

GLOBALIZING JUSTICE:  
THE ETHICS OF POVERTY AND POWER

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INTRODUCTION:  
INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE AND TRANSNATIONAL POWER

People in developed countries have a vast, largely unmet responsibility to help people in developing countries. Their fulfillment of this political duty would produce great benefits for the global poor, but impose significant burdens in developed countries.

This book is dedicated to justifying these claims in a distinctive way. The vast, unmet global responsibility is not a duty of kindness toward the needy. It is, primarily, a duty to avoid taking advantage of people in developing countries. Just as relationships to compatriots, friends and family give rise to distinctive duties of concern, the standards of due concern that must be met to properly value the interests and autonomy of people in developing countries, rather than taking advantage of them, depend on the nature of interactions with them. The crucial global interactions, in which power is currently massively abused, include transnational manufacturing, deliberations setting the institutional framework for world trade and finance, the global greenhouse effect and the effort to contain it, the shaping of development policies, and uses of violence in maintaining influence over developing countries. In repairing current defects in these transnational activities, we move toward global interactions of genuine cooperation based on mutual respect -- an aspiration familiar from justice among compatriots, even if it leads to different standards of justice and very different institutions, on a global scale.

This inquiry into current abuses of transnational power reconciles the familiar cosmopolitan demand for massive help to the foreign poor with the patriot's insight that demanding political obligations reflect specific relationships. The study of the realities of international power becomes a basis for transnational moral standards, not a way of avoiding moral assessment. The account of how abuses of power create unmet

responsibilities to help strengthens a vital social movement already under way, a global version of social democracy. Special concern for disadvantaged compatriots in developed countries is combined with demanding commitments to help the foreign poor, even in some cases in which these needs compete and even in times of domestic economic trouble: while charity begins at home, the main bases for transnational demands will be enduring imperatives to use power responsibly, not imperatives of charity.

Seeking to fulfill these promises, I will criticize prominent arguments of philosophers in the first two chapters and then engage in detailed examination of the interactions across borders that are the real basis for a vast, unmet transnational responsibility. Finally, the diagnosis of current moral disorders will be used to prescribe ultimate moral goals and current means of moving toward them. The rest of this introduction is a map of this long journey.

### Turning toward Relationships

To justify resort to a wide-ranging survey of specific relations, I will first consider and reject two standard paths of philosophical inquiry into global justice. These approaches avoid reliance on all but the most obvious facts of transnational interaction in arguing for demanding duties of people in developed countries to help the global poor.

One is the path of general beneficence. Some philosophers have tried to base a demanding obligation to help poor people in developing countries on a general principle of responsiveness to neediness as such, regardless of relationship to the needy. They argue that virtually everyone would be led to this principle of beneficence by adequate reflection on the initially secure convictions that are the raw material for moral judgment. The power of their arguments -- above all, Peter Singer's -- keeps this position at the

center of philosophical controversy over international responsibilities. But, I will argue, the proper outcome of reflective working up of moral common sense is too moderate and flexible to support extensive demands for aid to the global poor, independent of further relationships. A person is responsive enough to neediness as such when more underlying concern would risk worsening her life if she met her other responsibilities. Moreover, she is not obliged to devote her concerns to the neediest if other worthy causes are closer to her heart.

The second path -- powerfully and diversely advocated by Charles Beitz, Thomas Pogge and Henry Shue, among others -- takes a first turn into the sphere of transnational relations. A demanding transnational political duty of concern is based on aspects of the global scene that are, in part, relational, but utterly uncontroversial -- not just the concentration of extreme neediness in developing countries, accompanied by much comfort and luxury in developed countries, but also the obvious fact of global economic interdependence, including the assertion of exclusive property rights. This perspective receives powerful support from a challenge to explain demanding political duties to help disadvantaged compatriots: if we have such duties, at least when transnational interactions are put to one side, what could their basis be other than the economic interdependence that now obviously links people throughout the world? In arguing that the second path is not sufficiently engaged in the specifics of transnational interactions, I will try to meet this challenge. Our political obligations to disadvantaged compatriots respond to specific forms of loyal participation, public provision and political coercion that bind compatriots but not mere partners in commerce. *If* the mere fact of global commerce were the only morally relevant link across borders, then these relationships

would sustain a strong political duty of priority for compatriots: it would be wrong to support political measures advancing the interests of disadvantaged foreigners at significant cost to compatriots, even if the foreign poor are needier and more effectively helped. That "if" creates the agenda for the constructive project of this book.

Transnational interactions might create vast, demanding duties to help the foreign poor, restricting means of helping disadvantaged compatriots. But the existence of such interactions has to be established through further empirical inquiry into current features of international life and reflection on their moral consequences.

#### The Panoply of Relevant Interactions

Pursuing this method of inquiry, I will examine a series of ways in which conduct originating in developed countries affects lives in developing countries. The series will move from less to more intrusive forms, from specific commercial relations characteristic of globalization at one extreme to violent destruction inflicted across borders at the other.

Exploitation in the Transnational Economy: The first source of unmet responsibilities is a current feature of transnational production and exchange, giving substance to a charge of exploitation. People in developed countries take advantage of people in developing countries in deriving benefits from bargaining weakness due to desperate neediness. To express appreciation of the equal worth of people in developing countries and a proper valuing of their autonomy, people in developed countries must be willing to use the benefits to relieve the underlying desperate neediness. -- Here, as in most of the other indictments, I will not claim that those who wrongfully take advantage impose poverty on the poor or typically make their lives worse than they would have

been, claims of harm evoked by important arguments of Thomas Pogge's. So it will be crucial to show that someone can be wrongfully exploited when she is made better off.

Inequity in International Trade Arrangements: In the second type of interaction, governments reach agreements over the institutional framework of global commerce in ways that currently justify the charge of inequity. The governments of major developed countries, led by the United States, take advantage of bargaining weaknesses of the peoples of developing countries, often due to desperate neediness, to shape arrangements far more advantageous to developed countries than reasonable deliberations would sustain. This creates a duty of a citizen of one of these countries (especially pressing in the United States) to support new measures that reasonable deliberations would yield. -- To specify this duty, I will describe how reasonableness is determined by responsibilities of participants, both international responsibilities of good faith and responsibilities toward compatriots. The combination of international good faith and domestic responsibility will turn out to require a large shift in current benefits and burdens in favor of people in developing countries, along with some significant losses to economically vulnerable people in developed countries.

Negligence in Climate Harms: Recently, a different task of collective regulation has come to the fore, not the promotion of benefits of economic activity by mutually accepted constraints but the containment of climate harms inflicted as an unintended effect of economic activity. The American combination of contribution to the harm and reluctance to contribute to its remedy has been widely denounced. But there is little agreement on what standard of international equity should govern humanity's response to the greenhouse challenge and what rationale establishes the right current global goal in

limiting future climate change. -- I will defend a model of fair teamwork, as the equitable way of coping with the current tendency to cause unintended climate harm: people everywhere should seek an impartially acceptable allocation of sacrifices in a joint effort to keep global warming within bounds. This standard will turn out to strongly favor needy people in developing countries while probably imposing morally serious losses on significant numbers of people in developed countries. (The commitment to limit unintended harms that imposes these risks is entailed by the same values of free and equal citizenship as dictate concern for compatriots in developed countries.)

Imperial Irresponsibility: In addition to describing what would be fair in specific agreements that advance global economic activity and contain its harmful side-effects, an account of global justice should identify moral responsibilities due to ways in which some governments exercise power over lives in foreign countries. This is the most direct analogue of the generation of responsibilities toward compatriots by sovereign domestic power. But the relevant facts and moral consequences are hard to describe in a post-colonial world in which transnational power is exercised without assertions of political authority. I will mainly investigate this source of duties to help through moral scrutiny of a pattern of domineering influence through which the United States takes advantage of other countries' difficulties in going against its will, a pattern worthy of the label "the American empire." While this imperial conduct will not create the same duties toward the disadvantaged as those that bind compatriots, it will turn out to create exceptionally demanding, largely unmet duties of concern. (Through alliance with the United States or similar independent initiatives, these responsibilities extend, to a lesser degree, to most developed countries.) In steering courses of development, often via international

institutions, the United States acquires a residual responsibility to provide for basic needs. In propping up client regimes, the United States acquires a duty to make up for their moral failings. Finally, the violent destruction inflicted and sponsored by the United States generates large responsibilities. Extensive violent destruction in developing countries within the fairly recent past generates a correspondingly extensive duty of repair, even if this violence is not unjust. In addition, systematic tendencies toward injustice in this violence create a political duty of a U.S. citizen to take part in movements to reduce abuses of destructive power.

#### Quasi-Cosmopolitanism

Each type of interaction in this survey generates an obligation to help that is limited in extent, stopping short of provision for important needs that people in developing countries cannot meet by their own efforts. Some of the obligations would not concentrate benefits on the world's neediest people. For these and other reasons, the relational perspective is apt to yield a total pattern of fulfilled obligations with different contours than the perspectives of impartial global concern that are generally labelled "cosmopolitan." And yet, these different perspectives give rise to similar strivings to help people in developing countries, within the bounds of political feasibility.

When moral demands due to all of these transnational interactions are combined with the real, if limited demands of transnational beneficence, the outcome is a large moral responsibility to advance interests of needy people in all developing countries. This debt will not be paid, because of a disastrous irony: the transnational influence of developed countries that generates demanding responsibilities is guided by enduring interests and institutional tendencies that guarantee deep irresponsibility in dealings with

vulnerable people in developing countries, especially among the most influential powers. Faced with the need to make progress against injustice, a responsible person gives priority to efforts that help more who suffer gravely from injustice over those that help fewer, to help for those who suffer more gravely and to efforts that do the most to lighten burdens. When these criteria conflict, choice behind a global "veil of ignorance" guaranteeing global impartiality will turn out to adjudicate the trade-offs. So, within the limits of political feasibility, people seeking to overcome current transnational irresponsibility should have the priorities of someone committed to globally impartial concern.

They should also, in a sense, be cosmopolitan in their political ideals. The ultimate positive goal implicit in the rejection of transnational relations of exploitation, inequity and negligent harm is a world in which mutual reliance across borders is genuinely cooperative, based on mutual trust among self-respectful participants. Domestic justice pursues the same general cooperative goal in relationships of different (but, often, analogous) kinds. So the ultimate goal of global justice will turn out to mirror the ultimate goal of domestic justice in this way: they are both goals of civic friendship, taking different forms appropriate to different circumstances.

#### Global Social Democracy

Finding a sound argument that people in developed countries have vast unmet political responsibilities to help people in developing countries is one thing. Finding a method of persuasion that helps to promote fulfillment of these responsibilities is quite another. The political point of the arguments of this book might seem especially weak in the United States, where they ascribe the gravest unmet responsibilities. The thought that

one's country has massively abused its international power and the admission that global justice may require serious losses among vulnerable compatriots are not apt to be very popular.

I will conclude by describing how the connections between power, moral responsibility and actual irresponsibility that dominate this book can be put to political use, especially in the United States. Arguments making those connections advance a crucial social movement that is already under way, a globalized form of social democracy that has a special potential to reduce transnational irresponsibility by changing strategic calculations that shape foreign policy. At least among Americans, commitment to this movement will turn out to be cosmopolitan in one further, painful respect. It makes American patriotism a moral burden. More positively put: in the United States and, perhaps, some other developed countries, future progress toward global civic friendship will turn out to be a prerequisite for secure, informed, responsible love of country.

#### "Developing Countries"

My largest claims employ a category, developing countries, that requires a warning label. Following familiar usage, I use "developing countries" to refer to countries with a substantial proportion of inhabitants who are hard-pressed to meet urgent material needs and with a technology of production which has long, as a whole, been significantly behind the world's most advanced, and use "developed countries" to refer to those in which absolute destitution and backward technology are, at most, marginal exceptions. This standard usage requires a warning about diversity. There are great differences among developing countries. In 2005, one in six people in China lived below the World Bank's "dollar a day" poverty threshold, a third below the "two dollar a day" threshold,

median annual individual consumption was about \$1200 at purchasing power parity, and one in five young children were stunted by malnutrition. But national economic growth was stellar and supported by substantial investments in capital equipment and infrastructure, the scale of China's production, markets and military gave it a significant voice in international affairs, millions lived in urban enclaves of prosperity, and life expectancy at birth was 72 years. The situation was very different for people in the worst-off among sub-Saharan African countries -- for example, Malawi, where, despite recent strong growth, median consumption was less than a third of China's, the per capita level of investment less than a tenth, the scale of the economy was globally negligible, and life expectancy was 48 years.<sup>1\*</sup>

I hope to do justice to the differences among developing countries as well as their similarities. Detailed attention to specific features of transnational interactions will help to combat the illusion of uniformity among developing countries, and will yield moral standards that reflect their different capacities. Establishment of the quasi-cosmopolitan priorities will give proper standing to different needs for help throughout the range of developing countries. The rise of China, India and Brazil will turn out to make it all the more urgent to advance the cause of global social democracy.

In moving from moral flaws in the exercise of economic and political power to responsibilities for promoting much more help but less intrusion and, then, to a global

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\* Numerals of this size will be used to indicate notes with substantive content. In bold face, they will refer to especially long and substantive notes. Small numerals will refer to wholly bibliographic citations.

social movement, the whole argument will rely on ever widening empirical inquiries. Before starting this exploration of global power, it is important to see whether it is needed to establish the most important duties of global justice. According to influential philosophical arguments, people in developed countries would be led by rational reflection on ordinary secure moral convictions to a demanding requirement of concern for the world's neediest, without reliance on any specific or controversial characterization of interactions with them. I will begin by explaining why this evasion of specific relationships in the foundations of international justice is misguided.

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<sup>1</sup> See Shaohua Chen and Martin Ravallion, "China is Poorer than We Thought, But No Less Successful in the Fight against Poverty," (Washington: World Bank, 2008), p. 15; World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2008* (Washington: World Bank, 2008), Tables 1.a, 2.1, 2.18, 2.21; World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2007* (Washington: World Bank, 2007), Table 1.1. At purchasing power parity, the per capita Gross Domestic Product of China was one tenth that of the United States. (See *World Development Indicators 2008*, Table 1.a.)