I. Ethical Criteria for Trade Policy: Fairness between Countries or What?

I have given as my topic ‘The Obligations of Rich Countries’, but are countries - or more precisely states - the entities that have obligations with respect to global poverty? Where trade policy is concerned, it is states that are overwhelmingly important. In The Fight Against Poverty, two of the papers are about trade and a half of another is. It is not surprising that these papers focus on the actions of states unilaterally (e.g. anti-dumping duties or selling subsidized agricultural products on the world market), bilaterally (as with the deals the EU is trying to reach with sub-Saharan African countries), regionally (e.g. NAFTA) or through the WTO. Even then, we should bear in mind the Fair Trade movement, which allows consumers to support companies that guarantee purchases, pay above market prices and provide technical assistance. There are also consumer campaigns to boycott firms making footwear or clothing using child labour or dangerous working conditions. Now, the threat is hardly necessary and firms are anxious to avoid bad publicity. Whether consumers recognize the implication that clothes are too cheap is another matter.

What principles are relevant for trade relations? Fairness is often invoked, and I think procedural fairness makes sense as a criterion. This calls for the parties to have equal information and equal bargaining power. As Paul Turner (2008:247) points out, these conditions are far from being met in WTO negotiations, where poor countries cannot send large enough delegations to assess all proposals and are in a weak bargaining position because they need a deal more than the rich countries. However, slowing down the negotiations and getting behind large countries such as India and Brazil are ways of redressing the imbalance, and explain why the Doha round is still not completed.

When we come to substance, I do not think that fairness helps, for two reasons. First, if we think of fairness with states as the units, we naturally think of reciprocal liberalization. But fairness as reciprocity presupposes a morally acceptable status quo, and that does not exist. At a minimum, the EU and the USA would have to drop agricultural protection and the escalation of tariffs on processed products that condemn poor countries to be nothing but primary producers. But the most important point is that although states take the decisions, we must assess them by looking at their outcomes for individuals or more exactly whatever family groups share incomes. If we assume that rich countries do have an obligation to tackle world poverty (I shall ask why later), trade relations must be assessed by their impact on that. Even if some arrangement increases the national income in a poor country, it may increase poverty. Paul Turner (2008:247) gives the case of Haiti, which slashed its tariffs with the result that the food production was devastated by subsidized imported food. He says that food must have got cheaper in the towns, but now that global food prices have risen sharply there is no local production to fill the gap and people are reduced to eating mud cakes with a little cereal in to stave off hunger pangs.

It is also, of course, necessary to look at the effects of trade liberalization on distribution within the rich countries, and unfortunately these are bad for two reasons. First, the globalization of capital markets has increased the share of capital in the national incomes of rich countries. Since ownership of capital is extremely concentrated, the rich have become richer at an unprecedented rate in the last twenty years. And, second, competition from cheap imports (especially from China) has held down pay in production while professionals and those in business and finance have increased their incomes and also benefited from cheap consumer goods. In the USA pay rates for the bottom half of the population have scarcely increased since the 1970s, thus increasing relative poverty and even for those at the bottom absolute poverty measured especially in loss of job security and fringe benefits. This has to be balanced out against gains to low-paid workers in poor countries, and there is presumably a net gain in poverty reduction. The dilemma could be solved if the rich in the rich countries were taxed to provide transfers to the poor; but in the USA income tax rates have been massively reduced and death duties are being phased out, while in Britain tax rates have not been increased, capital gains tax cut by three quarters and the death duties threshold doubled, with inequality constantly increasing.
II. Why Aid?

I want in the rest of this paper to talk about aid from rich countries to poor ones. I accept Ivan Sammut’s (2008:221-2) point that trade flows vastly exceed the size of any possible aid but I also draw attention to his further point that ‘at the start of the twenty-first century, 1.1 billion people are struggling to survive on less than $1 a day, the same figure as in the mid-1980s’. More generally, as he says, economic growth does not guarantee improvement for the poor (Sammut, 2008:223). The poor could even get poorer. India, for example, has enjoyed strong economic growth but there are still over 800 million desperately poor people whose average nutritional level has been claimed to have fallen in recent years, and the country has slipped down the rankings on the Human Development Index. There is surely a prima facie case at least for saying that economic aid could help. Then there are the countries in sub-Saharan Africa whose average incomes have actually fallen and have little to export unless they have minerals or oil. They need aid simply to get by. Altogether, I am a bit surprised that none of the papers in The Fight Against Poverty dealt with aid.

In practice, all the rich countries accept the obligation to give aid, but the amount varies from about 0.14% of the national income for the USA up to about 1% for Scandinavia. Since the USA is extremely bad at reducing poverty domestically, and the Scandinavian countries very good, it appears that ideas about an obligation to help the poor in one’s own country carry across state boundaries. It is also worth mentioning that pledges of aid are not taken very seriously: two years ago, a G8 summit agreed on a $50 billion package for Africa, but almost nothing has happened, for example. Before that the so-called Monterrey Consensus of 2002 ‘urge[d] all developed countries that have not done so to make concrete efforts towards the goal of 0.7 percent of gross national product as official development assistance’ (Sachs, 2005:218). But very little has happened since.

We must also take account of non-state aid, which comes from foundations and from organizations such as Oxfam funded by individual contributions. The range of contributions from individuals varies much more than among states, from zero to maybe ten per cent of income. NGOs have the advantage that their decisions do not have to go through the endless process of papers, conferences, reports and so on outlined in several of the chapters in The Fight Against Poverty. The disadvantage is that they decide independently where to go and what to do there, and as a result they are liable to converge on the same humanitarian ‘hotspots’, distorting the local housing and labour markets. NGOs need to raise money, and eye-catching disasters make better copy than unglamorous efforts to relieve everyday poverty.

State-funded aid has its own, different, pathologies. The legislation setting up America’s aid agency, to take the most extreme example, explicitly says that aid should be subordinated to foreign policy goals, and it channels aid exclusively to its client states, regardless of their democratic credentials, their human rights records, or where the aid goes (e.g. into the pockets of the political elite). The international organizations are not immune to their own forms of perversity, largely because their institutional design makes them subservient to United States agendas. They deny aid to regimes such as the Sandanistas in Nicaragua and the Allende government in Chile that are genuinely concerned to help the poor while providing aid to corrupt dictatorships such as those of Mobutu in Zaire and the Duvaliers in Haiti.

To sum up so far, international trade rules and the policies of rich countries on subsidies and tariffs cannot be assessed in terms of fairness between countries but should be assessed by their impact on the poor. As far as aid is concerned, it is provided without any apparent rationale as to who contributes what, and certainly does not correspond to the idea that those who can afford the most pay the most. At the receiving end, aid does not track the extent of poverty very well. There may be some valid reasons for this, which I shall look at later, but they have to be stated explicitly.

A partial explanation for these anomalies is that there is not a lot of systematic discussion of the reasons for rich countries to provide aid. The Labour government in Britain, for example, has increased British aid significantly since 1997 but so far from celebrating this publicly it keeps quiet about it, perhaps fearing a backlash. The NGOs like Oxfam appeal for contributions, of course, but they are generally content to present images of extreme deprivation and leave the argument for an obligation to help unstated. What I have read of the professional literature on aid is also short on rationale: it focuses on what aid works and what does not, and tends to assume that where aid does work it should be forthcoming. This is as true for the so-called ‘aid
III. The Humanitarian Case for Aid

If I try to distil an implicit case for an obligation to provide aid out of this, the best I can do is to propose that it rests on humanitarianism. At its core is an appeal to the contrast between the superfluities in the rich countries and the lack of basic amenities suffered by one and a half or three billion people (depending on the threshold) who are in poverty. This can be pressed further by suggesting that the effort required by the rich countries would not be a lot if they all did their fair share - maybe less than the one per cent already provided by the Scandinavians. An argument for holding that simply being in a position to help generates an obligation was put forward by the Australian philosopher Peter Singer, who asked us to imagine a child drowning in a pond. Somebody passing by could pull the child out at some cost in dirty clothes but otherwise safely. Singer says that there is an obligation to help and generalizes this to the principle that ‘if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it’ (Singer, 1972:231). Singer derives from this an obligation on all those in a position to help the global poor to do so. This appeal to a feeling that there is simply something wrong with a world in which preventable poverty (and the example invites us to assume it is preventable) exists alongside affluence. Children, for example, should not be dying in infancy as a result of a lack of pure water or sanitation or lack of cheap and effective drugs for common diseases.

It may be suggested that this humanitarian case will be motivationally effective only if it actually engages with sentiments of compassion in rich countries or at least their governments. This sentiment, as we have seen, appears to be almost entirely lacking in the United States. Can people be somehow argued into feeling something if they do not feel it? Philosophically, the position I have described is a corollary of utilitarianism, since it seems undeniable that the gains of the poor will more than offset the losses of the rich. But by being more limited in scope than the injunction to maximise the total balance of pleasure over pain it gains in plausibility. We can still help ourselves to the classical argument for utilitarianism. This is that if we accept that all human beings have fundamentally equal moral status, we should give everybody’s welfare an equal weight. I do not think there is a conclusive argument from this to an obligation on the part of the rich to the poor. But it still seems to me reasonable to say that, if everybody’s welfare counts the same, low cost aid that could relieve suffering and degradation is not optional. Of course, somebody might reject the premise of human equality, but we have to start somewhere and it is hard to imagine any argument for transfers from rich to poor that could stand up if it is denied.

The strength of the humanitarian case is that it is extremely simple. But this is at the same time a potential drawback if it leaves out factors that might be thought to be morally relevant. Thus, by making the victim a child and the cause of need an accident, the example deflects attention away from any question of the responsibility of the poor for their own poverty, by having large numbers of children, for example. I shall return to this. The example also has no room for any question about the bystander’s causal part in the emergency: the responsibility arises simply from being in the right place at the right time to help. But with global poverty we may be able to identify agents (firms or countries, for example) that have contributed to the problems of the poor. I have already mentioned rich countries’ role in the WTO and their tariffs and subsidies, but there are a number of other cases that could be advanced where rich countries have arguably made poor ones worse off. I am not saying that other countries are relieved of any obligations to the global poor, but these obligations might be seen as less stringent. I shall take this question up later as well.

A further peculiarity of the example is that it has no room for special relationships such as those of parenthood. Suppose there are a number of bystanders at varying distances from the child. If one is a parent of the child but not the nearest this does not change the obligation of the nearest to rescue, because time is assumed to be of the essence. When we remove this element of emergency, the case alters. A child’s parents are expected to provide care for their children from their own resources if these are adequate. They can be prosecuted for neglect if they do not, and their children may be taken away. The analogy is that the claims of poor people in a country are in the first instance against the rich people in their own society. They qualify for financial aid from other states only if these resources are inadequate. However, this has to be qualified by noticing that the analogy of taking the children away is to invade a country and replace its government with one organized and supervised by an external state or consortium of states. As we can see in Iraq and
Afghanistan, this is far from unproblematic. I think this explains why natural disasters - cyclones, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis etc. - are unproblematic cases for humanitarian aid: how the emergency came about is irrelevant and it is straightforward that agencies with the transport and materials to help should do so if they can do it better and faster than the government of the country. In non-emergency cases, the state in question has the primary responsibility for relieving poverty. But if it fails to do so, and outside intervention is ruled out, there is still a humanitarian case for aid even if it would be unnecessary (or less necessary) if internal measures were better targeted at the poor.

IV. Human Rights

Despite its problems, I find the humanitarian case quite compelling. I am concerned, though, that it may easily be seen as not generating strict obligations but only the conclusion that it would be praiseworthy for a country to give aid but not morally required. An alternative approach, which is favoured by Dr Grech (2008) in his article for The Fight against Poverty, is to call on human rights as a foundation for an obligation to tackle poverty. As he says, this has the advantage that it gives an active role to poor people themselves. But there are two difficulties. One is that there is no generally accepted way of deriving human rights. We could say, with the American Declaration of Independence, that we are endowed with human rights by the Creator, but, quite apart from problems of verification, this is too controversial to be an acceptable premise. Similarly, the idea of natural rights requires dubious claims about things having natures from which we can deduce normative claims. I am inclined to think that human rights do not have any generally accepted foundation but simply mark out an area of broad agreement on what everyone needs for a minimally decent life and that everyone has a legitimate claim to have these things, by one means or another.

We now have to show who has the obligations that correspond to human rights and how much they are obliged to do. Grech (2008:272) cites the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as saying that ‘each State Party ….. undertakes to take steps …. to achieving progressively the full realization of [these] rights’ - ‘to the maximum of its available resources’. He then says that there are problems about calling the ending of poverty a human right because of resource constraints, though states can take ‘some if not all steps with their available resources’. However, the wording of the ICESR does not limit obligations to end poverty to the states in which the poor people live. I left out a bit of the article that I quoted, which says that the steps to be taken should be taken by states ‘individually and through international assistance and co-operation, especially economic or technical’ (Grech, 2008:272). Thus, the ‘available’ resources do not have to come from within poor countries. Development aid from rich countries averages only ‘0.25 per cent [of income] amounting to a total of $78.6 billion’ (Tickell 2008:76). It is hard to imagine that one per cent is not ‘available’ in principle, and this would pay over $300 billion - say $200 a head for the poorest billion people and $100 for the next poorest billion. The limits on aid, I suggest, are at the receiving end, not the supplying end. Could that amount of money possibly be spent usefully? Even more pointedly, could it be spent without helping to maintain and enrich brutally repressive dictators or stimulating conflicts between regions or ethnic groups over the division of such an influx of money?

Is it, in any case, a problem for human rights if there is no way of realising them, as Grech suggests it might be? If it were, there could be no human rights at all. Consider the traditional ‘liberal’ rights. There are only a minority of states with free media, freedom of political and economic organization, accountable governments elected without fraud or intimidation, no torture and trials that are not contaminated by unreasonable delays, bribery, threats to witnesses or defendants, ethnic or gender partiality, and subversion by a political agenda. There is no mechanism existing to make a government comply with these demands. But there is still a point

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1 I thus have to take issue here with Dr. Ellul’s claim that ‘reason’ can show Christianity to correspond to an ‘objective reality’ (Ellul 2008: 286). But even ceding that argument, there remains the further step of showing that Christian doctrine provides an unequivocal support for human rights. The difficulty is illustrated by the different conclusions that have been drawn by clerics over time. No church would now condone slavery or serfdom, but through most of its history Christianity has been taken to be compatible with them. Churches and clerics have also taken opposite stands about the same phenomenon: under apartheid for every Desmond Tutu there were ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church claiming to derive white supremacy from the Bible; the Civil Rights movement in the American South drew on the inspiration of the gospels but white congregations did not have to listen to denunciations of segregation and inequality; liberation theology and support for the status quo battled it out in Latin America; and so on. I am inclined to think that on balance the Christian churches have accommodated to broader changes in beliefs more than they have led these changes.
in saying that they are failures of human rights, because human rights provide a universal standard of judgement. It is in exactly the same way that human rights to food and water, sanitation, housing, medical care and education function.

V. Defaults on Meeting Obligations

Humanitarianism has its roots in utilitarian ethics while human rights thinking owes more to Kant. They are thus drawn from the two main schools of western thought in the last 250 years. But my conclusion is that they both have the same implications. In the first instance the state, and also relatively rich people within the country (whether the country itself is rich or poor) have an obligation to tackle poverty, but if they cannot do it (or cannot do enough) the obligation devolves on to rich states and relatively rich people in other countries. What if some countries fail to contribute their fair share of aid? It would be nice if we could come up with some form of sanctions imposed by other states, such as exclusion from the WTO. But the worst offender is the United States, and it would not leave the WTO viable if it were expelled. I suggested earlier that, if the nearest bystander to the drowning child fails to act, the obligation devolves on the next, and so on. But that is a finite, one-off obligation. How far are more altruistic states obliged to offset the failure of others to pull their weight? One answer is that the others should contribute what would be their share of the right total. But we do not really have much idea how much aid could be absorbed productively except by trial and error, so we do not know what the right total is.

Jeffrey Sachs, the principal architect of the UN Millennium Goals, thinks 0.5% would halve extreme world poverty by 2015, but this would imply that a number of countries can cut back from their current aid levels. This is surely profoundly counterintuitive. Perhaps the Scandinavian 1% is a reasonable effort, if other countries fail even to get to 0.5%, but it is a weakness of the humanitarian approach that it does not give us the materials for a definite answer. Does the human rights approach fare any better? As I see it, exactly the same question arises. The source of the claim is different but the obligation to aid is still diffused over those outside the country who are in a position to help if those in the country cannot do enough. The answer therefore still has to run along the same lines.

There is a parallel problem that arises in poor countries. I said that the obligation to aid cuts in whenever those in a country cannot contribute enough (through taxes or voluntarily) to do what might be done about poverty. But what if the rich in a poor country fail to contribute what they could? I suggested that the analogy of parents and wealthy people in a country does not carry over because they cannot be punished and cannot be displaced without consequences that cannot even be anticipated. But we are pulled two ways on this. On one hand, we feel drawn to saying that the compatriots of the poor have the first obligation to help, and to conclude from this that if they do not help even if they could that reduces the claim on others. A possible argument from moral hazard might be made for this position. That is to say, if it becomes established that failure to act locally will be compensated for by outside aid, that eliminates the pressure on the local rich. But the trouble is that the local rich do not do much in a number of countries even where outside aid is skimpy, so more outside aid would not displace local aid. On the other hand, then, it seems unfair that outside aid to the poor should be held hostage by the rich in their own country. We might support this by appealing to the cosmopolitan thought that rich people generally have an obligation to aid poor people generally, and the failure of the local rich to act no more negates the obligation of others outside than does the failure of some rich countries to contribute a fair share to aid reduce the obligations on others.

My own view is that this second line has more going for it. But I have to confess that it seems to me a reductio ad absurdum of the argument to suggest that it should apply to the United States, which clearly has far greater resources than it needs to eliminate poverty. Yet the elimination of the federal guarantee of a minimum income has created desperate poverty in many states, and thirty per cent of the population have no medical insurance. Does this imply that Médecins sans frontières should include the US within its scope or that Oxfam should set up soup kitchens in Mississippi? One possible answer is that the system is (looking purely at its electoral arrangements) democratic, so the poor have the chance to vote for pro-poor programmes. But the poor are a minority and it does not pay either party to promote their cause if it would hurt those in the middle. This still leaves it open that there could be a coalition of those in the middle and below against the top. Against this, it can be pointed out that the system has (by design) a lot of veto points (President and both Houses of Congress, as well as the Supreme Court) and it is hard to turn a popular majority into legislation. But this would not explain why a Democratic president (Clinton) signed the bill.
destroying entitlement to ‘welfare’, or why the Republican majorities in both houses of Congress were joined by a number of Democrats. Nor would it explain why many working class Americans are so easily seduced from voting their economic interests, which for all its faults lie with the Democratic party, in accordance with their assessment of the candidates on folksiness (which may simply be lack of intellectual capacity) and attitudes to sideshows such as guns, abortion and creationism plus other efforts to get God into public life. The enthusiasm for Sarah Palin among white working class voters provides a perfect illustration of this.

The only demographic group that votes lopsidedly for the Democrats (to the extent that it does vote) is that comprising African-Americans - not other ethnic minorities - which shows that class is a motivating force only where it coincides with race. There is a deeper explanation: the hegemony of anti-redistributive ideology. Even among the poorest, support for redistributive policies is weak. Only 35% of those in the bottom quintile of the income distribution said in surveys (in 1998-2000) that they thought the state should redistribute income to narrow the gap between rich and poor. Those with higher incomes were somewhat more opposed, but the most striking result is the one that only about a third of the poorest people were in favour of redistribution. This contrasts sharply with Western Europe, where between two-thirds and three-quarters of respondents were in favour of redistribution in Britain, Germany, Italy, Norway and Sweden (Howard, 2008:231). Even more extraordinarily, those with incomes below $40,000 a year were almost as strongly in favour of abolishing estate tax (death duties) as those making more: 76% compared with 81%. Yet very few even of those with incomes above $40,000 were liable to pay it, since 98% of families had estates below the exemption level (Birney, Shapiro and Graetz, 2008: n.3, p. 335).

It might perhaps be said that the poor have been brainwashed (like everybody else) by constant exposure to a uniform ideology that celebrates unfettered capitalism. Even worse, where the media are less than monolithic, the poor are more likely to be exposed to the most rabidly right-wing versions: Murdoch’s tabloids in New York and Washington D.C. rather than the New York Times or the Washington Post and Fox News rather than National Public Radio or news and features on Public Television. But if we are to count people as responsible for anything (which may be an open question), we must surely say that people are responsible for their own opinions. So if the poor don’t object to being poor why should anybody else bother? I am not convinced that this is all there is to it, but I do have to admit that I do not know what the rest is.

Even in the case of India, which could not by any means crack poverty with internal resources, it might be argued that poor people somehow do not seem to be able to get the electoral system to work for their material betterment. One possible explanation would be that politics, especially within the individual states into which the country is divided, largely employs caste as a mobilizing principle. When lower castes replace higher ones in government, as is happening, they focus on symbolic issues rather than material ones. Followers derive gratification from seeing members of their caste in office, with the reservation of quotas of jobs in the civil service and university places for their members, even though this can benefit only a tiny minority of the caste and then only those who are already among the better schooled, while perhaps more than half the caste will be illiterate, (Bardhan: 291-3). Does this reduce the case for economic aid? I think not because in such a status-ridden society it is hardly surprising if dealing with status is a high priority, since caste is still, sixty years after being officially abolished, a pervasive reality. Material aid from outside could, it may be hoped, do something to shift the position from one in which only a minority have gained at all from the economic boom towards one in which everyone enjoys the basic amenities of life.

VI. Political and Economic Constraints on Redistribution

Even when a government committed to redistribution gains power in a democratic system, it is liable to face strong internal opposition, especially where there are massive economic inequalities such as those in Latin America between enormous landowners and those without land or only squatter status. I have already mentioned the way in which the USA has blocked international aid or loans to regimes of which it disapproves, such as those of the Sandinistas or Allende. But these regimes were also overthrown and their efforts reversed by the American-financed Contras and the American-backed Chilean generals (following strikes orchestrated by the CIA). The very popular Chávez government in Venezuela was also briefly overthrown by the generals, with the USA the only country in the world to recognize the new regime during its brief life. Thus, we can see that the political constraints on countries pursuing progressive policies such as land reform come not only from within these countries but from other countries, notably the USA. An
especially repulsive illustration was the joint American and South African support for Jonas Savimbi’s rebel movement in Angola. But it is Latin America that has suffered the most from being regarded as the ‘back yard’ of the USA, and still suffers. The governments of Venezuela and Bolivia both expelled their American ambassadors one day apart in mid-September 2008 because both presidents ‘believe they are facing the possibility of an imminent coup d’etat in which they accuse the Americans of being involved’ (Gott, 2008).

The plotters in Venezuela were, as before, army officers. Ominously, the USA, as well as expelling the Bolivian and Venezuelan ambassadors, has accused the Venezuelan government of aiding the FARC guerrillas in Colombia and acting as a conduit for cocaine. This opens up the prospect that Venezuela can be declared a ‘terrorist state’ so that America can take an overt role in overthrowing its government. (Carroll and Campbell 2008). In Bolivia, the current situation is highly volatile and dangerous. Evo Morales, the first ever indigenous president, won a convincing majority in a recall election in August 2008, and has centralized oil revenues, directing them toward the poor in the form of pensions for those aged 60 and over. Land reform clearly poses political risks, since 90% of productive land is currently owned by only 50,000 families (Carroll and Schipani, 2008). ‘The atmosphere of violence has now broken into the open, with seemingly endless political demonstrations and several deaths, the seizure of provincial airports and sabotage of oil and gas installations’. All of this is occurring in the wealthier (and whiter) eastern lowlands, which have the oil and gas (Gott, 2008). Clearly, the rest of the world should be giving every help, logistically and economically, to the government. But instead of supporting it the American ambassador is accused of conspiring with the anti-government politicians.

I suggest that we are, in any case, liable to be too quick in saying that taxation could be rejigged in countries with a lot of inequality so as to reduce or eliminate poverty. There are, undeniably, political constraints including the power of the wealthy to block redistribution and constrain the ability of the government to monopolize revenues. But there are also economic limits that may be overlooked. I believe that they are overlooked by Jeffrey Sachs, for example, and this is significant because he was the leading architect of the UN’s Millennium Development Goals, including halving the amount of extreme poverty by 2015. According to him, ‘countries such as Brazil, Chile or Mexico ….. do not need donor assistance to end extreme poverty, since they have sufficient domestic resources to accomplish the task’. (Sachs, 2005:295). He concedes that these countries ‘may still have many extremely poor citizens’ but says consolingly that ‘this is mainly because of the lack of internal efforts’. (Sachs, 2005:295) He adds that ‘China too is largely able to cover its needs’ and that India is not far off. But does the fact that a country ‘could’ redistribute income to the poor mean that if it does not that relieves rich countries of the obligation to help?

I shall take up this question where the constraints are political in a bit, but suppose there are economic constraints Sachs does not recognise? Then it simply is not true that the country could finance the end of poverty from internal resources with the best will in the world. Sachs’s talk about ‘internal efforts’ makes it sound simple. It is anything but. It is easy enough to do back-of-an-envelope calculations and get the result that the relatively rich in a number of countries could easily afford to bring everyone in their society up to a dollar a day or more, but in practice bringing decent lives to millions of shanty-dwellers and remote indigenous people would be an enormous task: they need proper housing, clean water, sanitation, food, education and medical care. How feasible would it really be to raise the funds internally? Let me point to a couple of economic constraints. The current global economic system makes increased taxation of wealthy individuals and companies that do business in poor countries quite difficult. For example, ‘Lula’ da Silva became President of Brazil in 2003 on a platform that promised financial aid to all poor families, land reform and jobs for everyone. But to avoid a run on the currency, he was forced to agree with the IMF on an austerity budget that sacrificed all these goals. (Barry, 2005:30). And although there has been economic growth during his two terms as president, reassuring current and prospective investors still inhibits bold measures to help the poor. Similarly, successive post-apartheid governments in South Africa have not taxed companies or wealthy individuals heavily, and the bulk of the fertile land and mineral resources still lies in the hands of whites. This means that only a small minority of the black population have escaped poverty. The explicit rationale is that the priority is to maintain a ‘good business climate’, so as to retain and attract inward investment.

There is a second difficulty with the notion that the relatively rich in poor countries can be squeezed hard enough to aid their own poor. This is the notorious problem of the ‘brain drain’. Managers and professionals participate in an international labour market, and the high incomes available in rich countries set limits to the
extent to which the incomes of those in poor countries can be squeezed either by paying them less or taxing them more than their counterparts in rich countries. In India, for example, the economic boom has led to attempts to lure back Indians who have emigrated and to recruit managers and professionals who have always worked in the west. This has entailed providing them with an attractive package of benefits including not only high pay but also housing in closed communities, enabling them almost to ignore the fact that they are living in a third world country. Since the poor in India are much poorer than the poor in the west, while the managers and professionals are comparable, the inevitable result is that inequality is more extreme in India. But it is hard to see how this can be avoided.

It might be suggested that people in poor countries with valuable skills may accept lower pay than they could get elsewhere either because they do not want to have to leave their families, friends and culture behind or out of a sense of solidarity with their fellow citizens. This may be true to some extent, but all we can say, I think, is that the retention of highly skilled people does not require exact equivalence with what they could get elsewhere. Unfortunately, however, the same considerations suggest it is necessary to offer Westerners better prospects than they confront at home to attract them to migrate. And unless western immigrants are to receive better treatment than Indians doing the same jobs, which is hard to maintain in the long term, that means that the Indians have to benefit on the same terms. I am not saying that the Indian government could not deploy its resources better. The heavy subsidization of water and fertilizer chiefly benefits wealthy farmers and the money could be targeted at the poor. (Bardhan, 2008:283). But it remains true that international factors set fairly tight limits on redistribution.

What are we to say when the obstacles to redistribution are political? I have already discussed cases in which democratic regimes are impeded by powerful vested interests. There are also many instances in which the poor within the country cannot possibly be held responsible for the lack of poverty-orientated policy. For example, there are a number of African states (especially round the Gulf of Guinea) that have ample oil revenues to provide everyone with a decent life. At $100 a barrel, oil output is worth about $150 billion, and though not all of this, of course, turns into royalties, it represents an enormous windfall that can be compared with total global aid at $78.6 billion. Despite this, little or none of the proceeds go to the bulk of the population and the oil revenues distort the economy, making industry and agriculture unprofitable so that most people are actually worse off economically with the oil than without it, and politically worse off because the oil revenues that do not go to ostentatious luxury and offshore bank deposits can also be put directly into funding a gruesomely ruthless apparatus of repression. Oil provides a strong incentive for holding on to power - and offers the means to do so. At the same time the government is always nervous about its tenure because the ease of appropriating the oil revenues offers a strong incentive for others to displace the government.

The dictatorial regime of Obiang Nguema in Equatorial Guinea is perhaps the most extreme case. ‘As Equatorial Guinea’s per capita income rose from $368 in 1990 to over $2,000 in 2000, the country slipped ten places down the United Nations’ Human Development ranking. It now has the dubious distinction of being the country with the greatest negative difference - 93 places - between its ranking in terms of human welfare and its income per capita. Agriculture and manufacturing have fallen to less than two per cent of GDP between them, while oil claims 93 per cent. ‘The share of health and education spending has shrunk.’ In 2005, the IMF said ‘Unfortunately, the country’s oil and gas wealth has not yet led to a measurable improvement in living conditions for the majority.’ (Shaxton, 2007:142-3). Today, after the price of a barrel of oil has multiplied since 2000, Obiang and his extended family live in ostentatious luxury while the country has among the lowest levels of expenditure on education and health in the world.

I concede that there is in a certain sense something grotesque about providing aid to a country that would not need it if its revenues were properly allocated. But against this it can be said that we must take the situation as we find it, and the population at large can hardly be held responsible for being in the grip of a ruthless dictatorship. I suggest that this is the better case. But there is still a question of feasibility. If the oil revenues are appropriated in this way, what hope is there that aid money would fare any better? This point to aid that takes the form of strictly controlled programmes run by aid workers supplied by the donor, with no funds contributed to the state budget.

This, however, immediately brings us up against a real limit on the feasibility of aid. Would Obiang be willing to let foreign aid workers roam around the country observing his security forces engaging in ruthless
repression of any sign of opposition? The problem is, of course, not hypothetical. The Burmese junta refused visas to almost all the aid workers who applied after the disastrous cyclone in May 2008, and Robert Mugabe has refused food aid despite widespread hunger because he does not want foreigners observing the abuses of his regime and wants to use the allocation of what food there is to reward his followers and punish his opponents. (McVeigh, 2008).

If a regime collapses, the alternative to a repressive dictatorship may be a civil war (or both may occur simultaneously). This raises another limit on the feasibility of aid that is unfortunately quite widespread: the existence of civil war or war between countries. Arbitration or peacekeeping forces may be the most useful things, though in extreme cases there is a strong argument for military intervention to stabilize the situation by ratcheting down each side’s fear of the other and opening up the possibility of a political solution. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (previously Zaire) it is estimated as many as 5.6 million people have died, almost as many as Jews in the Holocaust, and many more raped and injured. Aid did get to refugees from Rwanda in the Congo, who used it to reorganize a militia and arguably fuelled more conflict. In many areas sheer anarchy prevailed so aid supplies simply could not get through. Somalia is now in a similar situation. A weak and unpopular government supported by Ethiopian troops is fighting an Islamist opposition. A UN agency has said that nearly half the population need emergency assistance while ‘one in six children under the age of five are severely malnourished’. But ‘pirates prevent food relief arriving by sea, while ambushes, roadblocks and targeted assassinations have a severe impact on field operations’. A large part of the country is ‘almost off limits to international staff’ (Rice, 2008). This is, of course, only a matter of immediate relief: conflict is completely inconsistent with economic development. Nobody will invest (even planting crops is a gamble) and the infrastructure actually decays. Even the thirty years of low-intensity conflict after 1968 in Northern Ireland deterred new investment, even though the rate of violent deaths was less than in the average American city.

Conflicts in one state may spill over to its neighbours. As I have said, the Congo anarchy was partly fuelled by refugees from Rwanda, and refugees from Somalia to Kenya are in the world’s biggest refugee camp (cared for by the United Nations) with more than 210,000 people and more arriving every day (Rice, 2008). However, outside aid can at least be mobilized here. Integration with the society at large, though, and hence economic improvement, is a longer shot. (Consider the fate of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, sixty years after being expelled from what is now Israel.) Neighbours to states at war also suffer from disruption of rail and road links and the breakdown of trading relations, thus setting back the prospects of development. All of these problems are particularly severe in sub-Saharan Africa.

I do not think that any question of responsibility is very relevant in these cases. Basic aid to people in the middle of conflict or refugees from it cannot be denied, I think: it would have been wrong to prejudge all Rwandan refugees as perpetrators of genocide, for example. And as far as development aid is concerned, that is irrelevant to situations of internal conflict. Where we have conflict between states and the fighting is localized, economic development aid could still flow but there is an obvious risk that it will either be diverted to the war or at least used to replace expenditures that the government would otherwise have incurred. I think the British government made a good decision when warfare between Ethiopia and Eritrea broke out: it continued humanitarian aid to areas affected by famine but cut off development aid for the duration of the war.

Is the question only one of the feasibility of development aid - aid that goes beyond minimal humanitarian relief - or is there also a question of responsibility here? Suppose a country that is at war is democratic or that it appears that the war enjoys widespread popular support, does that mean that the people themselves are responsible for the economic ill-effects? Similarly, what if both sides in a civil war show by their actions that they put fighting ahead of prosperity? Are outsiders obliged to help pick up the pieces? Again, I do not think minimal humanitarian aid, where feasible, can reasonably be denied regardless of responsibility, as long as it is feasible and does not prolong the war by supplying the fighting forces of both sides, or create conflict, as it did in Somalia in the early 1990s, where rival clan militias fought over food (Easterley 2006: 144). But what about development aid? This is a difficult question. At the end of the war or civil war do we really want to say that rich countries are relieved of any obligation to help rebuild? I am not convinced. It is very often hard to say that a war or civil war could have been avoided if both sides had wanted to. The dynamics of conflict have a way of taking over. There is also the obvious point that at least the children, who are usually the biggest sufferers, especially from population displacement, cannot reasonably be held
responsible for their fate. It is worth noting, though, that development aid can create or exacerbate conflict if it is targeted at one ethnic group at the expense of another. This can occur equally in democratic and non-democratic countries. Thus, for example, a big irrigation project in Sri Lanka displaced Tamils and settled Sinhalese in the irrigated areas, exacerbating conflict (Easterly 2006:44).

This raises a more general issue: the proportion of the budget that goes on the military in poor countries. In many poor countries, it greatly exceeds the share of education and health care combined. (Georgia spent seventy per cent of its budget, without much point as events proved.) A significant case is that of India and Pakistan, which both keep large standing armies and are equipped with nuclear weapons. When he was president, Zulkifar Ali Bhutto said that Pakistan would get nuclear bombs even if the people had to eat grass. They did get the weapons and they are, more or less, eating grass. There were widespread celebrations when the success of the nuclear programme was announced, and this obviously invites the question: if guns have priority over butter for the people, does this relieve outsiders of the obligation to help provide the butter?

What is very clear is that the use made of any economic aid must be rigorously monitored to ensure that it is not diverted from its intended purpose. What is harder but also important is to avoid giving aid that enables the government to save money it would otherwise have spent so as to spend more on the military. Beyond that, what makes it hard for western countries to take a high moral line is that Britain, the US, France and Israel are like drug peddlers, pushing military equipment on concessionary terms and bribing those with the job of awarding contracts, so the more is spent the more they make. Even more irresponsible is American military aid to what it conceives as its allies in the ‘war on terror’, thus fuelling regional arms races. Since Pakistan was enlisted in this ill-conceived ‘war’, it has received $9 billion in military aid as against $1 billion in economic aid. This cannot but produce a reaction in India.

By far the most useful thing that could be done would be for the arms-supplying countries to reach an agreement on limiting sales of arms according to some formula (maybe a maximum proportion of national income). Unfortunately, this is not going to happen because the arms industry corresponds to drug dealing: something too lucrative to give up. Arms suppliers compete to sell more and could be constrained only by governments that switched from being active pushers, as they are now, to responsible world citizens. As things stand, then, I fear that rich countries are in no position to insist that poor countries cut back on arms expenditures as the price of aid, any more than they would accept being told to cut back themselves - even when the USA outspends the next twenty-five countries put together. At the same time, as I have already said, it is certainly important to ensure that external funds are not diverted to the military and that they do not replace other government expenditure to free up resources.

So far, I have argued that the poor people in a poor country cannot be held responsible for their poverty where this arises from economic constraints on redistribution or misappropriation of revenues by a dictatorial government. With more doubt, I included warfare and military spending here as well. I have also argued that, conversely, rich countries cannot be held responsible for not providing aid where this is impossible, either because the government will not allow aid workers in, because any aid would be seized by those fighting a civil war or because it is simply too dangerous for aid workers to go in. What is in fact remarkable is how many aid workers can get killed - in Afghanistan, for example - before humanitarian organizations pull out.

A case that tests the limits of responsibility more sharply is that of corruption at all levels of the public sector. This is quite likely to be associated with corruption at the top. But it is independently deleterious to the delivery of services such as roads, medical care and schools. Money that is intended for public purposes such as these gets siphoned off at all levels and given to families and kin of officials. This makes life worse for everybody. There is also a form of corruption particularly inimical to economic development. This takes the form of officials demanding bribes to issue licenses that businesses have to have and extortion by the police demanding money for not allowing theft and arson to take place or for not prosecuting somebody in business on a trumped-up charge. This is clearly a massive discouragement to economic enterprise.

There is a problem of the feasibility of aid here. If government resources go into private pockets and businesses are held to ransom, what hope is there that outside aid will do any better? The problem is particularly acute in the case of general budgetary support, and a British House of Commons committee said in a report: ‘Estimates of leakage and corruption in the use of developing nations’ budgets are many times higher than would be acceptable in the UK domestic expenditure’ (Elliot, 2008). But even when an external
donor provides funds for a specific project, the aid is still liable to run into the sands if it is administered locally. For example, a ‘Social Action Programme’ set up in 1993 in Pakistan by the World Bank and intended to improve the coverage and quality of basic services was abandoned in 2002 after negligible improvement and an actual decline in school enrolments. An analysis pointed to ‘implementation failures’ centring round corruption at every level: ‘Politicians used staff recruitment, construction contracts, and site selection for schools and clinics to enrich their kith and kin’, while doctors and teachers drew salaries without doing their jobs (Easterly: 137).

There is also an issue of responsibility. Does this pervasive corruption undermine the obligation to give aid? There is an argument for saying that it does. This is that corruption is deeply embedded in the country’s culture, which means that it is, in some sense, what people in the country want, so they are getting what they want and it is nobody else’s business to do anything about the consequences. It is true that, even allowing for the spread of corrupt money to distant relatives, there are never more than a minority who gain. Quite often they are all members of one tribal or ethnic group. But against this it might be suggested that others share the same culture and would do exactly the same if they had the opportunity.

Now I am in general quite sympathetic to the idea that ‘culture’ is not a good reason for seeking special treatment: forced marriage or ‘honour killing’, for example, should not escape punishment on the grounds that they are ‘part of the culture’ of some groups. But the special problem here is that it would require concerted effort to get rid of the diversion of public resources into private hands. A very large number of people would have to change their behaviour in a co-ordinated way to make a difference. Otherwise each can think: if I stop stealing from public funds that just leaves more for others to take. Similarly, if it is necessary to bribe officials to get anything done nobody can afford not to pay. It could well be that in the long run even those who benefit from corruption would gain if the roads got built and the public services were provided, but the problem is how to get to that point from the status quo. Outsiders may be able to suggest ways of improving accountability, but the government and its agencies have to want to cut down on corruption for their procedures to be adopted. This is not true in Pakistan, for example, where both major parties are deeply corrupt. The only influence outsiders can exercise is to make aid conditional on an improvement in public administration. If this had any reasonable chance of succeeding, it might be worth trying. But the kind of co-ordinated change required is not likely to happen, so all that will happen is that the country will be denied aid. I am inclined to think that this is too harsh, if tightly controlled aid projects are in fact feasible.

VII. Population Increase

I said earlier that I would take up internal causes of poverty, including those for which the poor themselves are responsible. This second point has come up in the widespread acceptance of inequality in America and the focus on symbolic caste politics rather than material welfare in India. It also comes up in connection with enthusiasm in Pakistan for the ‘Islamic bomb’ - which, it has to be said, was matched by enthusiasm in India for its bomb - and by support for war and civil war. But by far the most significant case is that of population growth. Here, the poor are primarily responsible causally because in poor countries the better-off people tend to have few children and it is the poor who have a lot. Population increase has been and is a major impediment to improving the lot of the poor, and, with the important exception of China, it afflicts almost all poor countries. The children of poor people tend to be poorer the more there are of them in a family (see Saglam, 2008:164, for Turkey, but the point generalizes). But among the poor the number of children in a family does not much affect their prospects as adults, which are not good however many there are. The obvious exception is peasant proprietors, where the tradition of splitting land among sons leads to unviable holdings (see Ilgaz 2008:49 for Turkey, but the point is equally valid for many other countries such as Peru). Apart from this, though, the children of a large family have much the same prospects as those of a small family. There is an obvious collective action problem here, since the prospects of all poor children will be diminished if the population increases, but the contribution of each family to this is too small to make any significant difference. In contrast, typical middle class families regard children as demanding an investment of income and time so as to prepare them to follow them in the middle class. This requires resources which are finite, so the more children there are the less that can be devoted to any one. Hence, the middle class feel a strong incentive to keep down the number of children they have.

It goes without saying (or should) that the single most cost-effective contribution that rich countries could make is to ensure that - subject to political constraints - everyone should have access on free or affordable
terms to contraception and to abortion as a back-up. This is especially crucial in Africa where the distribution of condoms is in addition the only way of preventing AIDS from spreading, whereas providing drugs for those with HIV does nothing by itself to stop it from spreading and in fact gives those with the HIV virus longer to spread it to others. The World Bank has estimated that there are 137 million women who would use contraception if they had access to it and another 64 million using less effective methods than they might (Tickell:209). But what are we to say about countries in which the government bans contraception or countries in which, even if it is available, a lot of people do not use it for religious or cultural reasons? It is perhaps worth emphasizing that opposition to keeping down family size is not only religious in origin. It also occurs where, as in sub-Saharan Africa, big families are a part of traditional culture, with the consequence that the population doubles every generation.

It may be said that people are not responsible for the religious beliefs or cultural predilections so the case for aid is unaffected by population growth. But this makes aid a matter of throwing resources into a bottomless pit. World population is predicted to increase from six and a half billion to nine or perhaps as much as ten billion by 2050, almost all of it in the poor countries. Even if some graduate to be middle-income countries, I have pointed out that spreading the money around internally is not easy. Can an open-ended obligation to compensate for population growth be sustained? If we are really prepared to say that people are the victims, as it were, of their cultures and beliefs, perhaps it can. But the people concerned would not very likely thank you for discounting their own responsibility for actions they chose with their eyes open. And if the actions, why not their consequences? Admittedly each couple is only responsible (i.e. causally responsible) for their own contribution to population growth, but altogether they are responsible (in the same sense) for the whole of it. And if causally responsible, why not also morally responsible?

There is an answer to this, I suggest. We might concede that the parents are responsible for population growth but go on to point out that the children are not responsible for being born. On the basis of this it can be argued that it is unfair to penalise them for the procreative choices of their parents’ generation. Of course, the children will probably share the beliefs and attitudes to family size of their parents, so they will not criticise their decisions and can be expected to add to population growth themselves. But does this invalidate the argument? My own view is that it does not, which implies that there is still an obligation on rich countries to aid the global poor, even if their problems are exacerbated by population growth.

We could avoid having to adjudicate this question if we adopted the deterministic view according to which people are not responsible for beliefs and cultural predispositions or for the actions that flow from them. This does not imply that they are unchangeable; on the contrary, supporting evidence for this idea is the way in which they respond to social changes. Francophone Quebec and Italy both illustrate the way in which a Roman Catholic country can in just a few years swing from one in which large families are common to one that does not even reproduce itself, in response to social conditions: Angela Deguara (2008:94) observes that ‘Maltese families are nowadays much smaller than they were in the middle of the 20th century, couples are getting married at a more mature age and tend to postpone having children to the late 20s.’ She attributes this and other changes in family structure to ‘a general change in social attitudes, a more secular society and greater educational and occupational opportunities for women’ (Deguara 2008:94). I would not, of course, challenge the idea that Malta has become a less devout society, and the same can doubtless be said of Quebec and Italy. Nevertheless, Malta does not have legal divorce (Deguara 2008:95), which suggests that clerical influence is still a force to be reckoned with.

The key point is, anyway, that measures making children more expensive, such as compulsory full-time education, and increasing their opportunity cost by opening up career paths for women, will change the incentives facing prospective parents and change procreative behaviour. Of course, it has to be possible for couples to raise children without resorting to child labour, which may require aid from outside in the case of poor countries. Is it legitimate for outsiders to rig the incentives with a view to holding down population increase? I must admit to being torn on this. The focus on responsibility for choices reflects what I take to be the common view of human agency. But the science appears to me to be sound: given the appropriate conditions, the ‘demographic transition’ occurs pretty reliably. It might be objected that the second approach embodies a sinister neo-colonialist plot to manipulate the beliefs and cultures of poor people. But the means are surely desirable in themselves, and in any case the consequences of spiralling population growth are so dire as to suggest that this kind of non-coercive intervention is justified.
What seems to me the problem is that so many billions of people are so far from the conditions required for small families to be seen as highly desirable. Given the limits on the effectiveness of aid that I have outlined, it is impossible to see how these conditions can be achieved on a large enough scale to hold down world population. If we were to give holding down population absolute priority, a possible conclusion would be that aid should be focused on helping to push countries that are within sight of the ‘demographic transition’ over the threshold, on the ground that without some control over population any economic improvement will be undercut by increasing pressures on land and fresh water - indeed on all resources, renewable and non-renewable alike.2 But is this too harsh? When we think about what extreme poverty means, it is difficult to deny the cogency of the case for aid derived from either humanity or human rights. Perhaps the final answer is that aid to get people out of real poverty remains an obligation but that development aid might legitimately be made conditional on serious measures to hold down and in the longer term stop or even reverse population increase.

VIII. The Theory so far: General Obligations

A theory about international obligations needs an answer to two questions: who should have them, and why; and who should benefit from them, and why? In answer to the second question, I have offered a humanitarian claim for doing what can be done to reduce poverty and a claim that there is a widely-recognised human right to certain basic goods that are necessary for a decent life. Where trade is concerned, it is clear that rich states have obligations to poor states, and in particular to poor people within them. Acting in a way that makes a poorer country better off through trade does not automatically result in the country’s poor people gaining. As Ivan Sammut (2008:228) says, ‘Good international rules can create an enabling environment in which poor countries can successfully integrate into global markets, but it is national policies that determine the extent to which the poor share in the benefits of trade.’ And as he points out (Sammut, 2008:220) technological change can make the poor poorer: for example, labour saving improvements (e.g. automation or mechanization) can throw the unskilled out of work or drive their pay even lower. The governments of rich countries have an obligation to remove tariffs on poor countries’ products, agricultural and non-agricultural alike and to cease subsidizing their own agricultural produce. But governments in poor countries have an obligation to spread the benefits of increased trade around. As we have seen, there are many barriers to this. Trade rules, though, have to be general, and taking poor countries together a trade regime favouring poor countries will, I suggest, have a tendency to favour the poor within them.

Where aid is concerned, in an ideal world the governments of poor countries would redistribute domestic income to improve the lot of the poor, and middle-income countries would be able to eliminate poverty altogether. As I have pointed out, though, there are economic limits imposed by the risk of a run on the currency or a ‘brain drain’. And there are political impediments: the government may itself be corrupt, or the entire state administrative apparatus may be corrupt. Even if the government is honest and has a mandate to redistribute it may not be able to overcome political and economic resistance.

I have argued that none of these factors should rule out aid, though they may make it impossible to deliver it with assurance that it will go to the poor. And it may be impossible altogether if the government will not let aid workers in, if aid would be seized by warlords or if aid workers would be killed. The claims to aid are, as before with trade, based on humanity or human rights. The obligations lie in the first instance with the governments of the countries in which the poor people live, but if they cannot or (I maintain) even if they will not do what is required, the obligation goes by default to rich countries. Since the maximum called for is not plausibly going to be more than 1% of GNP, there is no economic constraint. The present aid donors are all more or less democracies, so the primary political constraint is, I suppose, that governments fear aid would be unpopular with the voters. The analysis does not quite end with the conclusion that the case for aid needs to be made more effectively, because we can also suggest, as I have done, that the deficit from under-performance by some states should be made up by others giving more than the amount that would be needed if all rich countries did their share. But I have conceded that I do not know of any satisfactory principle that would tell us how much more they should do.

2 Cf. Saglam (2008: 161): ‘In order to reduce poverty and to strengthen human development, which are the main objectives of the Mediterranean countries, top priority should be given to those initiatives that speed up the demographic transition.’
What all this analysis has in common is that the obligations of rich people to poor ones in both rich and poor countries and of rich countries do not rest on any claim that rich people or rich countries have acquired their wealth unjustly - by force or fraud, or by the exploitation of an unequal power relationship, for example, or that they are still benefiting from this injustice. In the case of trade, I did call attention to the bargaining power of rich countries in the WTO, and I could add the inability of poor countries to retaliate for rich countries’ tariffs and subsidies. But even here, I suggested that the obligations of rich countries would not be met by arriving at a fair bargain in some sense, but only by a deal on the framework of trade rules and decisions taken within them that would be the most helpful to the poor.

The case for saying the rich have obligations to the poor that I have developed so far is simply that the poor have a good claim for an improvement in their lot, and that the obligations rest on rich individuals and countries because they are the only agents capable of doing the job. The result is, as we have seen, that the obligations of rich countries are non-specific, in the sense that we cannot identify a particular rich country as having a special obligation to a particular poor one, nor can we specify the sum of its obligations beyond saying that each country should pay its share of the total that can usefully be spent and that if some countries fail to pay their share then other countries should increase their contribution by some indeterminate amount. In the case of rich individuals in poor countries, I have assumed that their obligations are specific in as far as their first priority is their fellow citizens. Subject to that, though, the position is parallel to that of rich states: the obligations of rich people are not to specific poor people or specific groups. The obligation will be met by accepting and complying with progressive taxes and other measures such as land reform plus perhaps contributing personally to an aid NGO that operates within the country (whether the organization is international or local).

This is not to say that there are not pragmatic reasons for a division of labour. It would make no sense for every rich country to provide aid to every country that qualifies. The World Bank has the potential capacity to operate in every qualifying country, but it clearly has no need to do so if unilateral aid is sufficient. In practice, this is most likely to apply to American client states such as Egypt (a payoff for recognizing Israel), Pakistan (a payoff for - it is hoped - co-operation in the ‘war on terror’) and now Georgia (an attempt to project American power even further). (Israel, which is lavishly funded by the American taxpayer, is too wealthy to qualify for aid.) As this suggests, motives for aid are not necessarily altruistic. French governments, pursuing the fading dream of French as a lingua franca tend to concentrate on francophone ex-colonies in Africa, while Britain focuses on its ex-colonies. However, there are obvious advantages in aid workers speaking the European language most in use even if only the elite know it.

IX. Specific Claims: Trade

For whatever reasons (and there may be some good ones) rich countries make the choice of countries to aid, my point still remains valid: that there is no principle laid down so far that commits any particular rich state to aid any particular poor one. Although “unassigned obligations” of this kind are, in my view, genuine obligations, there is a common idea that they are less weighty than obligations derived from a claim that the poverty of the poor in some place arises from some act of wrongdoing (or at least some act that has caused, or now causes, harm), and that this creates an obligation on the wrongdoers or on those who have caused or are causing the harm to provide redress or compensation.

A possible extension of this notion applies to cases in which the wrongdoing or harm were perpetrated more than a few decades previously. Then we may be able to find people living now who are related to the original perpetrators in some way that transfers the responsibility to them, so that the obligation of redress or compensation likewise devolves on to them. The standard application of this idea is that the citizens of the state that was responsible for the wrongdoing or harm have the primary obligation to provide adequate redress or compensation now. How might this work? Trading relations perhaps give us the easiest way in. If we are prepared to say that trade liberalization policies that are made a condition of help from the IMF or the World Bank are coercive, we can say that poor states are coerced into adopting them. If we combine this with US and EU subsidization of agricultural produce, we have a set-up that is not merely harmful but devastating for farmers in poor countries, who simply cannot compete. This seems cogent but it does require us to be willing to say that a ‘freely’ accepted deal is coercive or exploitative under some conditions, as wages are for Marx.
We can also say, as I have done, that negotiations in the WTO favour the rich countries both because they can field bigger teams of experts (and lobbyists) and because poor countries need to export to rich ones more than rich ones do to poor ones. Moreover, the existing form of the WTO is disadvantageous to poor countries because it accepts US and EU tariffs (especially on agricultural produce) and because the TRIPS (which deals with intellectual property rights) and the GATS (which deals with competition for the supply of services) are highly disadvantageous to poor countries. As Sammut (2008:227) observes, the TRIPS ‘threatens to force up the costs of basic medicines’. It does this by phasing out the right of companies in poor countries to reverse-engineer patented drugs. In agriculture, ‘TRIPS can damage the food security of the poor as it threatens the right of poor farmers to save, sell and exchange seeds which is vital not merely to their livelihoods but to bio-diversity’ (Sammut, 2008:227). The GATS is likely to displace local service-providers in poor countries with multinationals and, as Sammut says, it ‘could restrict the capacity of governments to extend access to basic services to the poor’. (Sammut, 2008:227). It can even reduce existing access, when a state body charged with maintaining equal access is replaced by a profit-making firm with no such mission.

The problem with the approach that identifies harmful effects of world trade patterns and rules is how we establish the baseline against which we measure harm to poor countries as against failure to help them. Is there really a morally significant difference? We may feel that pushing a child into a pond so that it drowns is worse than failing to rescue one that has fallen in, but the net result either way is that the child is dead. The problem is rather analogous in the case of trade with that of saying that the rules should be substantively fair and not only procedurally fair. As Bassam Karray (2008:214) says, ‘it is unreasonable to apply the reciprocity principle to all countries in the same way’, because the poor countries should get preferential treatment to improve their position in relation to the status quo. As Karray (2008:214) notes, the Doha round of WTO negotiations was supposed to give priority to removing trade barriers facing poor countries, and he adds ‘The differential treatment should be stronger.’ It is precisely the failure of the rich countries to make the required moves that has created the protracted deadlock in the Doha round. Are the rich countries behaving unfairly or simply not giving enough of an advantage to poor ones?

It is hard to know where to start answering this question, and it seems much more straightforward to emphasize that the rich countries have a moral obligation to help the poor ones develop through trade. Even when clothes and shoes are made in a poor country for very low wages, that is still better for the workers than being excluded from the markets. As Sammut (2008:229-30) notes, poor countries have been in the forefront of opposition to trade boycotts in rich countries based on low pay and poor labour standards in poor countries if these have the effect of forcing up the price of cheap imports until they become uncompetitive. Again we are faced with the problem of saying that something that is on balance advantageous is harmful or exploitative.

An obvious alternative is to take some status quo as a baseline and calculate benefit or harm as gain or loss compared to that point. But where do we find a status quo and how do we rationalize it? It is perhaps feasible to say that the TRIPS and the GATS were harmful compared to the situation that existed without them and would otherwise have gone on existing. But we surely want to say that the EU and the USA have a strong obligation to stop protecting their agriculture and dumping the surplus on world markets below cost. Yet we shall not be able to find a status quo ante that did not feature protection and dumping by the USA or the EU (or the states that made it up before they joined) - even if we go back to the WTO’s predecessor, the GATT. So how can we call protection harmful? Of course, we could simply say that the situation of poor agricultural exporters would be better if there were no tariffs than they are now, and that agricultural producers would be better off if they did not have to compete with below-cost products from rich countries. But if we are going to say that any situation that could be more beneficial to the poor than the current situation is enough to show that the poor are being harmed, we have again destroyed the distinction between not helping and harming. We have also come up with a profoundly counterintuitive idea. If I gave all my income to somebody picked at random, I would make that person better off. But it would be very strange to say that by not doing it I had harmed him or her.

X. Specific Claims: Aid

I want now to consider the prospects of a case for aid derived from claims by poor countries that they have been harmed by rich countries in the past. We can distinguish two varieties of this claim. One is for compensation in virtue of what happened in the past, without any reference to traces that it has left in the
The other appeals to current disadvantage but traces it to a continuous history that has led to it. The two can be contrasted by thinking about possible claims that Afro-Americans could make on their white compatriots. One would be to say that slavery was a great evil and the descendants of slaves should get reparation now. The other would be to say that the legacy of slavery still exists because even after slavery was abolished there was a continuous history of segregation, discrimination and stigmatization which continues to this day, and because the destructive effect of slavery on family life still shows itself in the dysfunctional condition of many black families.

The first approach is open to fairly obvious objections. One is that a payment based purely on something that was done by some people to others in the past is nothing more than a windfall for the recipients. Even if this is not pressed, only a minority of white Americans lived in the South at the time of slavery and most are descendants of immigrants who arrived only after slavery had been abolished. So if descendants should pay compensation, how could it be assessed? These objections seem to me decisive.

The alternative line of argument is, I believe, much more cogent. Although it refers to the past, the critical point is the disadvantage that blacks now suffer as a result of what has happened in the past. Thus, later immigrants still owe compensation, on this analysis, because they (or their ancestors) have been able to be socially mobile while blacks have been left behind. There was active wrongdoing against blacks by immigrants, indeed: in the 1880s and 1890s, for example, blacks were driven out of manual jobs in the New York docks by recently arrived Irish immigrants. The only question for me is what is added to the case by bringing in the way in which the current situation came to be. Does not the systematic disadvantage that exists now constitute a good enough case for compensation? My suggestion is that it might be harder to establish that this disadvantage results from wrongdoing today, but it can be easily shown that it arises from wrongdoing in the past.

It is unusual to find compensation in the form of financial reparations for wrongdoing in the past, detached from any reference to resultant disadvantage in the present. More common are formal apologies, as when the Queen apologised for the violation of the Treaty of Waitangi agreed between the Crown and Maori leaders in the mid-nineteenth century. But there are two examples that I know of. One is the annual payments made to Israel by the German (previously the West German) state as a form of compensation for the Holocaust. The other, which is very recent, is an agreement by the Italian government to pay Libya £2.75 billion in compensation for its 30-year occupation which ended in 1943. ‘It is a material and emotional recognition of the mistakes that our country has done to you during the colonial era’ said Berlusconi. However, this was not a totally disinterested gesture, in that Berlusconi secured a quid pro quo in the form of ‘crack[ing] down on the number of illegal migrants turning up on Italian shores,’ including the installation of electronic monitoring equipment supplied by Italy. (Observer, 2008).

For reasons I have already given, I would place more weight on arguments for compensation based on disadvantage in the present that can be traced to wrongdoing in the past. I am quite surprised that ex-colonies do not put forward a case for aid along these lines, since it appears to me that many of them could make a powerful one. Thus, I do not see how it could be denied that ex-colonial countries owe compensation to countries whose natural resources they stole: that is to say, extracted without any payment to the people in the colony. The ‘scramble for Africa’ in the 1880s was very largely a scramble for natural resources, and no recompense was ever provided for the mountain of copper excavated from what is now Zambia, for example. Doubtless this cheap copper contributed to the prosperity of Britain, but gain by the exploiters is not essential to the case for compensation. The massive inflow of gold and other minerals from the New World had deleterious effects, social and economic, on Spain and Portugal. But the harm done to the Latin American countries and the impoverishment of their resources is undeniable. If we nevertheless feel inclined to say that the case for compensation is weaker here, I do not think it is the lack of gain that is critical but rather the lack of continuity between the Spain and Portugal of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the contemporary states.

A good case for compensation based on the unrecompensed extraction of mineral resources can be made for many ex-colonies, including some in the most desperate situations today, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. How should the resources be valued? I think that we would get into a hopeless tangle if we were to estimate a ‘fair’ royalty at the time of extraction and then add a (very large) factor for inflation and interest. A simpler and I think reasonable alternative is to estimate the current world market value of the
resources taken minus the cost of extracting and processing them. This cost should be estimated not by taking the cost of extracting with what is left of it now but the cost of extracting the original supply of the resource. This would, in the nature of the case, be cheaper to extract because the most accessible supplies will have been removed first. Apologists for the ex-colony might argue that the loss of the resources should be offset against the investment made in infrastructure as a by-product of extraction. But extractive industries produce almost no spin-off in the form of wider economic development, and the cost of what investment there was will have been returned to investors with a profit.

This case for compensation has the disadvantage, if we are concerned with the lot of the poor countries, that there are quite a lot of very poor countries that have no natural resources beyond land (some countries in Africa do not even have any coastal waters) - which is of course a lot of the explanation of their poverty. They were never exploited because they were not worth exploiting. If we are looking for a basis for more evenly-spread claims, we should look for a feature shared by the great majority of poor countries, and we can find it in the experience of being colonized itself. I do not think we would be well-advised to seek to show that the colonial countries benefited overall from having colonies. The jury is still out, for example, about whether or not the British Empire was on balance economically beneficial to Britain. It did provide employment for a class of military and civil state employees who enjoyed a standard of living they could never have achieved in Britain. But this hardly carries over to the present, and it can be asked if this talent might have been more usefully employed at home. More seriously, the empire unquestionably offered profitable investment opportunities, but this made domestic investment relatively unattractive, which may help to explain the decline of Britain’s economy relative to that of Germany from the 1870s onward.

I have already said that I do not think it is necessary to show that long-run harms to the colonized is accompanied by long-term gain for the colonizers. But even if we just focus on harm, we are still faced with the inherent problem in assigning either gain or loss. How are we to stipulate the baseline against which gain or loss is to be measured? We can say that the counterfactual conditional to be contrasted with British Empire is no British Empire. But we then need to ask what would have happened in an alternative world without an empire. If German rivalry over colonies was a contributory cause to the First World War, perhaps that war would not have occurred, so no collapse of the Russian Empire, so maybe no Bolshevik revolution, and maybe no Second World War …. Analogously, what would have happened to Zambia (to stick to the earlier example) if it had not become a British colony? Do we imagine it as remaining as it was before colonization, or what?

I do not see how we can answer a question like this. But all is not lost. William Easterly has devised a test that is, as he himself concedes, far from conclusive but highly suggestive. I should say at once that he does not use it as an argument for aid: it seems fairly clear that he subscribes to what I have called the humanitarian position that the rich countries should do what would help. His own object is to use the history of colonization to support his attack on the overweening pretensions of today’s intellectual descendants of the colonialists: the ‘liberal interventionists’ who believe that it is possible to take over countries by force and leave them in a better state than they were in before, and their somewhat more cautious allies in the IMF and the World Bank who operate on the assumption that it is feasible to induce root-and-branch reforms in the institutions of poor countries by making aid conditional on cleaning up their act. What I have myself written conforms pretty much to his sceptical evaluation. If a government is well-intentioned but the efforts are sabotaged by corruption lower down the administrative chain, it may be useful to provide technical assistance to improve accounting procedures so as to increase accountability. But if the government is itself the fons et origo of corruption, this is hopeless and potential donors have to take it as given and adapt their behaviour accordingly, either withholding aid entirely or circumscribing it carefully so that it (or most of it) gets where it is supposed to go. This does not mean that we cannot take what we want from Easterly’s analysis. Easterly gives us a comparison of countries that were poor in the past some of which were colonized and some of which were not. In addition, though this is not essential, he offers one explanation of the deleterious effects of being colonized and provides two ingeniously-constructed measures.

What Easterly shows, then, is that non-colonized countries have developed from equally unpromising origins more successfully on average than colonized ones. The countries not colonized by Europeans show a wide dispersion of economic growth between 1950 and 2001, North Korea contrasting with South Korea, and Afghanistan, Bhutan, Ethiopia and Nepal contrasting with China, Japan and Taiwan, with Thailand and Turkey also doing well while Iran and Saudi Arabia enjoyed increased oil income. Despite the variance,
economic growth averaged 1.7% more in the non-colonized countries than the countries subject to non-settlement colonization, so that ‘by 2001, income was 2.4 times higher than in the non-settlement colonies’ (Easterly, 2006:284).

Easterly proposes that some of the explanation lies in the arbitrary borders left behind by the colonial powers when they withdrew: either yoking together disparate groups, as in the Middle East, where the boundaries of, for example, Lebanon and Iraq were drawn by French and British governments in pursuit of their territorial ambitions, or splitting homogenous groups between adjacent countries. Iraq was constructed out of three Turkish administrative districts that had different populations; conversely, the arbitrary borders drawn by the colonial powers almost inevitably failed to correspond to real divisions on the ground. In Africa, especially, there are far more ethnic groups than could be given a state each, and ethnic heterogeneity is itself associated with poor outcomes. But even controlling for that, the proportion of the population belonging to ethnic groups falling across border lines was found by Easterly and some colleagues to be positively associated with poor political features (democracy, government service delivery, rule of law, and corruption) and also doing worse than less-divided states on infant mortality, illiteracy, as well as specific services such as immunization and clean water supply (Easterly, 2006:292).

An ingenious second measure of the arbitrariness of colonial boundaries that Easterly and his colleagues constructed was an index of ‘how wiggly or straight are the borders of every country in the world’, on the assumption that straight lines would be drawn with a ruler on a map by colonial powers. They ‘found that artificially straight borders were statistically associated with less democracy, higher infant mortality, more illiteracy, less childhood immunization and less access to clean water - all measured today’ (Easterly, 2006:293). Of course, once countries with straight borders became independent they could, in principle, have renegotiated boundaries, but then one state or the other would have lost territory, and a founding principle of the Organization of African Unity was not to open up this can of worms and to stick to colonial boundaries. There is therefore an argument to be made that ‘the straight hand of the colonial mapmaker is discernible in development outcomes many decades later’ (Easterly, 2006:293), and that this grounds some kind of claim for compensation. I concede, however, that it is hard to know how it could be quantified.

XI. Global Warming as a Basis for Obligations

Another basis for specific redress or compensation, whose cogency can scarcely be denied, is the loss of agricultural production and even living space caused by global warming - now and in the future. Of course, rich countries as well as poor ones suffer from the effects of global warming, and will suffer more in the future. For example, the southeast coast of the United States has had bigger and more frequent hurricanes in recent years than before, and this can be attributed to the warmer surface of the Caribbean Sea. But America played a large part in creating the problem, and in any case has the resources to fix it (to the extent that higher sea walls will help) and to compensate those who have lost their possessions. ‘The poorest developing countries will be hit earliest and hardest by climate change, even though they have contributed little to causing the problem. Their low incomes make it difficult to finance adaptation. The international community has an obligation to support them in adapting to climate change.’ Nicholas Stern, who wrote that, said that ‘the costs are hard to estimate, but are likely to run into tens of billions of dollars’ (quoted in Tickell, 2008:176). If we add preparing for future problems to dealing with existing ones, the cost might well be many times higher: Oxfam has estimated $50 billion a year, while Oliver Tickell suggests a fund of $200 billion a year (Tickell, 2008:179-80).

There are two main ill-effects of global warming: the effects of melting glaciers and disruption of weather patterns. Melting glaciers and snow in the Andes and the Himalayas well in excess of the historic norm are creating floods as dammed up water is suddenly released; in the longer term the lack of run-off will have a devastating effect on areas of China and South America in the rainshadow of the mountains, which depend totally on irrigation. The melting of the Greenland and West Antarctic ice-caps will raise sea levels by at least a metre by 2100, perhaps as much as six metres. This builds on an increase in sea levels of 30cm

3 This point is made by Caruana (2008: 275), who writes: ‘The geographical location of Bangladesh, locked between the Himalayas in the north and the Bay of Bengal in the south, makes the country the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change but of course its emissions are very low.’ Per capita emissions of carbon in Bangladesh are 0.3mt, compared with 20.2mt in the USA and 9.2mt in the UK.
already inevitable as the warming oceans expand. As far as the disruption of weather patterns is concerned, ‘places that are wet will get wetter, dry places will get drier, and the rain will be concentrated into intense storms’ (Tickell, 2008:176). We are already seeing monsoons becoming more unreliable, three successive years of drought in places as far apart as Cyprus and Australia, and the spreading of deserts such as the Kalahari.

The rich countries have already accepted in principle that they have an obligation to pay for adaptation in poor countries, but have done little to act on it. They have pledged only $182 million and actually delivered no more than $48 million. ‘Not only is this funding a fraction of what is needed, but it is almost all [with the exception of the Netherlands] being counted towards long-standing commitments to provide 0.7 per cent of national income as aid’ (Oxfam, quoted by Tickell, 2008:178). As of 10 September 2008, the British government is pledging $50 million to Bangladesh - the worst-affected country, with floods, droughts, cyclones and a large low-lying population, 35 million of whom will be displaced by a rise in sea level of 30-45cm. It hoped that, with help from other countries and the World Bank, the adaptation fund ‘will attract nearly $100 million within three years’. Meanwhile ‘the Bangladesh government has estimated that it will need $250m to adapt to climate change in the next three years’ (Vidal, 2008). This seems more realistic in the light of the scale of the problems, and again pushes us towards a much higher overall figure.

It is surely clear that voluntary contributions by rich states are not an adequate response, especially since the USA is conspicuously absent here just as it is in relation to development aid. The World Bank wrote in 2007 that ‘the international community needs to devise new mechanisms to provide a range of public goods’ such as research into climate forecasting and the development of crops adapted to new conditions, and suggested that ‘carbon taxes based on the polluter pays principle could become a major new source of revenue to fund adaption programs’ (quoted by Tickell, 2008:179). Of course, adaptation itself is a lot more expensive than research, but the same principle holds. The great advantage of taxes on carbon emissions (or greenhouse gas emissions of all kinds) is that they are paid by those who are forcing global warming in proportion to the extent to which they are contributing to it.

Currently there is just one automatic mechanism for raising adaptation money, ‘a 2 per cent tax on transactions under the CDM except those arising from “least developed countries”, [which] is likely to contain no more than $500 million by 2012 (when the Kyoto Treaty expires) (Tickell, 2008:44). CDM is the Clean Development Mechanism, which enables a rich country to claim credit for helping to finance, say, a hydroelectric scheme in China. This suffers from the obvious drawback that it might have been built anyway and quite often actually has been built when the credit is claimed (Tickell, 2008: 35-6). It is apparent that an increased tax on such a flawed system is not the way forward. Oliver Tickell has proposed that the Kyoto agreement should be replaced by a new Kyoto 2 treaty whose centrepiece is a global carbon (and greenhouse gas) tax levied directly on coal mines, oil refineries, cement factories, artificial fertilizer plants and the like. This would take the form of an auction of licenses to pollute by an international agency, and could raise $1 trillion. This is a lot of money, but as he points out oil expenditures have risen from $1 trillion to $3 trillion as oil prices have gone up from $30 to $100 a barrel (Tickell, 2008, 171). This scheme has the advantage that there is no need for a fight over quotas among countries, because the tax is levied directly on polluting firms. But it displaces the prospect for international conflict to the stage at which the decisions are taken about where to spend the money.

Tickell proposes that the main expenditures should be $200 billion for adaptation, $120 billion for deployment of clean energy technologies, $250 billion for domestic energy conservation and $300 billion for forest and other ecosystem maintenance, to take account of the effects of rainforest depletion, exposing peatbogs and so on (Tickell, 2008: 213-14). It is obvious that this severely underdetermines where the money would actually go, and Tickell’s (2008: chapter 5) more detailed discussion does nothing to allay this worry. He emphasizes that rich countries will qualify for funds as well as poor ones, but if funds were allocated on a cost-benefit calculation the rich countries could end up with the lion’s share. For example, American homes are notoriously poorly insulated, so a big investment in insulation would bring big returns in energy conservation. But how much of this should be paid for internationally? Should not the profligate USA have to spend most of this money itself? Similarly, saving houses in a rich country will be worth a lot more than saving an equivalent number of makeshift huts in a poor one, but surely the poor have at least an equal claim.
I do not have an answer for this question of how the $1 trillion would be divided up, but Tickell is remarkably oblivious to the scale of the problem. The alternative that naturally presents itself is ‘more of the same’, a Kyoto-based approach with countries having quotas of carbon (or carbon-equivalent) emissions and an improved trading scheme, perhaps modelled on that within the EU. This time, though, all countries would have to be in, but there is no chance that the poorer countries would agree to cut down their emissions from (say) the 2012 level when they were still emitting far less per head than the rich ones. Indeed, the poorest ones would have to be allowed to increase emissions. It is hard to see how any principle could form the basis of an agreement other than equal emissions per head for everyone in the world, turned into quotas for states. Of course, it is also hard to imagine the United States, or perhaps any rich countries’ governments, signing up for this, and I have to confess to pessimism about the prospects.

Even if a framework on these lines could form the basis of a Kyoto 2 treaty, there is still the snag that the beneficiaries in poor countries from selling unused quotas would be governments. There is no more guarantee that the money would be well spent - ideally on adaptation and low-emission development - than there is in the case of oil revenues. A dictatorial kleptocracy might hold back on emissions-producing economic development to maximize its payoff from global carbon trading and pocket the money for luxury or foreign bank accounts (see Tickell, 2008: 73-5). The toxic effects on politics of oil revenues - the ease with which they can be appropriated and transferred to new hands - would also apply here. The difference is that only some poor states are infected by oil and other mineral royalties, whereas all poor countries would be involved here.

I have to concede that I cannot see how one might make use of carbon trading to deal with the manifest inequity that the rich countries have created and continue to create global warming while the poor countries suffer disproportionately from its effects and have the least opportunity to adapt to it precisely because of their lack of resources. This is not to deny that the planet desperately needs a new and better Kyoto treaty. But the claims of poor countries for help in coping with the present and anticipated effects of climate change are too pressing to wait for that. I suggest that what the situation calls for is a commitment by the rich states to provide some percentage of their national incomes to pay for adaptation in poor countries - with the proviso that this is not to count as a partial fulfilment of the already-undertaken obligation to give 0.7% of GDP in aid. There would still, of course, be a lot of wrangling about who gets what. But at least, with only poor countries as potential beneficiaries, like would be compared with like, avoiding the distorting effect of comparing rich and poor.

Leaving aside the problems of implementation for the moment, I do want to suggest that if we are looking for a cast-iron case for aid, we have it here. Responsibility for causing loss carries with it an obligation to provide a remedy to those who have incurred the loss. Here, in contrast with earlier applications of the idea that the poor can be said to have suffered harm at the hands of the rich, we have an unambiguous baseline. We can measure the loss against the situation before global temperatures started going up - they have now risen by 0.7 °C above the historical average. In some cases, such as rising sea levels, we can attribute all the loss (from tidal surges, waterlogging or inundation) to the effect of global warming on sea levels. In other cases - ‘extreme events’ such as cyclones or flash floods, prolonged droughts and failures of the monsoon - we can operate only statistically. We have to say that some of these events would have happened anyway, but they are occurring more frequently and also very often with greater intensity.

This, however, raises what may seem like a paradox. Leaving out intensity, let us suppose that pre-1950 cyclones hit once a year but recently they have been hitting twice a year. Does this imply that only half the cost of improving sea walls to keep the sea out should be recoverable? Perhaps there is an answer available here by saying that keeping out the water from the extra one cyclone a year requires building up the flood defences in exactly the same way as does keeping out both. Nevertheless, the country will still be better off (if the sea walls work) than it was in the past. There may also be cases in which adaptation is impossible and only compensation can be provided, as might be with the failure of the monsoon. The compensation might then be thought to be only for the extra failures in a decade, since only the extra failures count as harm measured against the historic baseline. But it seems rather curious to give each country a sort of ‘natural right’ to its previous climatic condition - no more and no less - when it may have been dealt a bad hand by nature to begin with. Perhaps in the end it is still a mistake to attach too much moral significance to the distinction between harming and not helping.
The point can be illustrated by making a leap of the imagination and thinking about what would be the implications for the obligations of rich countries if the climate sceptics were proved right and it could be shown that global warming was due to, say, solar activity rather than human causes. We could still, of course, use the historic baseline as providing the threshold from which harm could be measured. But it would be hard to see why the historical average climate in a certain area should have any great significance. It was, after all, arrived at naturally, and so was the present climate. That the present climate is bad, especially for tropical countries (Russia and Canada may gain, even) in comparison with the previous one does not in itself seem to form the basis for a claim. As I said before, the previous one may have been pretty lousy, too, for some countries. Why should far more resources be put into getting a country that has fallen from $1,000 to $600 a head back to $1,000 than to get one that started at $650 a head and has fallen to $600 back up to $650? One has been more unlucky recently than the other, but taking a larger view both are equally badly off now, and we might think that both have similar claims, other things (such as the nature of the regime) being equal. When we turn to the obligations of rich countries, these would now disappear if we could rely only on the causal responsibility of the rich countries for climate change to ground an obligation. Yet there is still a case for an obligation to help that can be founded on humanitarian or human rights grounds. What, again, would appear to drop out here is the relevance of the position of each poor country prior to the climate change of, especially, the last seventy years.

XII. Barriers to Migration

There is one final argument for aid from rich to poor countries that motivates the obligation to aid by making an accusation of wrongdoing on the part of the rich countries. This can be derived from the failure of rich countries to recognize a category of economic refugees parallel with that of political refugees. As Daniela DeBono (2008) argues convincingly, there is only an artificial distinction between (would-be) economic migrants, who move voluntarily, and political refugees, who are forced to move by a justifiable fear of physical abuse, imprisonment or death from their government or its proxies. In reality, fear of death, for oneself and one’s children, from disease and severe malnutrition is just as compelling a reason for migrating as is political persecution. But what follows? The distinction is maintained, I take it, because on a strict interpretation of the rule that nobody can become a refugee from a place of safety, even if it is only a refugee camp, the numbers can be severely restricted.

There is absolutely no realistic prospect that economic refugees will be accommodated as a matter of principle by rich countries, because the potential numbers are so enormous. The relevant number here is not that of people who would migrate in the next few years but those who would do so in the next decade or two. The history of immigration when unchecked (as it was essentially in the USA for Europeans in the nineteenth century) is virtually always one of smallish numbers moving first and establishing themselves and then paying for and looking after more migrants. As the numbers that leave increase, a tipping point is reached (as occurred in Norwegian and Swedish villages) where the community becomes unviable and those left have no option but to emigrate too. DeBono (2008:179) notes that three billion people live on less than $2 a day. If ten percent were to move, that would be 300 million. Conservatively, the population in poor countries will increase by 2 billion by 2050. If a quarter of these migrated as well, that would be another 500 million. These numbers in relation to the existing populations of rich countries would be simply unacceptable.

If the moral case for admitting economic refugees is nevertheless valid, what follows? My suggestion is that those who are prevented by the exercise of rich countries’ sovereignty from migrating to them have a good claim for compensation. Of course, we do not know who the potential migrants are specifically, but we have

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It should be recognized that economic refugees (and whatever family members migrated with them) are not the only beneficiaries. Migrants from poor countries to rich ones commonly send back money to kin left behind. The sums involved in remittances sent home can be large in relation to the scale of official aid. Thus, the President of Bolivia has said: ‘For us, our emigrants represent help in development that Europeans do not give us … Latin America received, in 2006, a total of $68bn sent back from abroad, more than the total foreign investment in our countries. My country, Bolivia, received more than 10% of its GDP in such remittances’ (Morales, 2008). Many of these immigrants in Europe are ‘undocumented’ - i.e. illegal - because they are economic rather than political refugees, but Morales points out that if they are deported not only will they lose but also poor Latin American countries will be seriously damaged.
here an additional argument for improving the lot of the world’s poor by reformulating trade rules and doing what can be done usefully to provide economic aid and technical assistance to poor countries.

XIII. Conclusion

‘The world we have created poses new challenges for us …. A decision taken in one part of the world has an impact - often an adverse impact - much further off’ (Caruana, 2008:275). Thus, European and American moves to add just a few per cent of bio-fuels to petrol have driven up food prices, driving poor people into even greater poverty: ‘According to FAO actually 36 countries are in crises as a result of higher food prices’ (Caruana, 2008:275). But that is not the only ill-effect since enormous areas of forest are being logged in Indonesia to plant palm oil trees. This more than cancels out any environmental gain from bio-fuels, because in the short run much of the timber is burned, and in the longer run the earth loses an important sink for carbon dioxide. Chaos theory is often illustrated by saying that a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil can give rise to a hurricane in Florida. In the same way, decisions taken by rich countries that are quite small in relation to the size of their economies can be devastating for people living on the margins in poor countries, which do not have the resources to offset losses. For example, the cost to consumers and taxpayers in Europe and the United States (in higher food prices and taxes) of protection plus subsidy in their agricultural sectors are large but bearable. But the damage done to poor farmers by blocking exports and undercutting prices is enormous.

In this paper, I have sought to show how rich countries can affect global poverty - for better and for worse - and to provide a variety of normative grounds on which they can be criticized for doing harm or at least not doing as much good as either a humanitarian or human rights approach would demand. At the same time, I have tried to point out the practical limits on what rich countries can do when faced with warfare, people displaced by war or civil war, dictators who loot the treasury and pervasive corruption at all levels of administration. I have also suggested, more controversially, that the poor countries, which are anticipated to add almost all of the additional population in the world, can legitimately be asked by rich countries to hold population increase down as much as possible so that economic development is not swallowed up.

I am well aware that, long as this paper is, it is still relatively superficial. But it seemed to me a price worth paying in order to cover the widest variety of bases for claims on rich countries that I could think of. I should add that I do not think any of these is original to me, but I have not seen them put together before now. I hope that others will gain encouragement to press these inquiries further.

References


