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Interview:

Globalising, With Justice: An Interview with Thomas Pogge

Much of your work is concerned with global inequalities of wealth and income. What practical measures do you favour to redress these inequalities?

At the root of this problem is a vicious circle: The global poor can exert very little political influence, so their interests are not considered in the design of social institutions on the national and global levels; and these institutions then further impoverish those marginalised people in relative and often even in absolute terms. The problem can be attacked at both ends. To improve the socio-economic position of the poor, we – the rich societies – should work together to do or support on a much larger scale what some of the better NGOs are doing here and there: ensure real access to safe water, adequate food, shelter, schooling, basic medical care and electricity. To enhance the political influence of the poor, we should discontinue the practice of recognising their rulers, on the basis of effective power alone, as entitled to make legally binding commitments in behalf of ‘their’ country, to borrow in its name, to sell its natural resources and to spend the proceeds on importing the weapons
they need to stay in power. In addition, we should also ensure that their interests are forcefully and competently represented in international negotiations about WTO rules, for example, or IMF loan agreements.

*I can understand the point you are making about the indefensible character of the regimes in many poor countries, but are you suggesting that the regimes in such countries should be subjected to a kind of filter of political acceptability imposed by the West before they are granted membership of the family of states? Is this not paternalism on a grand scale? And might it not leave their subject populations unrepresented in world politics, and therefore in an even worse position?*

Who says that ‘the West’ should be the judge? My proposal does not involve any of the paternalism you reject. It envisions a standing Democracy Panel organised by democratic developing countries and authorised by each of them to issue a ruling, in real time, when the exercise of political power in it no longer accords with its constitution (after a coup, say, or a fraudulent election). Here each country can fix its own (broadly democratic) constitutional criteria of legitimacy, and the participating countries can, together, select the experts serving on the Panel. Once the Panel has found a government to be illegitimate, the world is put on notice that lending to it does not create legal claims against the country and its people and that buying public property from it (e.g. natural resources) does not create valid legal ownership rights. The point of the proposal is greatly to reduce the funds tyrants can use to entrench their rule (e.g. through arms purchases) and thereby to weaken the incentives of potential putchists to attempt a coup in the first place. Even with many more details added (see my ‘Achieving Democracy’, *Ethics and International Affairs*, Spring 2001), this proposal gives countries an opportunity to join the scheme only when they enjoy a period of democratic governance, which some may not do for a long time to come. So it is only a partial solution. Still, I deny that the noble aim of avoiding paternalism requires that we consider countries and peoples not included in the scheme to be represented by whoever holds effective power over them. We should not allow our corporations to buy natural resources from, or to lend money or sell weapons to, the likes of Sani Abacha or the Burmese junta, because doing so makes such rulers more oppressive, entrenches their rule, squanders the wealth of the country, and encourages similar types to take power by force. I agree, of course, that we should not leave the populations of such countries unrepresented in world politics – but this is exactly what we do now when we recognise their hated oppressors as their representatives. Are there no other voices in the country? Remember South Africa under apartheid, when the vast majority of blacks told us not to invest, not to trade, not to visit. Did we not have more reason to listen to them than to the white government? And do we not now have more reason to listen to Aung San Suu Kyi, who has called for a travel boycott, than to General Than Shwe?

Yes, decisions about the representativeness of undemocratic governments and of other voices claiming to speak for the people should not be made by Western governments, either individually or collectively. Their decisions would often be distorted by their political and economic interests. I don’t pretend to know the best way of making such decisions. But here is one way, just to show that there are better options than the status quo: An independent organisation representing the interests of the global poor could be created and funded by the United Nations, whose General Assembly elects as its directors competent and energetic experts committed to the struggle against poverty and oppression. This organisation would contain a quasi-judicial body that monitors all non-democratic governments and authoritatively decides which ones are at least minimally representative of the people they rule and of the poor among them in particular. When rulers are found not to be minimally representative, their international legal power to enter binding agreements in behalf of their country – to borrow, sell or buy in its name – is suspended. Such a mechanism could greatly weaken oppressive rulers and provide strong incentives against grievously oppressive and corrupt governance. The same organisation would also contain an advocacy body that represents the interests of the global poor in negotiations about the rules governing international politics and the global economy, where most of the global poor currently lack committed and competent representation. (I know, the World Bank is supposed to be the global champion of the poor – but its work, not surprisingly, is rather more closely aligned with the interests of those who fund and hold the voting rights in that organisation.) No doubt, this quick proposal could be much improved. But it suffices to show that my challenge to the common recognition of tyrants as representatives of those they
oppress need not lead to Western paternalism or further marginalise the interests of the global poor.

Are you in favour of the Tobin Tax?

This has become a rather emotional issue. Nearly all economists, including many former supporters, now claim that such a tax could be circumvented and would thus not serve either of its two purposes well. This claim is endlessly repeated in the financial media with much polemics, little argument and no space given to ideas about how the compliance problem might be solved. This universal rejection among the experts seems to have more to do with career pressures than with a sober assessment of the pros and cons. It is in any case rather disingenuous to blame the unfeasibility of the Tobin Tax on the possibility of a few non-compliant tax havens when nearly all rich countries are refusing to go along. If they supported the Tobin Tax, they could do a great deal to discourage circumvention: Major players – corporations, banks and hedge funds – are unlikely to break the laws of countries on which they depend for customers and legal protection merely to avoid a small fee on foreign exchange transactions.

Yet, even if the Tobin Tax were really unworkable, there are plausible alternative specifications of the same basic idea. In 1994, I proposed a Global Resources Dividend through which those who extract natural resources or discharge pollutants compensate for their devaluation of our planet. Like the Tobin Tax, such a GRD would have two purposes, on the revenue and expenditure sides: to slow resource depletion and pollution, and to raise funds – about US$300 billion or one percent of the global product – for poverty eradication.

Are you in favour of a global basic income?

Something like this may well be part of the best plan for using funds raised through a Tobin Tax or GRD toward poverty eradication. Given the enormity of international economic inequality, one might however want to depart, at least initially, from the conventional conception of basic income as unconditional (i.e., not needs-tested) so as to better protect the bottom half of humankind, who live on about $150 per person per year on average and would gain much more in economic security than affluent people from each extra dollar. A basic income in poor countries has two attractive features: The poor would decide for themselves how to prioritise their various needs. And the additional spending generated would be largely local, creating a multiplier effect as new demand for food, housing, etc., would raise local employment and wage levels. Still, I see basic income as just one component of a comprehensive poverty eradication program. There should also be infrastructure projects on which it is difficult and expensive for the poor to co-ordinate: wells, hospitals, schools, banks, power plants, road, rail and communication links. Funds for such projects could be competitively allocated to governments, corporations and NGOs on the basis of the quality and efficiency of their past work. Most importantly, the rules governing international markets must be reformed to take account of the interests of the global poor.

Much recent debate on global inequality has pitted opponents of ‘globalisation’ (who point to the low wages paid to sweatshop labour in countries like Indonesia) against its proponents (who allege that insistence on higher wages only helps workers in developed countries and harms those it intends to help). What is your perspective on this conflict?

The proponents are right that sweatshop wages are better than no wages at all, and the opponents, too, are right that a world so rich in aggregate must not be organised to provide sweatshop work (or worse: prostitution, mining, carpet manufacture – so often forced upon children and teenagers) as the best option available to many. In general, it is a mistake, I think, to make globalisation the key issue. Massive and severe poverty can persist (and has persisted) without globalisation, and the eradication of such poverty is perfectly compatible with globalisation. Over the period since the end of the Cold War, our governments have again and again, for the sake of small gains, shaped and reshaped the rules of the world economy to the disadvantage of the global poor. They force poor countries to open their markets while sheltering their own markets from cheap agricultural and textile imports. They sell weapons to the most barbarous tyrants and rebel movements. They have used their increased power after the collapse of the Soviet Empire to renegotiate the sharing of seabed resources out of the Law of the Seas Treaty. They have dramatically lowered their official development assistance from 0.34 per cent of their aggregate GNP down to 0.24 per cent in less than a decade – even while the end of the Cold War is presenting them with a
1.9 per cent peace dividend. None of this is an integral part of
globalisation as such. It is part of one particular and especially brutal
path of globalisation which our governments, ruthlessly exploiting our
superior bargaining power, are choosing to impose. These governments
are acting in our name, and perhaps even in our best interest, in a narrow
sense of this phrase. But their strategy has the foreseeable result that
global economic growth is not improving the condition of the global
poor. Head-counts for severe poverty (1,200 million) and malnutrition
(826 million) are stagnant – despite a grandiose promise at the 1996
Rome World Food Summit to halve these figures within 19 (!) years.
And one third of all human deaths, some 18 million annually, are still
due to poverty-related causes. This was and is avoidable, and cheaply so:
1 per cent of aggregate income in the rich countries (containing 900
million people) is equivalent to over 50 per cent of aggregate income of
the poorest half of humankind (over 3,000 million people).

You stress the importance of universal principles of justice and human
rights in your work. Yet the solidaristic communities in which such
principles may stand their best chance of being respected may depend
on bonds of affection between their citizens which are local and
particularistic in character. How do you see the relationship between
universal justice and particular identities?

I see both human rights and justice as articulating specific minimal
demands (more minimal in the case of human rights) that persons owe
one another. These demands have the character of negative duties; they
require that we should not, alone or in concert with others, inflict certain
undue harms on others. By conceiving human rights and justice in such
minimalist terms, I am going against strong trends of the last decades.

Most people assume that social and economic human rights, at least,
must be conceived as imposing positive duties: to supply food and other
basic goods and services to those who need them. I take even such
human rights to be narrower, so that they impose only negative duties,
such as the duty not to help impose upon others an institutional order
under which they avoidably cannot meet their basic needs. On my
account, then, we have no human-rights-based duties to help people in
whose distress we are not causally involved (which is not to deny, by
any means, that there are other strong moral reasons to provide such
help). But this limitation makes little difference in our world where
actual starvation is due to national and global economic institutions that
we, through our governments, help shape and impose.

Most people conceive social justice ambitiously as expressing some
high ideal for any institutional order or for specific social rules,
practices, procedures. Think of Rawls’s ‘difference principle’, which
holds unjust any national economic order generating inequalities that are
not quite to the greatest benefit of the lowest socio-economic position.
This loses the association of injustice with undue harming which I seek
to maintain. For it is hard to see how such a mildly unjust economic
order can be said to harm these people when the least advantaged under
most alternative economic regimes and in the absence of any would be
much worse off. On my account, then, social justice articulates minimal
conditions that the design of social institutions must meet if their
coercive imposition is not to count as harming others unduly.

It is common and plausible to hold that our positive duties are
stronger toward the near and dear and, in particular, stronger toward
compatriots than foreigners. But we do not think this about negative
duties as when, for instance, you have made conflicting promises to a
compatriot and a foreigner. Here it seems clear that, if the foreigner
stands to lose more, you should break your promise to the compatriot. Or
consider runaway trolley cases, which moralists have discussed so much.
No one has suggested that compatriotism is relevant to the question
which track with trapped people one should steer the trolley toward. Or
consider whether it is morally worse to beat up a compatriot than a
foreigner, worse to defraud a poor family in Britain than a poor family in
France.

In all these negative-duty cases, the celebrated priority for compatriots
has no grip: We are required (roughly put) to minimise the undue harms
we cause others. This much we owe to foreigners and compatriots alike.
Members of families, religious communities, political societies, etc., may
among themselves seek to fulfil much higher standards and may thus
come to owe much more than this to their fellow members. But these
special obligations do not reduce what we minimally owe outsiders. Our
special bonds with our families do not make it permissible for us to steal
expensive toys or to cheat on our taxes. We understand this and would,
if a relative did steal or cheat for our sake, not be gratified by the depth
of her commitment to us, but rather appalled. Analogously, special
compatriotic bonds do not make it permissible for governments to
impose unjust social institutions or other wrongs upon foreigners. Can
we not understand this analogous point as well?

Are you optimistic about the prospects for movement towards global
justice? What do you take to be the role of the political philosopher in
encouraging such movement?

It does not seem likely that we will ever overcome domination based on
violence and the threat thereof. There is a better chance that massive and
severe poverty will once be a thing of the past. But how many human
beings will our unjust economic arrangements kill in the meantime?
Currently they produce some 50,000 premature deaths from poverty-
related causes every day.

As for the role of the political philosopher: ‘Philosophy’ means ‘love
of wisdom,’ and wisdom, one might say, is understanding what matters.
For many contemporaries, including philosophers, the question what
matters boils down to what we care about. This is a paradoxical
reduction, because people – initially, certainly, when they begin their
adult lives – care deeply that what they care about should be worth
caring about. Philosophers have not been much help, lately, in giving us
ways of evaluating and critically modifying what we care about. Many
have rejected the very search for such standards as inseparably tied to an
outdated metaphysics or as incompatible with the pluralism of
multicultural societies. And some have then seen it as their task to cure
us of the ambition that their reductionism presents as incapable of
fulfilment.

As regards morality, this sort of therapy has helped make it almost
inconceivable that right and wrong, justice and injustice, could differ
much from what we take them to be. Individuals and small groups,
sociopaths and paedophiles, can be horribly mistaken about morality, to
be sure. But the larger ‘we,’ the civilised people of the developed west,
cannot be so mistaken. Not because our moral views are based on so
much careful thought. Rather, our moral views cannot be deeply wrong,
and need no careful thought, because there are no external standards
they could run afoul of. Our moral convictions are the data that any
moral conception must explain and reaffirm – or so it is thought.

One of these dear ‘moral facts’ is the conviction that we bear no
moral responsibility for poverty and oppression abroad. This conviction
is among the ‘fixed points’ of our moral world view which we feel more
sure of than we could ever be about the merits of complex philosophical
arguments to the contrary. And so we can save ourselves the trouble of
examining such arguments (unless we happen to enjoy brain-teasers).

This sort of shallow complacency is now rather entrenched in the
public culture, and philosophers peddling yet one more confirmation of
it have thus become increasingly irrelevant. What we should expect from
philosophers is that they will once more have interesting things to say
about what matters and, specifically, about what matters morally. When
they will, they may well contribute substantially to the movement toward
global justice – by being society’s gadfly, or conscience if you prefer.
This will require work not merely in moral or even political philosophy
proper, but also work in economics, political science, history and the
law, because any truly adequate treatment of global justice requires a
great deal of knowledge of facts, causalities and historical-political
possibilities. In doing this sort of trans-disciplinary thinking, political
philosophers have, for now, one great advantage over professionals in
those other fields, economics and political science especially, where
pressures toward conformity are so much greater. Political philosophers
know that, no matter what they say, they will neither be offered
consultancies, overpaid stints at the World Bank or IMF, pages in the
Economist, nor be completely shunned by their peers for challenging the
reigning orthodoxy. (I have been amazed to find how strong such
pressures are in academic economics and how much of the production in
that field therefore works backward: from the desired conclusions to the
supporting arguments.) So long as political philosophy remains
marginal, the pressures toward conformity are not too great and, in any
case, partly compensated by there also being, in academic philosophy, a
good bit of cheer for the outliers, oddballs, eccentrics and underdogs.
Thus, I expect more good, unbiased, multidisciplinary work on global
justice issues from the present generation of young political philosophers
than from the academics in the other relevant disciplines. I know a fair
number of them and am quite impressed by their willingness to learn
what they need to know and to think on their own.
You have thought a great deal about international relations within a broadly Kantian and Rawlsian framework. John Rawls has himself published reflections on this area with his book The Law of Peoples. How and why do you see yourself differing from Rawls in this area?

These disagreements go back some 20 years, when Rawls supervised my thesis on Kant, Rawls, and Global Justice and they have deepened as we have each worked out our positions in more detail. Though I have not been able to make Rawls appreciate what I consider to be the paramount injustice in our world – an injustice for which we citizens of the rich countries (and his US in particular) bear responsibility – I am nonetheless pleased that he was, despite his declining health, willing and able to complete this book. It shows that he holds his views conscientiously and sincerely, and thus cannot but add to the stature of this admirable person. It also shows what sort of mistakes one must make in order to blind oneself to that enormous injustice.

In his masterpiece, A Theory of Justice, Rawls develops a reasonably progressive conception of justice for the basic structure (institutional order) of a closed or self-contained society. In The Law of Peoples, he seeks to marshal the power of that contractalist conception in support of a more conservative account of international justice. But the extension fails on several levels. It fails most clearly for ideal theory. In his first book, Rawls argues that the basic structure of a self-contained society, to be fully just, must satisfy his two principles of justice. But the new book claims that it would be morally unacceptable for the global basic structure, regulating the only self-contained society there is in the modern world, to satisfy the difference principle. He gives a reason why this is morally unacceptable: Under a global order satisfying the difference principle, peoples would have to share certain costs of decisions made by other peoples (decisions not to reduce their birth rate or not to industrialize). But this reason applies with equal force within a national society to its provinces, towns and families (which may differ in their birth rates or investments in education). And Rawls does not explain why this reason should not render equally unacceptable what he continues to endorse: the application of the difference principle to the basic structure of a national society.

Rawls has a second line of defence: Even if the application of his two principles to the global order were not unacceptable in itself, it would still be unacceptable in our world due to its cultural diversity. – But cultural diversity exists intranationally as well as internationally. Rawls holds his principles to be applicable, first and foremost, to the United States, which has a great deal of cultural diversity, much of it outside the liberal range of values his theory is seeking to unify and to articulate. If we must not impose a liberal basic structure internationally upon those who do not share the liberal outlook, then why may we do so intranationally?

And there are two further problems with Rawls’s appeal to cultural diversity: He fails to explain why, if a liberal global order must not be imposed upon decent non-liberals, a non-liberal global order may be imposed upon liberals. And he fails to make clear what actual culture-based objections to a liberal global order he is concerned to accommodate. He holds, plausibly enough, that only the values of decent societies, not those of absolutist or outlaw regimes, deserve accommodation. But if there are such decent societies in our world (Rawls offers only the fictional ‘Kazanistan’), then they would, I suspect, be delighted if we were to offer them institutional reforms toward a global economic order that satisfies liberal ideals of fair opportunity. In our world, it is the liberal democracies that are blocking such reforms in order to preserve their crushing economic predominance. To suggest that a delicate concern for the values of the poor societies might justify such obstruction strikes me as rather fantastic.

There are further major defects in Rawls’s Law of Peoples, beyond its inconsistencies with his original theory. Let me mention two. First, the contractalist argument he offers is flimsy. Representatives of different peoples get together behind a veil of ignorance to choose the content of international law (not, by the way, principles for the comparative assessment of alternative contents of international law, as the analogy to the domestic theory would require – another unexplained divergence). Rawls posits that these representatives are motivated by an interest in the justice or decency of their society, but otherwise says nothing about their reasoning (e.g., about whether they use the maximin rule as their domestic counterparts do). He then gives these parties one single proposed content of international law and concludes the ‘argument’ with the memorable sentence: ‘the representatives of well-ordered peoples simply reflect on the advantages of these principles of equality among
peoples and see no reason to depart from them or to propose alternatives’ (LP 41).

Second, Rawls fully endorses what I have called ‘explanatory nationalism’ – the claim that existing misery in many developing countries can be explained in terms of domestic factors alone and that formulating the content of international law can therefore proceed without regard to its impact on the incidence of poverty and oppression. Here he endorses a view that is propagated by economists on the right and the left, who insist that poverty would be eradicated if only the countries in which it occurs were willing to follow the good example of the Asian tigers or of Kerala, respectively. This view is also widely taken for granted in work on international ethics, whose practitioners formulate their disputes in terms of beneficence and charity: whether we have a duty to ‘help,’ whether we should/may ‘intervene.’ But such explanatory nationalism does not withstand even minimal reflection on the profound effects of global political and economic institutions, of resource purchases from as well as lending and arms sales to dictators, of international bribery, pollution, global warming, epidemics, and so on.

You have emphasised and defended John Rawls’s focus on the basic structure of society. Yet critics, most prominently G.A. Cohen, have charged that such a focus deprives us of our ability to discern patterns of injustice that flow not from the institutional structure of society but from the attitudes of its members. Are you inclined to revise your view in the light of Cohen’s critique?

No, I still believe that the basic structure should be treated as a separate subject of moral assessment and I do much of my work on developing such a conception of justice for basic institutions. I can answer the weak Cohen charge you report by pointing out that my topic should not and, I think, does not blind me to other injustices and other wrongs. They are simply not my current focus. To this easy response, one should add that the attitudes and personal conduct of individuals are very substantially shaped by the social institutions under which they live and grew up. If our design and reform of an institutional order takes account of its foreseeable effects (as is surely required), then we will also take account of the effects it has through the attitudes it engenders. In this way, the basic-structure focus does not divert but alert us to Cohen’s concerns (though perhaps not as much and as comprehensively as he would like).

Cohen also makes the strong claim that whatever criterion of justice applies to the basic structure must also apply to the conduct of individuals and, in particular, that those who apply the difference principle to economic institutions should also apply it to individuals and their conduct. I have tried to show at some length how Cohen’s arguments for this claim fail (Philosophy and Public Affairs, Fall 2000). But this is a complex issue that does not lend itself to brief summary.

As well as your work on global justice and on Rawls, you are also known for your work on Kant. How, if at all, do you see your work as related to Kant’s practical philosophy? Which aspects of this philosophy do you take to be most relevant to people facing problems of justice—both global and domestic—now?

I would begin here with a sharp distinction between Kant’s ethics, on the one hand, and his legal and political philosophy, on the other. The latter is closer in subject matter to the problem of social justice as we conceive it, but it is also substantively quite remote from our present social world: Writing in the 18th century, Kant had only a very rudimentary understanding of questions of economic organisation, for instance, and held rather unpalatable views about the political status and role of women and servants. He was also wedded to what I have called the dogma of absolute sovereignty: that a juridical state, as opposed to a state of nature, presupposes an undivided and unlimited political authority as decider of last resort. Finally, Kant’s political philosophy is committed to the unrealistic ambition of justifying ideal institutions even to ‘rational devils.’ Kant’s legal and political philosophy is complex and challenging, but it cannot now be of more than historical interest.

We can learn more for the present world, I believe, from Kant’s ethics and his writings on history, the enlightenment and religion. On the personal level, he can help us understand what it is to be a moral person, what it is to live up to one’s responsibilities and, in particular, to one’s most basic responsibility of working out for oneself what one’s moral responsibilities are. Such help is needed, as today most people hereabouts think of their responsibilities in terms of what is expected of them or what others around them do. And so they are easily programmed to commit horrible wrongs, or to be blind to horrible wrongs, as one can
see from the Milgram experiments and from many real-life examples. Kant's ethics also provides support for a truly deontological alternative to the purely recipient-oriented (or broadly consequentialist) theorising about justice typical of the utilitarian and Rawlsian traditions.

You have recently argued for an 'active' conception of justice. According to this conception, we focus not on what persons ought to receive as a matter of justice, but on what we owe to others as a matter of justice, where what we owe is determined by assessing the extent to which we are responsible for the disadvantages others suffer. What are the advantages of this approach over the more traditional, recipient-oriented approaches you oppose?

Within the dominant consequentialist-contractualist paradigm, exemplified by utilitarian and Rawlsian theorising, persons and social institutions are held morally responsible for their effects on the distribution of relevant goods and ills without regard to how these effects are brought about. Thus, any institutional order is assessed by reference to the distribution of quality of life it produces among its participants, irrespective of the nature of the causal link from that order to particular deficits in quality of life. An example can show how this is implausible. Domestic violence, insofar as it is reckoned institutionally avoidable, may indicate an injustice in the present institutional order. But the magnitude of this injustice depends not only on the quantity, quality and distribution of the violence suffered, but also on the way in which that order is causally related to it: Is such violence merely insufficently deterred due to mild punishments and lax enforcement? Is it not legally prohibited at all? Or does the law even explicitly authorise husbands to beat their wives for infractions (perhaps with the proviso that canes thicker than a thumb must not be used)? As we pass through these three possibilities, the institutional injustice becomes progressively greater, even if we hold fixed the pattern of beatings received.

The nature of causal links is also morally relevant in allocating moral responsibility for unjust social institutions to specific individuals. Consequentialists hold persons responsible in proportion to how much of a difference they could make. Rawls similarly postulates an indiscriminate duty to further the justice of social institutions. But the moral responsibility of individuals also depends on how they are involved in the institutional injustice: Are they outsiders in a position to promote appropriate reforms, for instance, or privileged participants of the existing institutional order and beneficiaries of its injustice? The latter bear much greater moral responsibility even if both could effect the same institutional changes at equal personal cost.

Failure to recognise the moral relevance of these distinctions leads to conceptions of social justice that militate against prevailing considered judgements (which Rawls, in particular, claims to bring into reflective equilibrium) — in part through their sharp and unexplained discontinuity with ordinary conceptions of ethics which attach great moral importance to the distinction between what agents bring about and what they merely let happen. Such conceptions of social justice also reinforce the tendency of rich-country citizens to see themselves as morally detached from the poverty and oppression so prevalent in the developing world: If our duty to further the justice of social institutions were, as Rawls explicitly assumes, a positive duty on a par with mutual aid, then we might indeed have moral reason to give priority to protecting our compatriots from injustice and to aiding them in other ways over protecting foreigners from injustice. In our world, however, the moral priority generally runs the other way: It is morally more urgent to mitigate the harms foreigners suffer through institutional injustice in whose imposition we are materially involved than to further improve the lives of our (already much better-placed) compatriots.

The responsibility for others' disadvantages to which justice responds on the active conception is causal responsibility. Given the difficulties involved in establishing chains of causal responsibility, how can the active conception be action-guiding?

Certain chains of causal responsibility are indeed very difficult if not impossible to establish. Many of our daily economic decisions have causal effects abroad which, given the massive and extreme poverty in many developing countries, will often make the difference between life and death. A change of UK fashions — in coffee, toys, T-shirts, tourist destinations — can easily save hundreds of lives by providing desperately needed employment and can just as easily kill hundreds of children prematurely by throwing their parents out of work. Still, we cannot possibly keep track of the remote effects of our conduct, which reverberate around the globe and intermingle with the effects of billions
of decisions made by others. Assigning moral responsibility on the basis of such effects of what we do would be of no practical use.

Yet we can analyse severe poverty and premature deaths not only interactionally, but also institutionally: We can trace back their overall incidence to the relevant institutional rules, such as the evolving system of amazingly detailed treaties and conventions structuring the world economy, regulating trade, investments, loans, patents, copyrights, trademarks, double taxation, labour standards, environmental protection, and much else. Responsibility for these rules lies primarily with the governments of the more powerful countries which, in international negotiations, enjoy a huge advantage in bargaining power and expertise. Their negotiators have succeeded, again and again, in shaping the rules in the interest of the governments, corporations and citizens of the rich countries. In many cases, rules so shaped foreseeably inflict great harms upon the global poor -- harms that one can estimate at least in general statistical terms. Seeing that our wealthy countries are at least approximately democratic, we citizens certainly share responsibility for the rules our governments negotiate in our name and for the human cost these rules impose around the world.

The past fifteen years afford many examples of such negotiating ‘successes.’ Here is one. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development has estimated that the poor countries could export $700 billion more each year if the rich countries had not, in global trade negotiations, successfully insisted on continued import protections for their markets (www.unctad.org/en/press/pr2816en.htm). One could extend UNCTAD’s calculation to estimate what these additional export opportunities would have meant in terms of faster economic growth, additional employment, higher wages and increased tax revenues in the developing world; and one can then further estimate the impact of this one decision against free trade on global child mortality (which the US Department of Agriculture puts at 34,000 per day). No one can know how many extra children will have died because our politicians insisted on protecting their compatriot farmers and textile producers from cheap foreign imports. But it would be good to have a rough estimate. I suspect the figure would be quite large, much larger than other death tolls blamed on the West, such as the Rwandan and Cambodian genocides and the American war in Vietnam, -- very much larger, certainly, than all the lives we pride ourselves on saving through humanitarian interventions and development aid. Compare the $700 billion annually in lost export earnings with what all OECD countries together give for development assistance: $56 billion annually, of which a mere 8.3 per cent are spent toward meeting basic needs (United Nations Development Program: Human Development Report 2000, p. 79).

You are prominent in the world of Anglophone political philosophy, yet you were first educated in Germany. Does this give you a different perspective on assumptions that Anglophones perhaps take for granted in politics or the law?

Oxford UP recently turned down a collection of my essays on the grounds that I was not prominent and the book would not sell. But you are right about my having grown up in Continental Europe. In legal and political philosophy, Anglophones are supposed to attach greater moral importance to the distinction between negative and positive duties, perhaps to the point of denying the latter altogether. On this point, I am on the Anglophone side: I go beyond Continental legal theorists, utilitarians and even supposedly deontological Rawlsians by attaching considerable moral significance to how a person is causally related to an institutional scheme and how this scheme in turn is causally related to institutionally avoidable harms.

More significant, perhaps, is the fact that I grew up specifically in Germany not too long after World War II. My generation went through the rather unique experience of waking up to the enormity of what had happened, of what all the adults around us had, in some way or another, been involved in. This made it impossible for many of us smoothly to grow into the habits and lifestyles of our elders. It gave us a strong sense that we had to develop our own values and that the general world view offered by our parents, schools, media, might be defective not merely in this or that detail, but false through and through.

This sense was reinforced in the late sixties, when our governments and parents strongly supported the American war in South Vietnam and welcomed the Shah of Iran on a state visit (June 1967) during which many of his opponents were brutally beaten by his supporters while the police looked on and even joined in. One student was shot dead by a policeman. I was quite young at the time, but began to participate in the very earnest and highly intellectual discussions of moral and political questions in which Habermas emerged as a major figure. I came to see
these questions as being of the greatest importance, but also lacking fully reflective answers from the establishment and the largely leftist German intelligentsia.

*Do you think that there are differences between American and European audiences which might lead you to significantly alter the arguments you use to support your views?*

There will be some expositional differences, of course, as regards examples, analogies and practical proposals. But no significant divergence in the arguments. For one thing, the differences across the Atlantic are not great. Europeans will, far more often than Americans, say that we have a moral duty to eradicate severe poverty no matter how it is caused. But my sense is that their moral commitment actually to do something about the problem is nonetheless quite sensitive to their causal assessments. So it is still important to debunk explanatory nationalism. Moreover, I doubt that arguments of the kind I present have much of a direct effect on audiences. Any substantial effects are likely to be long-term and indirect, hence quite difficult to predict. It makes little sense, then, especially without a deep understanding of history and politics, to try for strategic sophistication. Better to make the best case one can and keep on improving one’s arguments, making one’s claims more precise, meeting objections, as the debate unfolds. This also fits with my ambition to present a universal conception of social justice that, applying uniformly to coercively imposed social institutions at all levels, is responsive to the ideals and aspirations of a wide range of cultures and traditions. Such a conception would not duplicate any of these diverse moral outlooks, but would function as a universal core: as the core in which various fuller moral world views overlap and as the core, containing the most important elements, of each of these outlooks.

*The murderous attack in New York and Washington on September 11 has raised many questions about terrorism, globalism and the role of the United States in the world. How do you think it changes the international order that we live in and what should be the political stance of the left?*

It’s hard to have a clear view so close to the event, but let me give a few preliminary reflections. The attack will be invoked in support of all sorts of competing political agendas, but its effect on the international order will in the end be slight, I believe. It may strengthen subcultures of xenophobia in some of the developed countries, the sense that we have had more than enough immigrants and asylum seekers from the South and that our generous attempts to help those people live more like us is just a waste of effort. It will lead to increased freedoms and funding of the secret service agencies, both domestically and abroad, with an erosion of civil liberties and an escalation of dirty tactics. In the US, the attack may further strengthen the willingness to use force broadly (in terms of targets and purposes) and world-wide, even at the risk of losses — though this willingness may wane again if the war on terrorism proves costly and protracted.

Whether left, right or centre, the quest for a political stance should begin with an effort to understand what happened. Here one might start by reflecting on how amazingly easy it was to cause so much death and destruction: A guy takes some basic flying lessons in Florida and then, with four equally determined associates, smuggles in some box cutters, takes control of a plane, and flies it into the World Trade Centre which, at least since the largely unsuccessful car bomb attack of 1993, is the most prominent terrorist target in the world. Easy enough for four teams to achieve three successes and one narrow miss. Yes, I know, a huge diabolical and well-funded terrorist network with cells in over 60 countries is supposed to have directed the operation. But the fact remains that small, low-tech teams of determined people have pulled this off at a total cost of a few hundred thousand dollars and that whatever instruction and funding they may have received was not essential to their success.

Why have we been so incredibly vulnerable? There are three basic ways of defending against terrorism. Passive defence strategies aim to protect potential targets in order to prevent and to deter attacks. Active defence strategies seek advance knowledge in order to foil attack plans, to neutralise would-be attackers, and to deter terrorist planning. Motivational defence strategies strive to understand and to moderate the grievances and emotions among those who volunteer or cheer for terrorist suicide or murder.

While it may seem obvious that strategies of all three types should be explored and employed, the West, and the US in particular, has concentrated heavily on the second. In response to several highly questionable operations, the capabilities of the secret service agencies
have been constrained in the last 25 years through legal rules, increased legislative oversight and tight budgets. The executive has fought these constraints, using the threat of terrorism as one major argument. After the disaster of September 11, this effort has greatly intensified, with Administration officials from Bush on down stressing the urgent need for more leeway and funding for these agencies. Although they have grotesquely failed to anticipate and prevent a rather straightforward way of attacking quite obvious targets, they will be primary beneficiaries of the event: better funded, free to spy on all our communications, and free to ‘fight fire with fire’ by employing and protecting ‘unsavoury characters’ (murderers, drug dealers, warlords, tyrants, and the like). One task we will face in coming months is that of publicising and limiting this empowerment of the secret service agencies.

Given the magnitude of the disaster, passive defence strategies will also receive more attention. Their remarkable neglect is partly due to the effort of expanding the role of the secret service agencies. With the success of this effort, there is less reason to divert attention from passive measures – such as installing the secure cockpit doors long demanded by American pilots and equipping planes with narcotic gas that pilots could release into the main cabin in the event of a hijacking. At least in regard to aircriner terrorism, such passive measures can provide greater security than active defence strategies. Insofar as they make success unlikely, they also discourage hijacking attempts.

Strategies of the third type are least likely to receive more attention because of strong ideological pressures against a sober assessment of the milieu in which Islamist terrorism finds recruits and moral sympathy. Most Muslim countries have suffered, and many are still suffering, under unpopular and repressive rulers sustained by Western oil purchases, political support, arms-sales, or military protection. Poorly governed, these countries have achieved little, if any, economic growth and social progress. Consider Saudi Arabia and most of the oil emirates, which underwent decades of decline in per capita GDP. Similarly repressive, Egypt did have some economic growth, but its adult illiteracy rate is still over 45 percent. The dreadful rulers of Iraq and Afghanistan also owe their power to massive Western support during the eighties. In Iran, we organised the overthrow of Mossadegh and then installed and maintained the Shah for a quarter century. In Indonesia, we supported Suharto’s coup, in which some 500,000 were massacred, and then befriended him for 30 years. Because we support such regimes and do not criticise their internal conduct so long as their foreign and economic policies accord with our interests, their domestic opponents come to oppose us and our double-standard. And because political opposition against such regimes is ruthlessly suppressed, such opponents drift toward religion, the only mildly safe public space available to them.

An additional perceived injustice is of course the West’s support for continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. When Iraq occupied Kuwait, the UN Security Council demanded Iraq’s complete and unconditional withdrawal, and the idea that Iraq should be allowed to leave militarily protected settlements behind would have been laughed out of court. Regarding the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, however, the West is – contrary to UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 – supporting Israel’s refusal to consider any peace agreement that does not safeguard most of its armed settlements in perpetuity. The West can pressure and bribe some Arab governments to line up behind this stance. But its success in doing so only renders these governments even more unpopular and repressive.

Many people in the Muslim countries see their impotence in the face of such perceived injustice as a collective humiliation. It is humiliating to be excluded from political participation in one’s own country. It is humiliating to see this country fall behind: remain poor and backward while others are thriving. It is humiliating to see how one’s rulers are propped up by foreigners and how one’s country is put at the service of foreign interests – all the more humiliating when these foreigners support and defend Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians.

Even if sound, these (roughly sketched) grievances cannot in any way justify or excuse the recent terrorist attack which, coming on a weekday morning, clearly showed a horrifying desire for civilian casualties. I am sure that most Muslims are equally appalled by it – even if they share the grievances and even if they are more willing than we are to see historical parallels featuring Western governments practising, excusing, or tolerating attacks on civilian targets: the destruction of cities (Dresden, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Tokyo, etc.) even at the very end of World War II, the napalm and cluster bomb attacks on South Vietnamese villages, Western support and official recognition for the genocidal Khmer Rouge in the decade after its 1979 overthrow, the decision against stopping the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the 1998 destruction of a Sudanese
pharmaceutical factory by cruise missiles, NATO’s 1999 failure to stop the Serb rampage in Kosovo while bombing bridges, television stations, a car factory, water and electricity facilities (and the Chinese embassy), and Israel’s ongoing bombardment of Palestinian villages with US-supplied rockets and tank shells.

These felt grievances and perceived parallels play a significant role in the moral outlooks and sensibilities prevalent in the Muslim countries and, together with our perceived blindness to them, help explain the moral confidence, righteous indignation, and fringe popularity of the terrorists. We can understand and discuss, even feel and accept, these grievances and parallels without viewing all those behaviours as morally on a par and — again — without softening our moral condemnation of the terror attack. My plea here is for understanding, reflection, and dialogue. We should try to understand, and make our compatriots understand, the sense of injustice prevalent in Muslim countries, and in the developing world more generally. Too many of our politicians and their academic experts present it as self-evident that we are enlightened and benevolent countries doing our very best to make this world just and prosperous for all. Victims of their own propaganda, they then underestimate the extent of anti-Western sentiment in the developing world or dismiss it as due to envy, massive ignorance, moral confusion, hatred of freedom, or pure evil. As President Bush is rallying the world behind Operation Infinite Justice (since renamed Enduring Freedom), we should try to keep alive the thought that we are not the only ones wronged. On the day thousands of my neighbours were burned and crushed to death by terrorists, 50,000 others — mostly children and mostly female — suffered painful deaths from poverty-related causes. If infinite justice is what we want to meet out, let it not all come from the barrels of guns. Let it extend beyond revenge and punishment, to the hundreds of millions forced to live in life-threatening poverty. Let it consider impartially the interests and grievances of all.

**New Liberalism Revisited**

Marc Stears and Stuart White

**Introduction: Looking Back to the Liberals**

In contemporary discussions of progressive politics there is a pronounced tendency to look to the past for inspiration. The best way forward, it is often claimed, is to retrieve a theoretical perspective which, once displaced by Marxism or Fabian social democracy, now has more relevance to our times. In this vein, for example, Paul Hirst asks us to look back to the Guild Socialism of G.D.H. Cole and the mutualism of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon as inspiration for a new non-statist, ‘associationist’ model of economic democracy.1 The ‘New Democrats’ in the US claim to be looking back beyond ‘big government’ New Deal liberalism to the small-business-friendly New Freedom progressivism of Woodrow Wilson and Louis Brandeis.2 Others refer us back to social

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1 This paper will appear in Henry Tam, (ed) Progressive Politics in the Global Age, Polity Press, forthcoming

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