hans Morgenthau, George Kennan, and Henry Kissinger) in the cold war era. During this time, the pragmatic imperatives of prevailing and winning were, or seemed, so absolutely compelling that they tended to overwhelm all other (including moral) considerations. In periods when states feel more secure, it is much more likely that their governments and citizens can be moved by moral considerations, even in their foreign policy.

⁴⁶ Drescher 1986. A relevantly similar, though somewhat more contestable story can be told about the U.S. retreat from Vietnam — see Zinn 1980, Chapter 18.

⁴⁷ Obviously, a lot more could and should be said about the various similarities and dissimilarities between this case and the proposed GRD reform. But here I have merely wanted to point out that there do seem to be significant counterexamples to the claim that governments never act contrary to what they take to be in their own, or their society's, best interest.

⁴⁸ To show this fully, one would need to respond to the objection that instituting the GRD would be an immoral imposition of our Western values upon a pluralistic world. As explained elsewhere (Pogge 1989, 267-273, and Pogge 1994, 215-218), I find this objection implausible, mainly because there can be no "neutral" global order, nor a "neutral" role that the developed Western states could play in regard to how the world economy is structured: Our political and economic policies and decisions unavoidably co-determine the structure and development of global institutions. — And even if the objection had some merit, the Western countries should at least jointly propose

(something like) the GRD regime.

⁴⁹ Witness proposals for a new international economic order (which in the 1970's were debated extensively but without result in UNCTAD and also in the UN General Assembly), for an international tax on carbon dioxide emissions, and for an agreement (which was to have been included in the Law of the Sea Treaty) to share the value of ocean-floor resources "to benefit all peoples, with special regard for the needs of the least developed countries."

⁵⁰ This vision jars, I admit, with our current notions of state sovereignty (with which I had said my GRD proposal would be compatible): It involves a more democratic world order, a greater role for central organizations, and, in this sense, more world government than we have at present (though nothing like a world government on the model of current national governments). But then this vision is not part of my GRD proposal. It merely describes what I take to be another important potential benefit for us of the GRD scheme.

I am not naive enough to believe that this proposal would be popular in all countries, let alone with all current governments. Implementing it could well require economic sanctions and even military interventions. My point is that its implementation would at least be morally and politically feasible (assuming I am right to believe that it could gain significant support in most LDC's), while instituting a technology control regime unilaterally would be neither. So long as the developed world shows itself essentially indifferent to the immense and massive suffering of the global poor, it will be much easier for hard-liners in the LDC's to gain and hold power and to win support for ambitious weapons and technology programs. "Only through such programs," they can plausibly say to their compatriots, "can we become a potential threat to the peoples of the affluent states, and only if we constitute a potential threat to them will they pay any attention to our society."

⁵¹ We participate *indirectly*: through our contribution to the imposition of a grievously unjust world order. The responsibility of persons for the injustice of any institutional scheme in which they participate will vary: The more influential and privileged persons are within the scheme, the greater will be their negative responsibility for any grievously unjust institutions they help to uphold without striving for reform. And the greater also will be the contribution they should be willing to make toward helping to reform unjust (and also toward upholding just) social institutions. Responsibility here links up not with blameworthiness, but with wrongness: Privileged and influential participants in a grievously unjust institutional scheme who help support the scheme without working toward its reform, act wrongly. They may nevertheless, in some cases, not be blameworthy on account of such conduct, if it is due, for instance, to genuine and excusable factual or moral error.

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