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1

Inequality and the Inherent Dignity of Persons

I

In this chapter I set out to do two things. One is to discuss certain concepts and claims that are foundational to the arguments in the subsequent chapters. Another is to set some expectations about arguments that will come later in the book. The chapter serves as an introduction in both respects but I do not summarize all the major claims or systematically list the most important arguments that I promise to make later in the book. That, I think, would make for pretty dreary fare. Instead, I hope to tantalize by simply starting with a discussion of the basic features of my approach to global inequality and the reasons that I have for thinking that it is unjust, and from time to time noting where certain ideas will be developed later.

In the next section I highlight various facets of global inequality and note different measures of global inequality that have been developed by empirical researchers. In Section III, I introduce my approach to respect for human dignity, an approach that is foundational for the normative arguments made in subsequent chapters. I also begin some reflections on justification in that section. These are further developed in Section IV. Section V introduces the view that respect for the dignity of persons establishes an egalitarian justificatory presumption, which is the basis of the criticism of inequality later in the book. Finally, I close the introductory comments of this chapter in Section VI by distinguishing the approach that I take in this book from the much-discussed approach of Thomas Pogge. Pogge's approach has deservedly received a great deal of attention.

It should help many readers to understand my approach by comparing it to Pogge's.

II

Our world is marked by deep and persistent inequalities. The *World Development Report 2006* offers several examples, which make terribly vivid the nature of some of this inequality. One comparison is under five mortality rate. 'A baby born in Mali in 2001 had an approximately 13 percent chance of dying before reaching the age one, with this chance declining only slightly (to 9 percent) even if the baby were born into the top quintile of the asset distribution. By contrast, a baby born in the United States the same year had a less than 1 percent chance of dying in its first year.'¹ More generally, in 2001 the mortality rate for children under age 5 was nearly 26 times higher in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa than in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCED) countries.² According to the World Health Organization, over 60 percent of deaths in developed countries occur beyond age 70, compared to about 30 percent in developing countries.³ Returning the Mali–USA comparison, consider education inequality: 'The average American born between 1975 and 1979 has completed more than 14 years of schooling (roughly the same for men and women, and in urban and rural areas), while the average school attainment for the same cohort in Mali is less than two years, with women's attainment less than half that for men, and virtually zero in rural areas.'⁴ With the onset of adulthood the cumulative effects of these childhood inequalities is enormous income disparity. In 1994 the average income in Mali was less than \$2 PPP per day, or \$54 per month; in the USA it was more than 20 times greater, \$1,185 per month.⁵ Considering the broader picture, the richest 5 percent of the world's population earns 114 times that of the poorest 5 percent. The total income of the richest 1 percent is equal to that of the poorest 57 percent. And the income of 25 million richest Americans is nearly as much as that of the 2 billion poorest people in the world.⁶ Income inequality, however, is less severe than wealth inequality. The assets of the richest three people in the world are more than the combined GNP of all of the least developed countries.⁷

There is a great deal of longitudinal evidence about income inequality. Branko Milanovic shows that whether the trend is toward

greater or less inequality depends crucially on the concepts of inequality and methodology used. When one derives a Gini coefficient from the unweighted (for population size) GDP per capita of all countries, there is a strong trend toward increasing inequality.⁸ This is a version of international inequality that he refers to as *concept 1 inequality*. But when the GDP per capita is weighted for population—a version of international inequality Milanovic calls *concept 2 inequality*—the trend is toward decreasing inequality.⁹ Milanovic observes that this trend is reversed if China and India are excluded, and concludes that the rapid economic growth in these countries is responsible for the decreasing trend.¹⁰ Finally, if the GDP per capita of countries is not used at all, but instead the incomes of persons are compared, the nature of the change over time varies depending on the methodology used for gathering the data.¹¹ This last approach measures what Milanovic terms *concept 3* or *global inequality*; and for most of this book it will be the most significant measure. He sees an overall increase in global inequality from the late 1980s to the late 1990s, but a decrease from the early to the late 1990s.

Despite the differences, by all measures income inequality remains extremely high. As noted in the comparison between persons in Mali and in the USA, income inequality is only one of several kinds of morally salient inequality, but it is quite plausibly causally related to other kinds. Inferior health care and education as a child grows up in Mali predictably leads to less income as an adult than the income of the citizen of the USA. The low income of the parent in Mali results in fewer resources to devote to the health and education of her children. And so it is not surprising that global inequality is so persistent.

Our world also contains staggering poverty. A recent World Bank study estimates that 1.4 billion people are living on less than \$1.25 PPP a day, and 2.4 billion on less \$2 PPP a day.¹² There is controversy surrounding the accuracy of these figures.¹³ But no one denies that billions of people are living in terrible poverty. This is a moral catastrophe that replays itself every day, all the more horrible because the costs of eliminating it are so paltry. Pogge argues that a program of transfers to the desperately poor, the starving and dying children of the world for example, could be instituted without causing any significant hardship to the very wealthy.¹⁴ Moreover, according to the United Nations Development Programme in 1998 the total assets of the 200 richest people in the world were \$1,042 billion. At a cost of

\$7–8 billion, less than 1 percent of the net wealth of the world's richest people, access to primary education could be provided to every child around the world.¹⁵

Not everyone who has studied global inequality judges it to be unjust. Jagdish Bhagwati, for example, condemns the absolute poverty that exists in various places around the world, but considers it 'lunacy' to condemn inequality. '[W]hat sense does it make to put a household in Mongolia alongside a household in Chile, one in Bangladesh, another in the United States, and still another in Congo? These households do not belong to a "society" in which they compare themselves with the others, and so a measure that includes all of them is practically a meaningless construct.'¹⁶ Bhagwati's rejection of the injustice of global inequalities seems rather quick. But he is not alone in this view. The most influential egalitarian political philosopher of the twentieth century, John Rawls, agrees. He is followed in this judgment by several other egalitarian political philosophers; the most prominent is Thomas Nagel. All these philosophers (and perhaps Bhagwati too) would reject such inequalities as unjust if they were within a single state, but do not do so globally.

There are many good reasons to believe that global inequality matters. One is that reducing global inequalities could serve as a means for eliminating absolute poverty under which so many people suffer. The fact that poverty could be eliminated by slightly reducing the wealth of the very wealthy—thereby slightly narrowing inequality—supplies a premise to the argument that the current level of inequality is unjust. Moreover, if inequality is reduced, economic growth is distributed more equally and poverty is reduced more. Charles Beitz correctly makes the point, however, that this sort of argument against inequality is limited to cases in which the poverty is great and the costs of eradicating it are comparatively low.¹⁷ Another reason that global inequality matters is that inequality makes possible, perhaps even likely, the dominance of poor countries by rich countries in international negotiations and institutions.¹⁸ These are instrumental reasons to believe that global inequality matters. They take it to matter because it contributes to other social evils.¹⁹ These reasons suggest that inequality matters a great deal when the gap between the rich and the poor is great and the condition of the poor is particularly bad. Indeed it might matter most in these cases

because of the accumulation of reasons.²⁰ But it does not follow that the only reasons that it matters is because it contributes to other social evils.

In this book I shall argue that there is another less instrumental and less limited reason for maintaining that justice requires reducing global inequality. I say *less instrumental* because I shall not argue that equality is a free-standing value, which commands our allegiance apart from all other values. I shall not argue that equality is intrinsically valuable. My criticism of global inequality is less instrumental in the sense that it does not derive from the service that reducing inequality plays in realizing other morally important social arrangements although it does rely on other important moral commitments.

The injustice of absolute poverty is urgent. It demands our attention and best efforts. But I shall argue that if we take seriously the fundamental basis of all major human rights documents of the twentieth century, which affirm that all persons possess inherent dignity, the construction of new institutions that reduce inequality is also a matter of global justice. That such institutions could also eliminate poverty is a strong reason to support them, but it does not exhaust the moral reasons in their favor. In the remainder of this chapter I begin this argument by providing an initial account of the relationship between respect for human dignity and the presumption of equality under social institutions.

III

Respect is a pro-attitude, or perhaps more accurately a family of pro-attitudes. It is an attitude that positively values its object. It is commonly distinguished from other pro-attitudes, such as belief and concern: Although one might believe a statement, one would not respect it; and although a person might have concern for the functioning of her computer, she does not respect it. In many of the human rights documents of the twentieth century the object of respect is presumed to be the inherent dignity of persons. These are documents that a great many political elites have committed their regimes to observe and that provide hope for millions ordinary people who are seeking more just political, economic and social structures. And these documents typically explicitly acknowledge their basis in human dignity.

Consider the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: 'Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.'²¹ The Preambles of both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights postulate a basis in human dignity: 'Considering that, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world . . .'²² Also noteworthy is Article 5 of The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights: 'Every individual shall have the right to respect of the dignity inherent in a human being and the recognition of his legal status.'²³ References to inherent human dignity within human rights documents are not surprising since the justified claim that a person has a right is usually taken as support for a policy of directing state resources her way, either as protection or provision, even if it is contrary to the will of the majority.²⁴ The special status of persons as the basis for this anti-majoritarian position is well captured by the notion of dignity. Possessors of dignity are entitled to respect even if the majority thinks otherwise.

The inherent dignity of persons, and the respect that is appropriate to it, is a useful place to start a justification of global egalitarianism because of the wide appeal that these ideas have. To be sure, this is a pragmatic reason, appealing to a contingently accepted normative understanding of persons, not one appealing either to a necessary moral truth or to the conclusion of an argument about deep moral foundations. But it is also a reason appropriate to the task of justifying principles of global justice. In the final section of *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls distinguishes between justification and proof.

[J]ustification proceeds from what all parties to the discussion hold in common. Ideally to justify a conception of justice to someone is to give him a proof of its principles from premises that we both accept, these principles having in turn consequences that match our considered judgments. Thus mere proof is not justification. A proof simply displays logical relations between propositions.

Proofs become justification once the starting points are mutually recognized...²⁵

To begin an account of justice as Rawls recommends is to commit oneself to a view of what an account of justice is about, namely that it seeks a resolution to practical problems, where there are sufficient values held in common for such a resolution to seem possible. Accounts of justice are practical normative conceptions about how to order human affairs, suitable to the circumstances in which there is disagreement about such matters, but deeper agreement on some values. A person seeking a justification then has one eye on the social context and another on common values, seeking to provide arguments that might provide the basis for a reasoned resolution to on-going disputes. One implication of this view of justification is that it better not start with abstract metaphysical claims about the nature of the moral universe, the source of moral value, or a delimitation of all objects of moral concern. Justification must be more pragmatic than that.

To invoke the inherent dignity of persons is to claim that all persons have a special moral status or standing. The attribution of human rights to persons is an example affirming that standing of persons. Consider, for example, the manner in which Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights constrains the use of power and force: 'Everyone has the rights to life, liberty and the security of person.'²⁶ Observance of the article requires that institutions not infringe on the life, liberty and security of others. Pogge, I believe, correctly argues that when this right is violated the moral demand that we halt the violation is a consequence of the negative duty against infringing on life, liberty and security.²⁷ But observance of human rights not only constrains the use of power, it also directs it. For observing the rights identified in Article 3 requires not only the negative duties of non-interference, but also duties to ensure (at least) the requisite institutional functioning for policing and prosecuting wrongdoing.²⁸ Human rights documents which invoke the inherent dignity of persons, then, take that moral status of humans to be the reason why they can justifiably demand of institutions that their power be constrained and directed in the ways required by the documents. These constraints and directions are enumerated in the human rights documents as fundamental human rights. Because

inherent dignity is a status possessed equally by all persons, human rights are equal for all persons. Equal treatment under common institutions is the baseline expectation.

Human rights documents assume that the inherent dignity of persons makes appropriate the attitude of respect. More specifically, respect of the kind that Stephen Darwall distinguishes as recognition respect. '[W]e respect something in the recognition sense when we give it standing (authority) in our relations to it.'²⁹ Recognition respect is the acknowledgment of this authority, which all humans have, to demand that the use of institutional power that affects them be appropriately constrained and directed. When human rights documents state that the inherent dignity of persons is the normative basis of the rights that the documents enumerate, the documents are expressing a kind of respect—recognition respect—for persons that is the attitude appropriate to the dignity of persons. This is one expression of recognition respect. It might be thought of as kind of declarative (recognition) respect since it issues in documents. It is echoed in institutional arrangements that constrain and direct power toward the fulfillment of human rights. This could be distinguished as institutional (recognition) respect.

IV

I have been arguing that a justification of global justice can sensibly start from a premise of the inherent dignity of persons. Such a justification seems to presume more than Rawls allows in *A Theory of Justice*. Indeed, there he apparently specifically rejects this approach: 'I believe, however, that while the principles of justice will be effective only if men have a sense of justice and do therefore respect one another, the notion of respect or of the inherent worth of persons is not a suitable basis for arriving at these principles. It is precisely these ideas that call for interpretation.'³⁰ Moreover, when he discusses the moral considerations that are worked into the original position these include that the deliberation be fair and reasonable and that persons be equal with conceptions of the good and capable of a sense of justice.³¹ This could be interpreted as a weaker set of moral premises, than the premise that persons possess inherent dignity that demands respect.

Still, continuing the quotation just cited, it is clear that Rawls also believes that beginning in this manner sheds light on the demands of respect for persons. 'Once the conception of justice is on hand, however, the ideas of respect and of human dignity can be given a more definite meaning.'³² Presumably, this is more than just a happy coincidence. Features of the original position argument, such as the veil of ignorance and justification by agreement, must connect up with ideas of respect and human dignity in order for there to be any assurance that the latter will 'be given a more definite meaning' by the principles derived from the former. It is not clear then that resting the justification of principles of justice on a premise of the inherent dignity of persons is more presumptuous than Rawls's attempts in *A Theory of Justice*; but it is at least making something explicit that is not explicit in Rawls.

Rawls's claim in *A Theory of Justice* that justification must proceed on the basis of commonly accepted premises is related to his concern in *Political Liberalism* that the account of justice be political and not metaphysical. Two, of the three, requirements of an account being political in the right sense (as opposed to the sense of politically expedient) are that the premises invoke values that can be endorsed from within all reasonable comprehensive conceptions of the good, and that the principles are narrowly focused to the ordering of institutions, rather than to directing the whole of a person's life.³³ The desideratum of such a political account is that it is plausible to expect that institutions directed by such principles will be legitimate.³⁴ Although in *Political Liberalism* Rawls defends a political conception that, in addition to satisfying the above two requirements, also employs premises involving conceptions of persons drawn from the liberal tradition, there is nothing about the political approach that restricts it strictly to such premises.³⁵ There is no reason to rule out in principle the possibility of other approaches, such as the employment of a moral conception of persons and goods drawn from some other kind of association. Such a procedure would be useful for the justification of principles of justice appropriate for assessing institutions of that association. An approach based upon the premise of the inherent dignity of persons in conjunction with an account of the goods of the global economic association could possibly be well suited to the justification of principles for the institutions of the global economic association. In Chapters 3 and 4 I pursue this kind of argument.

V

I noted in Section III that recognition respect of the inherent dignity of persons is the acknowledgment of the authority, which all persons have, to demand that use of institutional power that affects them be appropriately constrained and directed. These constraints and directions are enumerated as rights in the human rights documents. The determination of whether the constraint and direction of institutional power is appropriate is a matter of justification. To what might justification appeal in order to be consistent with human dignity? The answer must be based on an interpretation of the premise of human dignity that is consistent with it being the basis of human rights.

To begin, institutions that observe human rights offer persons the ability to pursue goals and values without interference, even contrary to the will of the majority, so long as the pursuit observes the same institutional rules for other persons. Constructing institutions in order to observe human rights, then, involves seeing persons as sources of practical reasons, for example, to limit institutional reach and to ensure that institutions make adequate provisions. Taking persons as sources of practical reasons has a double sense. On the one hand, when crafting institutions we take persons as sources of practical reasons when they become reasons to constrain and direct the power of institutions that we endeavor to empower. We take them as having claims on institutional power. On the other hand, persons are reasons for us in part at least because they have reasons. They live their lives, or seek to do so, in accordance with reasons of their own. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, 'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.'³⁶ We can interpret the right to freedom of conscience as making a claim on institutions, providing a reason for why institutions should function in one way and not the other, out of respect for the reasons that persons have. Taking persons as sources of practical reasons serves, then, as an interpretation of our commitment to the human rights expressed in Article 18.

Respecting human dignity then can be seen as involving taking humans as sources of practical reasons in the sense outlined above. Rawls states approximately the same idea when he takes persons to be 'self-authenticating sources of valid claims.'³⁷ This is a conception of inherent dignity as the status to make demands on institutions. But if the source of the reason that guides the use of institutional power is the demand that persons may make to have it so guided, then the principle that underlies the institutional construction must be one that persons can reasonably endorse. An institution directed by a principle that persons cannot reasonably endorse is an institution that is not respecting persons as sources of practical reasons. There is, then, another sort of respect for human dignity, in addition to the recognition respect that institutions can express in their functioning. This I call *justificatory respect*. Justificatory respect requires that the principles that guide institutional functioning be such that they can be reasonably endorsed by the persons participating within the institutions.³⁸ Respect for human dignity then requires a justification of institutional principles that can be reasonably accepted by those who live under them.³⁹

I claim that justificatory respect follows from taking persons as possessing inherent dignity. I have not tried to derive a commitment to justificatory respect from deeper ethical theories. This relative shallowness is a consequence of the understanding of justification that I discussed in Section II. A justification must employ premises; it must make assumptions. I assume the inherent dignity of persons. Still, it seems to me that justificatory respect could well be consistent with several ethical theories. Perhaps it could be supported on rule-utilitarian grounds. It certainly echoes the injunction of the Formula of Humanity version of Kant's categorical imperative not to treat persons merely as means. And it could be a piece of contemporary contractualism or constructivism, which take the justification of moral principles to be a function of some kind of constrained consent. Indeed, such accounts fit particularly nicely because they provide the details of what should count as reasonable endorsement.⁴⁰ Reasonable endorsement is not equivalent to actual acceptance. The justification of principles cannot be held hostage to the unreasonable demands of persons. A full account of justification must then include an account that distinguishes reasonable from unreasonable acceptance of principles. This is a major philosophical project far exceeding

my more modest aims in this book. But, I believe that enough can be said, for present purposes, to avoid having to develop anything like a full account of the justification of principles. I shall have much more to say about this, however, in Chapter 3.

Let's suppose we have what I call a *common good association*. This is an association that by the joint effort of its members produces goods and powers, useful to the members, to which no person has a pre-associational moral entitlement. Let's suppose furthermore that this common good association is strong, non-voluntary, significant for people's lives, and under the collective control of persons.⁴¹ Now consider a principle for the governance of this association. The principle 'institutions should be arranged so as to realize maximally the interests of persons in sub-group G' cannot be reasonably accepted *pro tanto* by persons who are not members of sub-group G. In contrast the principle 'institutions should be arranged so as to realize equally the interests of all those living under the institutions' can be reasonably endorsed *pro tanto* by everyone living under them. This reasoning is consistent with the requirements of Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which includes the following commitment: 'All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.'⁴²

There are four plausible exceptions that could support a difference between the *pro tanto* endorsement of a principle of equality and a complete justification of a principle in particular cases: (1) Some persons could deserve to have their interests treated less well because of something they have done to harm the interests of others; (2) some persons could voluntarily consent to lesser realization of their interests or to taking certain risks of this outcome; (3) there might be differences in morally relevant needs requiring more resources to satisfy; or (4) offering incentives that produce differential outcomes could benefit everyone in comparison to their condition under equality. In any particular case the *prima facie* principle of equality might not, then, upon further consideration, be appropriate because of one these exceptions.

Taking persons as possessors of inherent dignity establishes a *prima facie* principle of equality under common good institutions, including distributive institutions. This suggests a method for considering whether distributive inequalities between people who share common and unavoidable institutions are all-things-considered just despite

their violation of the *prima facie* equality principle: One must consider whether the exceptions to equality adumbrated above apply. It is highly implausible to believe that these exceptions apply when considering the bulk of current global inequality. The child growing up in Mali, for example, has done nothing to deserve her inferior health and education prospects. Nor has she voluntarily chosen them or put herself at risk having them by her choices. It is outrageous to suppose that her needs are so much less than the child growing up in an OCED country. Finally, the arguments of Pogge and the UNDP concerning the relative costs of eliminating absolute poverty also lend credence to the claim that alternative institutions can be devised that would better realize the child's interest in health. It's certainly not the case that everyone is benefiting from these massive global inequalities. If we assume the inherent dignity of this child and children like her in the underdeveloped world, we have good initial reasons to believe that the inequalities between their life prospects and children growing up in OCED countries are seriously unjust.

VI

Now that I have sketched several of the main features of the account that will be more fully developed in subsequent chapters, it might be well to close these introductory arguments by contrasting my approach with Pogge's well-known human rights-based account of global justice. Pogge's account quite deservedly has received considerable attention. His argument that absolute poverty is a human rights violation caused in part by structural features of the international system, especially the international borrowing and resource privileges is insightful, plausible, and the best moral compass we have for dealing with this urgent global problem. My account differs from his in several ways, however. First, Pogge's account is human rights based. The account I defend here begins with the inherent dignity of persons, which is typically invoked in human rights documents, not with human rights themselves. Rather, the focus will be on social justice, in particular global distributive justice.

Second, Pogge's account is sufficientarian; he is concerned mainly with absolute deprivation. The account that I defend argues that we have reasons to oppose distributive inequalities, which reasons

are independent of the service that reducing inequality can play in remedying poverty. My account is, then, broadly egalitarian. Pogge believes that distributive injustices are 'mere symptoms of a deeper injustice: the imposition, by our governments in our name, of a coercive global order that perpetuates severe poverty for many who cannot resist this imposition.'⁴³ Perhaps Pogge merely means that attention to severe poverty is more urgent than attention to global inequality. I have no quarrel with that judgment. But his language suggests that his meaning is not that. Rather, the claim seems to be that the cause of the unjust distribution of wealth and income is the coercive imposition of a poverty causing global order by wealthy and powerful states and persons; distributive inequalities are 'mere symptoms' of this. Indeed, Pogge points out that his critique is not at all leftist. 'The political right, too, condemns poverty caused by an unjust coercive institutional order . . .'⁴⁴ It is, however, implausible to claim that if the international system did not provide powerful incentives to corruption and anti-democratic power-taking by recognizing the legitimacy of leaders to borrow and sell no matter how they take power, and if the World Trade Organization's (WTO) rules did not permit massive developed country protectionism, then significant market-generated global inequalities in resources and opportunities would not exist. This is not to deny that either the borrowing and resource privileges or the WTO rules are unjust, but merely to deny that an account that recognizes these injustices, is necessarily an egalitarian one.

The political right does not doubt that market-generated inequalities would exist. This is because such inequalities are not merely the symptom of the international borrowing and resource privileges, they arise in well-functioning markets for labor, resources and goods, markets that reward persons of certain talents, punish the unlucky and allow the opportunities of young children to be governed by their parents' fortunes in the market. The political right and the political left do not generally disagree about these empirical claims. The disagreement is about their moral significance. The political left argues that institutions that permit at least some of the market-generated inequalities mentioned above are unjust. Unlike, Pogge's criticisms, then, mine serve to align my account with the political left.

Third, in keeping with his general approach, which focuses on the *coercive imposition* of international institutions, including especially

the borrowing and resource privileges, Pogge argues that the central feature of global injustice is the harm caused by international institutions. Again, if he can succeed at this there is no reason why libertarians should not enthusiastically endorse his moral conclusions. In contrast, the account that I defend holds that global social injustice consists in inequalities of the global economic association, those inequalities at any rate that cannot be excused by reasons like the four adumbrated in Section IV above.

One might be inclined to think that Pogge's account has a certain justificatory advantage. It, unlike mine, holds out the hope of bringing libertarians on board because it is based upon the more ecumenical harm-causing conception of injustice. On further consideration, however, it is not obvious that the hope is well-placed and that the advantage is very substantial. For the claim that the relevant institutions cause harm is in fact controversial on both empirical (the extent of causation) and normative (the nature of the harm) grounds. Take causation first. The global economic association is massively complex and not well understood. How confident should we be that a particular international institution, which affects all states, causes poverty especially given the abundant evidence that some states are rapidly decreasing their poverty rates? Pogge, of course, has an answer for this. One way he puts the answer is to distinguish between local factors, which cause variations in poverty among states, and global factors, which negatively restrict the ability of all states to mount successful anti-poverty programs.⁴⁵

A World Bank study concludes that complete trade liberalization would lower the Gini coefficient of international inequality (Milanovic's *concept 2 inequality*) by 0.06 percent.⁴⁶ This conclusion, I take it, is controversial, perhaps in part because it focuses only on the static effects of complete liberalization. In contrast, Joseph E. Stiglitz and Andrew Charlton argue that capital market imperfections make the protection of infant industries in developing countries a necessity of a successful development strategy.⁴⁷ But in either case we have the bases of arguments to support the claim that WTO rules—which require that developing and underdeveloped countries eliminate protectionist policies, but which allow countries with highly developed economies to maintain such policies—contribute to inequality and poverty. Either of these arguments then could be taken to support the role of global factors in causing poverty, despite

the existence of local factors as well. But given that some countries, most notably China, are rapidly reducing poverty, the question of how to understand the causation of the global factors persists. Pogge suggests an analogy to his students' learning. Individual factors might explain the variations between their performance, while a global factor—his teaching—might also exercise an effect on the performance of all the students.

[E]ven if student-specific factors fully explain observed variations in the performance of my students, the quality of my teaching may still play a major role in explaining why they did not on the whole do much-better or worse than they actually did. Likewise, even if country specific factors fully explain the observed variations in the economic performance of the poor countries, global factors may still play a major role in explaining why they did not on the whole do much better or worse than they did in fact.⁴⁸

In the case of the students there are two phenomena that require explanation, students' performance relative to one another and students' performance relative to a less well-defined open-ended common goal of mastery of the class material. The global factor of teaching quality might have some explanatory value with respect to the second, even if we assume it has none with respect to the first. In the case of poverty reduction, there are also two phenomena that require explanation, states' success relative to one another and states' success relative to the common goal of poverty eradication, as defined by the \$1.25 PPP/day—or some other—goal. In the case of the students, their approach to the common goal is quite likely asymptotic; there is always room for improvement in the direction of mastery. Hence, one can nearly always sensibly query whether all or most of the students would not learn more effectively with a different teaching approach or a different teacher, in other words with different global factors. In the case of poverty reduction, if some states are realizing some well-defined goal (\$1.25 PPP/day or some other one), laying more stress on the explanatory value of local factors rather than global ones is not obviously incorrect. In other words, we should expect controversy regarding the claim that global factors are a significant cause of poverty.

If there is reasonable controversy regarding the empirical claim about the extent to which global factors cause poverty, there is bound to be reasonable controversy regarding the normative claim that global institutions are harming the poor since, of course, the harm must be caused. But in addition to such controversy, there is the matter of how harm is even identified. Consider our common-sense understanding of harm: Fritz's action harms Hazel only if Hazel is worse off than she was before Fritz acted. Following Pogge we can refer to the standard employed as *the diachronic comparison* since it compares well-being across time.⁴⁹ One recent World Bank study finds that the percentage of people living below \$1.25 PPP/day has been halved, falling from 52 percent to 26 percent from 1981 to 2005.⁵⁰ These findings are controversial.⁵¹ Indeed, Pogge is a strong critic of World Bank measures of poverty.⁵² The fact that there is controversy here is enough to cast doubt on the justificatory advantage that a harm-causing conception of injustice, which uses a diachronic comparison, has over an inequality conception. In any case, however, the international borrowing and resource privileges are long-term features of the global economy; and it would be difficult to measure harm in terms of a comparison between poverty levels before their existence and now.

An alternative conception of harm employs what Pogge he calls *a subjunctive comparison*.⁵³ According to such a comparison, harm (or benefit) is a measure of a person's actual condition in comparison either to her condition as it would have been in the absence of the institutional change (or individual action) or to her condition as it would have been under a fictional alternative institutional order (or some other individual action). When applied to agents, the idea is that Fritz harms Hazel only if either she is worse off than she would have been if Fritz had not acted or she is worse off than she would have been had Fritz acted differently. Or if we accept the fall in poverty, as asserted in the World Bank study cited above, persons would be harmed by global institutions (despite the fall in poverty) only if the fall would have been greater either in the absence of an institutional change or under some other (feasible) hypothetical institutional arrangement. The former Pogge calls *a subjunctive comparison with an historical baseline*, the latter *a subjunctive comparison with a hypothetical baseline*.⁵⁴ The distinction that Pogge draws between local and global factors in poverty elimination allows him

to argue that even a state that is reducing poverty might nonetheless be harmed by the global order if its poverty level would have been even better under other institutions.

Now, Pogge rejects the use of the subjunctive comparison with an historical baseline because it improperly assumes that the prior historical period was neutral; hence what might appear to be an instance of a benefit in relation to the past could suffer from an unappreciated harm if there were some causal factor of the same kind operating both in the past and the present that served to make people worse off than they might be.⁵⁵ This might suggest the appropriateness of the subjunctive comparison with a hypothetical baseline, but Pogge criticizes that too for the lack of 'a precise and morally uniquely appropriate standard for comparing the two worlds....'⁵⁶ The point seems to be that we must choose some picture of how people might be to employ such a comparison, but there are many possibilities; and the comparison provides us with no standard for choosing among them. Hence, Pogge contends that an assessment of harm must rely on a morally justified standard, an account of people's entitlements as clarified by a harm-independent conception of justice.⁵⁷ Pogge's preferred conception is apparently broadly Lockean.⁵⁸ In the end Pogge is left with an identificatory account of harm that is dependent upon an account of distributive justice. This effectively renders null any justificatory advantage that an account of injustice as harm-causing has over one based upon distributive inequality since both rely on controversial accounts of social justice.

The point of this section is not to offer a convincing critique of Pogge's account of global justice. Rather it is to show that there is no reason to suppose that Pogge's apparently ecumenical basis of harm-causing is any less philosophically controversial than an account based upon distributive inequalities. This clears away one source of resistance to exploring a more thorough-going egalitarian path. There will, of course, be many obstacles along the way. I hope to avoid some and remove others, and thereby advance some distance down the path in the chapters ahead.

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