Global poverty: four normative positions

Varun Gauri\textsuperscript{a} and Jorn Sonderholm\textsuperscript{b}

\textsuperscript{a}World Bank, Washington, DC, USA; \textsuperscript{b}Department of Philosophy, George Washington University, Washington, DC, USA

Global poverty is a huge problem in today’s world. This survey article seeks to be a first guide to those who are interested in, but relatively unfamiliar with, the main issues, positions and arguments in the contemporary philosophical discussion of global poverty. The article attempts to give an overview of four distinct and influential normative positions on global poverty. Moreover, it seeks to clarify, and put into perspective, some of the key concepts and issues that take center stage in the philosophical discussion of global poverty. The four positions to be discussed are labeled the Maximalist Position, the Minimalist Position, Intermediate Position I and Intermediate Position II. After an account of these four distinct positions, we turn, in the conclusion, to a discussion of what role empirical sciences such as economics and political science should play in normative considerations about global poverty.

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1. **Introduction**

Global poverty is a huge problem in today’s world. A brief glance at some relevant statistics is truly depressing. Consider, for example, that in South Asia, 73.9% of the population lived on US$ 2 or less per day in 2005. For Sub-Saharan Africa, the number was 72.9% for the same year.\(^1\) In 2009, Sub-Saharan Africa had a mortality rate, under-5 per 1000, of 129.6.\(^2\) The number for Sweden for the same year was 2.8. Life expectancy at birth in Sub-Saharan Africa was 52.9 in 2009.\(^3\) In the same year in Japan, it was 82.9.

The issue of global poverty is a complex one that is made up by a number of sub-issues. These sub-issues can instructively be subsumed under either of three general headings: measurement, causality and normativity. Issues that fall within the measurement category include (i) what the total number of the global poor is (Chen and Ravallion 2010), (ii) where the global poor live (Chen and Sydor 2006), (iii) whether the number of global poor has increased or decreased in, say, the last 30 years (Chen and Ravallion 2010), (iv) what countries have been successful in decreasing their number of poor inhabitants (Deaton and Kozel 2005), (v) what the depth and severity is of the poverty that the global poor suffer from (Sen 1979) and (vi) what measurement/criterion it is appropriate to use in counting the global poor (Anand, Segal, and Stiglitz 2010).

The causality category include issues about (vii) what the causes of global poverty are (Collier 2007), (viii) how to alleviate global poverty most effectively (Easterly 2009, 2006), (ix) the causal relationship between the level and nature of economic growth, on one side, and

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poverty rates, on the other side (Sachs 2005), (x) the causal role of development assistance in poverty reduction (Prasad, Rajan, and Subramanian 2007), (xi) the causal role of a democratization process in poverty decline (Ross 2006) and (xii) the extent to which increased citizen participation and political decentralization affect poverty levels (Heller 2000).

Issues that fall within the normativity category include, but are not restricted to, those of (xiii) how ‘harm’ should be defined (Patten 2005), (xiv), how ‘poor’ should be defined (Sen 1983), (xv) what human welfare consists in (Sen 1985), (xvi) whether or not one is under a stronger moral obligation to help one’s poor ‘neighbors’ (fellow citizens or members of one’s own regional or municipal community) than poor individuals in faraway countries (Kamm 2000; Wenar 2003; Singer 1972), (xvii) whether or not well-off individuals have a duty to alleviate global poverty just because they are materially much better off than the global poor (Unger 1996; Temkin 2005), (xviii) whether or not global inequality matters morally (Beitz 2001), (xix) when, if ever, it is morally acceptable to stop contributing to the alleviation of global poverty (Miller 2004; Murphy 1993), (xx) whether poverty alleviation is something that primarily ought to be carried out through individual acts and/or contributions or something that primarily ought to be the remit of domestic or international institutions (Kuper 2002; Singer 1972), and (xxi) whether or not being poor should be seen as a condition that amounts to a human rights violation (Koubi 2004).

It is important to note that philosophers, qua philosophers, do not have any real insight into issues (i) - (xii). These issues are most competently dealt with by the practitioners of economics and political science. Philosophers can, however, have something useful to say about issues (xiii) - (xxi). These issues are conceptual or normative in nature and are therefore ones that, on a
traditional understanding of what the subject matter of philosophical investigation is, are of concern to philosophers.

In the past four decades, there has been an increasing and intensifying focus in the philosophical literature on normative and conceptual issues in global poverty such as issues (xiii) - (xxi). It is no exaggeration to say that much of this literature can be seen as a response to Peter Singer’s seminal article on famine, affluence and morality (1972). The debate on normative issues in global poverty has over the years become more and more detailed with new and ever more refined arguments continuously being articulated and defended in the literature. It lies outside the scope of an academic article of standard length to do justice to the range and wealth of detail in the philosophical literature on global poverty. This survey article is informed by this and seeks to be a first guide to those who are interested in, but relatively unfamiliar with, the main issues, positions and arguments in the contemporary philosophical discussion of global poverty.

Like any guide, this article contains a certain subjective element in terms of choice of which issues and positions to discuss. We hope, however, that our choice of what to discuss will not come across as being idiosyncratic. The article attempts to give an overview of four distinct and influential normative positions on global poverty. Moreover, it seeks to clarify, and put into perspective, some of the key concepts and issues that take center stage in the philosophical discussion of global poverty.

The four positions to be discussed are labeled the Maximalist Position, the Minimalist Position, Intermediate Position I and Intermediate Position II. The exemplar of the Maximalist Position is Peter Singer. The Minimalist Position is represented by three writers in the libertarian tradition: namely Jan Narveson, David Schmidtz and Robert Nozick. Intermediate Position I is
exemplified through the work of Thomas Pogge and, finally, John Rawls is the exemplar of Intermediate Position II. After an account of these four distinct positions, we turn, in the conclusion, to a discussion of what role empirical sciences such as economics and political science should play in normative considerations about global poverty.

2. The Maximalist Position

As indicated in the Introduction, the perhaps most influential driver of the contemporary philosophical interest in normative issues in global poverty is Peter Singer’s article “Famine, Affluence and Morality”. In this article, which is written with the East Bengal famine of 1971 as the historical backdrop, Singer articulates and defends a very demanding view about what obligations affluent individuals in developed countries have to alleviate suffering among the global poor. Singer’s theorizing about global poverty is underpinned by a commitment to what might be labeled ‘interest utilitarianism’ (Singer 1993:14). This type of utilitarianism is a version of consequentialism, and it asserts that an act is right if and only if it is the act that, among all of the acts available to the agent, maximizes the overall interest-satisfaction among all affected individuals. To this it should be added that all sentient beings, according to Singer, have a strong interest in being free of suffering. The main proposition that Singer defends in his article is:

(C) The way people in relatively affluent countries react to a situation like that in Bengal cannot be justified; indeed the whole way we look at moral issues – our moral conceptual scheme – needs to be altered, and with it, the way of life that has come to be taken for granted in our society (1972:230).

What Singer has in mind when he talks about ‘the way people in affluent countries react to situations like that in Bengal’ is the behavior pattern, commonly found among affluent

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4 Singer’s article has been the subject of a colossal amount of commentary. For a number of relatively new essays on Singer’s position on global poverty and for references to commentary articles on “Famine, Affluence and Morality”, see (Schaler 2009:section III).
individuals, that consists in the failure of such individuals to contribute a significant portion of their income/wealth to the eradication of instances of famine/suffering among the global poor. (C) asserts that this way of behaving is morally unacceptable. According to Singer, (C) follows from the following two premises:

(1) Suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad (1972:231).

(2) If it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it (1972:231).

Singer offers a qualified, or moderated, version of (2). This is the principle that:

(2Q) If it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it (1972:231).

As a means to illustrate what the practical implications are of (2Q), Singer offers the shallow pond thought-example of herostratic fame in the philosophical literature on global poverty. Singer asks us to imagine an adult individual walking past a shallow pond in which a child is about to drown. A consequence of the adult wading in the pond and saving the child is that the rescuer’s clothes get ruined. This consequence might tell against undertaking the rescue operation. However, (2Q) implies that the adult should save the child. The reason for this is that it is in the power of the adult to prevent something very bad from happening without thereby sacrificing anything morally significant. By saving the child, the adult would be sacrificing her clothes, but the sacrificing of this is not, according to Singer, morally significant.

Singer explicitly says that (2Q) is a weaker and less demanding principle than (2) (1972:241). It is worthwhile to briefly spell out what the relative weakness of (2Q) consists in. Imagine a scenario in which the only way for individual x to prevent that a group of people (y)

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5 The phrase in (2) ‘without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance’ is, according to Singer, short for ‘without causing anything else comparably bad to happen, or doing something that is wrong in itself, or failing to promote some moral good, comparable in significance to the bad thing that we can prevent’ (1972:231).
become utterly destitute consists in x sacrificing her own income/wealth to such an extent that she must, say, cancel a planned house renovation project and an upcoming family vacation. Singer would now suggest that there is no reasonable view about the moral importance of house renovations and family vacations that places the moral importance of such things on an equal footing with the moral importance of preventing a group of individuals falling into a state of complete misery in which they are likely to suffer immensely and face an early, preventable death due to lack of access to proper nutrition, shelter and health care. Acceptance of (2) therefore entails that the morally correct thing to do in the above example is for the woman to cancel the house renovation and family vacation and divert the saved money to poverty relief.

It is not the case that acceptance of (2Q) entails this conclusion. This is so on the assumption that the sacrifice of things such as a house renovation and a family vacation amounts to the sacrifice of something morally significant. If the conjunction of these things is morally significant in an individual’s life, then acceptance of (2Q) is compatible with the woman in the above example stopping to contribute to the prevention of group y becoming destitute at a stage before she has to sacrifice her house renovation and family vacation. It is telling of the demandingness of the position advanced by Singer that he explicitly asserts that (2), and not (2Q), is the correct view to adopt (1972:241). What does (2), in more detail, imply in terms of the issue of how much affluent individuals ought to be giving to poverty relief? It is instructive here to quote Singer. He is of the opinion that (2), together with a number of other premises, leads to the conclusion that:

We ought to give until we reach the level of marginal utility – that is, the level at which by giving more, I would cause as much suffering to myself or my dependents as I would relieve by my gift. This would mean, of course, that one would reduce oneself to very near the material circumstances of a Bengali refugee (1972:241).
It is important to note that acceptance of (2) would not, in all possible worlds, lead to the demanding conclusion that affluent individuals would need to reduce themselves to very near the material circumstances of that of a Bengali refugee in the actual world. In a world in which there were little or no severe poverty and/or suffering, Singer’s commitment to utilitarianism would lead to other outcomes, as compared to the outcomes it leads to in the actual world, in terms of what affluent individuals ought to do. The general point here is that the issue of what a utilitarian theory, no matter what exact form it takes, dictates in terms of what is morally right is extremely sensitive to the empirical facts with regards to what the world is like. The actual world is one in which an enormous amount of suffering co-exists with an enormous amount of wealth, and on the assumption that much of this suffering can be alleviated through actions performed by affluent individuals, such individuals are under a stringent moral duty to contribute most of their resources to the alleviation of suffering.

Let us return to principles (2Q) and (2). These principles might, at first sight, come across as being relatively uncontroversial. Singer states, however, that any appearance to this effect is deceptive. Both of the principles are so demanding of affluent individuals that taking them seriously, and acting upon them, would entail that the kind of spending culture that is common to the type of consumer-society instantiated in most developed countries would have to be severely, if not completely, scrapped. Not only should payments to things such as house renovations and family vacations be terminated and directed to poverty relief. The same is true of payments allocated to the purchase of designer clothes, electronics and entertainment and culinary experiences such as visits to the movie-theater and upscale restaurants.

Two features of the principles are principally responsible for their demanding character. First, the principles take no account of proximity or distance (1972:231). From a moral
perspective, there is no relevant difference between a needy person living close to affluent individual x and a needy person living far away from, and being unknown to, x. Singer contends that affluent individuals in developed countries can easily alleviate the suffering of far-away needy individuals through contributions to aid organizations such as Oxfam and UNICEF. The suffering of far-away individuals is just as bad as an equal amount of suffering experienced by individuals living close to x. As a consequence of this, there is just as much reason for x to alleviate the former instance of suffering as the latter. Second, the fact that there are numerous affluent individuals who are in a situation similar to x’s with respect to having an ability to prevent something very bad from happening (in this case the very bad in question is the continued existence of suffering among the global poor), does not make x’s situation morally different from one in which x is the only one who can prevent something very bad from happening (1972:231). In support of this view, Singer returns to the shallow pond thought-example and asks us to consider if the fact that there were other adult witnesses to the child’s fight for her life would mean that adult individual x would be blameless if she did not wade into the pond and rescue the child. Singer’s contention is that the presence of other witnesses would not entail that x were blameless if she did not rescue the child, and he takes this intuition to be evidence that the ‘numbers lessen obligation’ is a morally absurd view though it, admittedly, is an ideal excuse for inaction among the global affluent when it comes to the issue of contributing to the alleviation of suffering (1972:233).

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6 The view that two instances of suffering, which are identical in severity, are equally bad from a moral standpoint, no matter what beings have the experiences, is a core commitment of Singer’s. It underlies much of his theorizing in other areas of philosophy such as medical ethics and issues relating to animal welfare. “The essence of the Principle of Equal Consideration of Interests is that we give equal weight in our moral deliberations to the like interests of all those affected by our actions” (Singer 1993:21).

7 For an influential discussion of many of the issues central to the ‘numbers lessen obligation’ view, see (Murphy 1993).
Singer takes it to be an upshot of his overall argument that the common distinction in everyday language between the concepts of duty and charity is untenable. It is common to think of affluent individuals who donate significant portions of their income/wealth to poverty relief as ones who are engaged in charitable action and are doing things that are supererogatory. Such people are commonly thought of as being worthy objects of moral praise because they go beyond what is required of them by moral duty. Likewise, affluent individuals who do not donate significant portions of their income/wealth to the relief of suffering among the global poor are not, commonly, thought of as doing anything morally wrong. It would certainly be good and praiseworthy if such people started to donate more of their wealth to poverty relief, but they cannot be blamed for not doing so. The distinction between moral duty and charity needs to be redrawn such that the norm for morally acceptable behavior is one that mandates, and not merely allows, significant contributions to poverty relief by affluent individuals. Affluent individuals in the developed world should not be praised for their contributions to poverty relief. Such people are merely doing what morality requires of them. Likewise, affluent individuals who do not contribute to poverty relief should be regarded as individuals who are engaged in a serious moral wrong (1972:235).

In recent writings, Singer has continued to defend a demanding view of what affluent individuals in developed countries ought to do in terms of contributing to poverty alleviation. In *The Life You Can Save* (2009), Singer defends the principle:

(2*) If it is in your power to prevent something bad from happening, without sacrificing anything nearly as important, it is wrong not to do so (2009:15).

This principle is the crucial premise in an argument that has as its conclusion:

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8 See, for example, Singer (2009, 2002).
9 Note the similarity between (2*) and (2) and (2Q).
In order to be good people, we must contribute to global poverty relief until we are in such a position that if we give more, we would be sacrificing something nearly as important as the bad things our donations can prevent (2009:141).

Singer grants that this standard for being a good person is high and is such that it is not likely that many people will qualify as being good. Singer therefore proposes an alternative way of thinking about how much we ought to give in assistance to the global poor. This alternative standard is underwritten by pragmatic considerations to the effect that since it is unlikely that many people will meet the demanding standard, it makes sense to introduce a less-demanding one in the hope that more people will meet this standard and thereby generate an increased amount of donations that can be used to minimize global suffering.¹⁰

Singer’s alternative, less-demanding standard is built on the idea of a set of income brackets for annual income. Each bracket indicates how much an individual, who falls within that bracket, should give annually to global poverty alleviation. The set of income brackets dictates giving in a manner that in one respect is similar to the manner in which a progressive tax-scale dictates tax contributions: top earners are obligated to pay both a higher percentage of their income and a higher absolute amount of money than people who find themselves in a lower income bracket.

The exact numbers associated with the various income brackets are not important for present purposes, but in order to give a hint as to how (un)demanding Singer’s alternative standard is, it should be mentioned that people who make less than US$105,001 are not obligated to donate anything and that people who find themselves in the top income bracket, earning more than US$10.7 million per year, should pay 5% of the first US$148,000, 10% of the next

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¹⁰ Singer presents this as The Public Standard for giving (2009:160). This standard should not be confused with a higher standard that individuals might privately choose to adopt. Singer is adamant in asserting that what we morally ought to do as individuals is to pay heed to the standard for giving expressed by (C*).
US$235,000, 15% of the next US$217,000, 20% of the next US$1.3 million, 25% of the next US$8.8 million and 33.3% of the remainder (2009:164). These numbers entail that an individual who makes US$10.7 million in annual income is allowed to keep US$8.19 million for herself (2009:165). It is obvious that a proposal that allows this is much less demanding than the standard for giving expressed by (C*) and the standard incorporated in the early view that we ought to give until we reach the level of marginal utility (1972:241).

After this outline of Singer’s Maximalist Position, it is instructive to turn to an outline of a Minimalist Position that can be seen as the Maximalist Position’s opposite. This move from the Maximalist Position to the Minimalist Position allows the reader to appreciate the significant difference that exists between the two poles in the spectrum of contemporary normative views on global poverty.

3. **The Minimalist Position**

In political philosophy, there is an important distinction between negative and positive duties. Negative duties are duties not to harm other people whereas positive duties are duties to offer assistance to worse-off people. It is an essential feature of negative duties that in cases where a negative duty has been violated, the person who has been harmed has a right to compensation from the person who has done the harm. Positive duties are different from negative duties in the sense that it is not a necessary condition for the former duties to kick in that the duty-holder has harmed someone. It is uncontroversial among contemporary theorists that we have negative duties towards other people. It is, however, much more controversial whether or not we have any positive duties. Libertarians such as Nozick (1974), Narveson (2003, 2005b, 2005a) and
Schmidt (2000) believe that we only have negative duties unless we have contracted otherwise or owe compensation for harm we have done.\textsuperscript{11}

When applied to the issue of world poverty, this belief implies that affluent members of rich, developed countries, have a duty to assist the global poor if and only if they have harmed them (e.g. through causing or contributing to their poverty). This implication is of course compatible with affluent individuals, as a matter of charity, offering assistance to those among the global poor they have not harmed. According to libertarians, there is a morally significant distinction between actively causing poverty and failing to prevent it, and whereas there is a stringent, enforceable moral obligation not to cause poverty, there is no analogous stringent, enforceable moral obligation to alleviate poverty that one has not brought about. The following quotes from Narveson and Schmidt are illustrative of this libertarian core-commitment:

Not all similarly agree that it is not in general our duty to make other people better off, and therefore not in general our fault when people are not better off than they happen to be, even if perhaps we could have made them so by efforts of our own. Nevertheless, I have seen no plausible argument that we owe something, as a matter of general duty, to those to whom we have done nothing wrong (Narveson 2003:419).

Taking involuntarily from Jim to be “charitable” to Judy is not right; nor is taking from first-world taxpayers in order to feed starving folks on the other side of the globe. Some readers of this essay won’t see it that way. In their view, taxpayers’ money is up for grabs, to be spent as enlightened intellectuals direct, rather than as the unenlightened earners of that money would spend it if they had their choice. Myself, I side with the unwashed. I do not accept the view that money earned by ordinary people in their work or from investments isn’t really theirs. It is, and we have no business taking it from them by force even for good causes, such as the building of better halls in which to play Mozart or feed victims of political violence or droughts on the other side of the world (Narveson 2003:428).

Unger advocates not only that we contribute our own resources to famine relief, but that we contribute our neighbors' resources, too, with or without permission (p. 62). Unger says he believes this is morally required but will argue only that it is permissible forcibly

\textsuperscript{11} As will be discussed below, Narveson is of the opinion that we in some sense of ‘duty’ also can be said to have a positive duty to come to the aid of other people. Such a duty is, however, not enforceable, and it is a duty in a very different sense of ‘duty’ as compared to the meaning of this word in the proposition that x has a duty not to harm y.
to divert other people's money to famine relief (p. 63). As Unger puts it, "to lessen serious suffering, it's good to take what's rightfully another's" (p. 63). What Unger thinks is good sounds like a recipe for chaos. Indeed, it is chaos wherever it has been a general practice, which is why we still have "developing" countries that will not develop until people in those countries can count on being able to control the wealth they create (Schmidtz 2000:702).

The libertarian contention that there is no stringent, enforceable moral duty to aid other people can be unpacked in more detail by saying that x does not have a duty to aid y that y, or z, can legitimately compel x to provide. x’s withholding of aid to y is not something that makes x subject to any kind of legal punishment. Having said this, it should, however, be noted that there is room in Narveson’s theory for the view that in some other, weaker sense of ‘duty’, it can make sense to speak of us as having a non-enforceable duty to aid people in dire need (Narveson 2003:425). Ordinary humanity compels us to help other people in dire need if this help can be provided at low cost to ourselves.

Why should we provide such help to, say, individuals among the global poor? Narveson’s answer to this question is based on the view that morality is a “general understanding among people, who must be presumed to be self-interested, whatever else they are. The moral understanding requires mutual interest” (Narveson 2003:426). We should have a standing disposition to help others in need if we can do so at little cost, and we should try to cultivate such a disposition in other people, because it is in our self-interest to have such a disposition and to sometimes act on it. First, it is plain nice to be the kind of person who helps other people when they are in dire straits. Second, no person is an island who can be sure to never be in a situation in which she will be in need of other people’s help, as opposed to their commercial services. In order to make it worthwhile for other people to provide help to oneself when one is in need of help, it is useful and prudent to have been helpful to other people in their hour of need. Helping
out other people is therefore part of a mutual insurance scheme that in its ideal version has the features that \( x \) helps \( y \), \( y \) helps \( z \), and \( z \) helps \( x \) when \( z \) has a chance to do so at little cost to herself.

How much should one invest in the helping of others in need? According to Narveson, we all have a budget with respect to our acts of beneficence. Helping other people often requires resources of either a financial, physical or psychological character, and no one has unlimited resources in these respects. The suggestion that help at low cost is appropriate is an important one in Narveson’s overall position (Narveson 2003:421). An individual who moves beyond help at low cost and provides help at great cost to herself is not just benevolent, but deserving of predicates such as ‘is a hero’ or ‘is a saint’. In general, Narveson recommends that the issue of how beneficent one should be is guided by paying attention to what he labels the ‘silver rule’ (2003:426).

This rule asks us to consider the likelihood that we will be in a situation in which other people can help us and the likelihood that we will be in a situation in which we can help others. If we have an abundance of financial resources and are, to a relatively large extent, self-reliant, then the likelihood that other people will be in a position to help us is relatively small, and the corresponding incentive for us to help others is therefore also relatively small. But, as Narveson observes, you never know what will happen to you, and it is therefore prudent, in addition to just being plain nice, for even the most self-reliant person to be disposed to help others in need (Narveson 2003:427).\(^\text{12}\) Some people are of course dependent on other people’s help to a very

\(^{12}\) Narveson is aware that the mutual insurance scheme that he advances might be problematical for reasons similar to those that make the provision of collective public-goods problematical. One might wonder why anyone should participate in this scheme given that it is in everyone’s rational interest to be a free-rider in the sense that one does not help other people but accepts other people’s help. Narveson accepts that it cannot be demonstrated that it is in everyone’s self-interest to participate in the mutual insurance scheme. The lack of such formal proof is, however, not
large extent, and are themselves unable to help other people. Are these people, so to speak, hung out to dry on Narveson’s view? Narveson does not think so. He takes it to be an important psychological feature of people that they, in general, are willing to help if given the chance to help (2003:427, 421). True to libertarian doctrine, Narveson emphasizes the importance, scope, present-day extent and genuine commendability of activities of charity. Such activities will, it is anticipated, kick in and provide support for those unable, say the disabled who have no marketable skills, to take care of themselves.

The considerations about the budget for, and the possibility of offering low cost, help to other people have implications for the issue of how, on Narveson’s view, well-of individuals in rich countries should relate to the global poor. Distance between donor and recipient does some times, but not always, increase the cost of help. This means that it is sometimes, but not always, more taxing on one’s budget for help to help people in far away countries than it is to help people in close physical proximity to oneself. Moreover, it is a legitimate concern to have, and to be moved by, that one’s neighbor is often more likely to be in a position to offer help to oneself than some individual, or group of individuals, in a relatively poor country far away. However, there is much to be said for being on good terms with other people. We therefore have a non-trivial incentive to help people even if they do not, or cannot, repay the favor. In a globalized world with a multitude of border-crossing personal, political and economic relations, it is a worthy and prudent objective to have good relations with all people everywhere (Narveson 2003:432).

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a problem on Narveson’s view. Participating in the scheme and being helpful to other people when one has a chance to do so at low cost is rational in real-world probabilistic terms. Moreover, individuals who do not do their part will be subject to ridicule and severe criticism from those who participate in the scheme, and such ridicule and criticism for lack of participation is a social/cultural factor that constitutes an incentive to take part in the scheme. Nobody likes to be called a scrooge or tightwad, but this is what one will be called if one is not forthcoming with help when one is in a position to offer it at low cost (Narveson 2003:429).
Moving beyond an account of some of the important details of Narveson’s position, it is key to note that the minimalist, libertarian position does not automatically entail the view that the current worldwide distribution of wealth is morally justified. To understand why this is the case, it is useful to briefly recapitulate Nozick’s views about justice in holdings (1974:149-182).

Famously, Nozick offers the following inductive definition of justice in holdings:

1. A person who acquires a holding in accordance with the principle of justice in acquisition is entitled to that holding.
2. A person who acquires a holding in accordance with the principle of justice in transfer, from someone else entitled to the holding, is entitled to the holding.
3. No one is entitled to a holding except by (repeated) applications of (1) and (2) (Nozick 1974:151).

Libertarians accept that if the current global distribution of wealth has come about via the violation of either (1) or (2), then this distribution is morally unjust. Whether or not (1) or (2) has been violated in the past by countries and/or individuals that are today rich is an empirical question. It is, however, impossible to answer this question without some understanding of what justice in acquisition, related to (1), and justice in transfer, related to (2), consist of on Nozick’s view. With respect to justice in acquisition, Nozick can be said to roughly endorse the principle found in Locke’s theory of property which says that an individual owns herself and her labor and that by ‘mixing her labor’ with previously unheld/unowned resources come to own these resources. With respect to justice in transfer, the key word for Nozick is ‘voluntary’. A just transfer of wealth consists in a voluntary transaction between individuals in the form of either the

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13 The natural right of appropriation central to libertarianism has an important proviso, famously formulated by Locke, which is an ‘enough and as good’ clause on original appropriation. The proviso states that one can only legitimately appropriate unowned resources if one leaves enough and as good for others. The issue of what Locke exactly meant by ‘enough and as good’ is a matter of contention among historians of philosophy. Libertarian writers on the contemporary scene also differ in their views on how the proviso should be interpreted/analyzed. For more on both of these issues, see Narveson (1999). See Mack (2002) for more on the latter issue.
giving and receiving of a gift or a transaction of sale. This means that a paradigm example of an unjust transfer of wealth is a transfer through theft, fraud, the enslavement of others or forcibly excluding other actors from competing for profit-generating business-exchanges (Nozick 1974:152).

The issue of what an unjust transfer of wealth consists in leads to the third, and final, aspect of Nozick’s theory of justice in holdings: namely rectification of injustice in holdings (Nozick 1974:152). Past injustices call for redress or reparation to be paid by the offending party to the victim of the injustice. This means that current holdings, according to Nozick, are just if and only if either i) the original acquisition of wealth was just and all subsequent transfers of this wealth were just or ii) if there have been violations of (1) or (2), these injustices have been addressed through the paying of reparation.

Nozick pleads ignorance with respect to a general theory that sets out the parameters for rectification of injustices in holdings (Nozick 1974:152), and confines himself to raising a number of difficult, theoretical issues that such a theory needs to take account of. These issues include: (i) which obligations do perpetrators of injustice have towards those whose situation is worse now than it would have been had the compensation been paid promptly, (ii) is an injustice done to x if (part of) her holding, which itself is based upon an unrectified injustice, is stolen from, or defrauded, her and (iii) how far back must one go in wiping clean the historical slate of injustices? To these questions, one might add two other ones. (iv) should victims of theft be compensated in proportion to the value of the stolen goods at the time of the theft or should they be compensated in proportion to the value of the stolen goods at a later (say, present) time. For example, assuming that descendents of various indigenous populations in South America are entitled to compensation for precious metals stolen from their forefathers in prior times, how
does one now calculate what amount of compensation they are entitled to? Should one be guided in one’s deliberation by the value of the precious metals at the time of theft or should one be guided by the value that these precious metals currently trade for? (v) should the compensation offered by a beneficiary of unjust trade to the victims of such trade be proportional to the size of the benefit received by the beneficiary?

The above reference to trade constitutes a bridge to considerations about what, on the libertarian view, the main solution is to the structural problem of global poverty, as opposed to the problem of human suffering stemming from emergencies such as natural disasters or outbreaks of epidemics. The main libertarian answer to the structural problem is an increase in free trade.\textsuperscript{14} Libertarians are of the opinion that much of today’s global trade is governed by regulations that are grossly unfair and to the detriment of the economic development of the global poor. Libertarians condemn those trade barriers that especially the US and European Union have erected in order to protect their own domestic producers. Whether or not such barriers take the form of subsidies and export credits to domestic producers and quotas and tariffs on imports from developing countries, they harm the global poor, and they prevent them from getting ahead and actualizing their capabilities for wealth accumulation. One way in which affluent citizens of rich countries can better the situation of the global poor therefore consists in taking an active stance against those barriers that hinder trade between developing and developed countries and trade between the developing countries themselves (Narveson 2005b:406).\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} Why is free trade ‘only’ the main solution, and not the whole one, to the structural problem of global poverty? Part of the answer is that a non-trivial amount of global poverty can be causally attributed to various cultural/religious behavior patterns exhibited by some of the global poor themselves (Narveson 2005b:407).

\textsuperscript{15} According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), tariffs apply to some 70% of the goods exported within the group of developing countries. See http://www.unctad.org/templates/Page.asp?intItemID=5227&lang=1 [Accessed 9/6/11].
Narveson is of the opinion that his analysis of the normative aspects of world poverty invites us to see the global poor as talented, resilient individuals with a mind of their own and a set of abilities that makes them capable of providing for themselves and a good deal more if only they were allowed to do so by various political regimes at both the local and international level. The global poor do not mainly need help but mainly need a level playing field and a fair chance to exploit their talents. When the political obstacles to these things have been removed, any remaining global inequality should not induce guilt in the global rich.

But in any case, the wrong way to look at all these things is by developing a robust guilt complex for not engaging in what is objectively the wrong way to deal with poverty, namely, via a huge (and, in most writers’ accounts involuntarily) “redistribution” of property from the rich to the poor. […] On my view – which is the true one – we are not doing the world’s poor any injustices by not setting aside part of our paychecks to help them by sending them stuff that they would, if the world’s set of institutional, political machinery were only working probably, be making themselves (Narveson 2005b:408).

4. Intermediate Position I

For the past few decades, Thomas Pogge has been one of the most influential writers on international justice and global poverty. Pogge has in a number of important publications articulated and defended the view that affluent individuals in the developed world have a duty to eradicate severe poverty in developing nations (Pogge 2008, 2005b, 1994). In holding this view, he is on a par with members of the Maximalist Position (Singer 2009, 1972; Unger 1996), but unlike these theorists, who mainly rest their view on a ‘positive duty’ argument, Pogge mainly rests his view on a ‘negative duty’ argument. Pogge does not reject the idea that affluent individuals in developed countries have a positive duty to alleviate global poverty (Pogge 2005a:5), but he is eager to primarily rest his argument on negative duties because they are philosophically less controversial than positive ones.
A common argument for the view that well-off citizens in developed countries have no duty to eradicate global poverty involves two premises: one normative and one factual. The first, normative premise is the view that while it may be wrong to harm individuals by actively causing their poverty, it is not wrong to fail to benefit individuals by not preventing as much of their suffering as possible. The second, factual premise is that well-off individuals in developed countries are not causing the poverty in the developing world, but are merely failing to prevent or alleviate as much of this poverty as they could prevent.

Pogge does not dispute the first, normative premise of this argument. By accepting this premise, he sides with members of the Minimalist Position. According to Pogge, there is a morally significant distinction between actively causing harm and failing to prevent it, and his position on global poverty involves a primary focus on negative duties which impose constraints on conduct that worsens the situation of others (Pogge 2008:15). The second, factual premise of the above argument is, however, one that Pogge objects to. In his view, it is false that (most) affluent individuals in the developed world are not actively engaged in the causing of harm in developing nations. The perhaps most central idea in Pogge’s overall theorizing about international justice is the idea that affluent individuals in rich countries are harming the global poor because they, in virtue of imposing a burdensome global order on the poor that greatly diminishes their earning potential and imposes unnecessary costs on them, cause poverty in developing countries. As a result of this, the poor’s access to objects of basic human rights such as shelter, water/food and basic medical care is made insecure by the global order. If this objection to the factual premise is successful, then the conclusion of the above argument can be

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16 It is worthwhile to note that this normative premise is inconsistent with the main idea of Singer’s interest utilitarianism. According to this type of utilitarianism, an agent acts wrongly if she fails to choose that action, among those available to her, that best minimizes the overall amount of suffering among all affected individuals.
rejected. The conclusion may follow from the premises, but since one of these is false, the conclusion can safely be rejected.

If Pogge’s argument goes through, he will have achieved the important result of having convinced even those members of the Minimalist Position who reject the existence of enforceable positive duties that well-off individuals in developed countries have a fairly strong duty to be actively engaged in the eradication of global poverty. As one commentator has instructively put it, Pogge’s argument aims to derive a fairly maximalist conclusion about well-off individuals’ duties towards the global poor from a normative minimalist premise (Patten 2005:20).

In order to better understand the central idea in Pogge’s theorizing about global justice, it is useful to look into the issue of what the global order is. According to Pogge, this order is made up by the rules and regulations laid down by global institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations (UN) system. In conjunction, these institutions set up a system that greatly advances the national interests of developed countries over those of developing ones (Pogge 2008:122). This system is unfair because it does not pay enough attention to the interests of poor citizens of developing nations, and it is open to moral criticism because it is the result of powerful and rich nations exploiting their immense intellectual and economic bargaining power to design and shape a global order that significantly advances their own national, economic interests.

Pogge is especially critical of the WTO. The critique of the WTO regime primarily consists of the claim that it has opened the markets of the developed countries too little and has

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17 Just to recapitulate: the conclusion is the proposition that well-off citizens in developed countries have no duty to eradicate global poverty.
thereby gained for the citizens of developed countries the benefits of free trade while withholding these benefits from the citizens of developing countries. The WTO allows various trade barriers that significantly reduce poor populations’ ability to export their products and thereby earn much needed income (Pogge 2008:18). From this description of Pogge’s view of the WTO, it should be clear that there exists a widespread agreement between Pogge and members of the Minimalist Position on the moral unacceptability of barriers to free trade.

Two other features of the global institutional system of which Pogge is highly critical are the international resource and borrowing privilege and the international patent regime that involves substantial and uniform protections of intellectual property rights. The international resource and borrowing privilege is hugely problematic because it allows heads of states to sell the natural resources of their country and to borrow from international donors in their country’s name. This privilege benefits the developed countries immensely, but it contributes considerably to the politically unstable and economically unfortunate situation in a number of resource-rich developing countries. The privilege is an incentive to seize power through military coups or other non-democratic means, and it has as a somewhat common consequence that a country is saddled with a huge debt for generations to come because a onetime head of state has been allowed to borrow money in the country’s name but failed to spend a significant amount of that money on welfare improvements for the general population (Pogge 2008:29).18

The international patent regime is problematic because it imposes unnecessary costs on populations in developing countries. This point can instructively be brought out by considering the effects that the international patent regime has on health outcomes in developing countries. Such outcomes are influenced by a number of different factors including the availability and

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18 For a recent critique of the resource privilege, see Wenar (2008).
price of pharmaceutical products that are useful in reducing the disease burden of poor populations. Patents are a form of Intellectual Property Rights that create a temporary monopoly for inventor firms and enable such firms to charge prices for their innovations that are many times higher than the marginal cost of production of the innovations. This allows the inventor firms to salvage their research-costs and secure a profit on their innovations. When pharmaceutical companies take out a patent on their products, the price of the products goes up, and this has as a common consequence that relatively poor, potential buyers are squeezed out of the market. They simply cannot afford the products. This problem is sometimes referred to as the ‘exclusion problem’ or ‘access problem’ (Pogge 2005:187).

Another problem that, according to Pogge, arises as a consequence of the international patent regime is the ‘availability problem’ (Hollis and Pogge 2008:4). Consider that subgroup of drugs that are designed to treat diseases, say river blindness and sleeping sickness, that mainly affect individuals in low-income countries. Research and development of drugs for such diseases is at present very limited (Trouiller et al. 2001). An important cause of this unfortunate situation is the fact that poor individuals quite often do not have sufficient money to pay for drugs for their illnesses. For-profit pharmaceutical companies therefore have little economic incentive to spend resources on the research and development of such drugs. From an economic perspective, such companies are much better served if they direct their energies and monetary resources to the development of drugs for which there is a huge market in the developed world.

Now, at least the access problem would not be such a big problem if only it were allowed to copy the useful pharmaceutical products in question and sell them at lower prices than those of the original, patented, brand-name ones. Historically, such manufacturing of generic drugs has been allowed by the global institutional order. Especially India has had a thriving industry
specializing in the copying of patented brand-name drugs. This industry has, however, been severely reduced in size due to a 2005 implementation of WTO rules. Pogge sees the decision of the WTO to demand compliance with developed world intellectual property rights standards, as a necessary condition for gaining membership of the WTO, as clear evidence that the global institutional order is one that systematically and effectively works against the interests of the global poor.

If one accepts Pogge’s central claim that well-off individuals in developed countries are harming the global poor, an important question arises of how such individuals should behave in order to rectify their behavior. One rather radical solution consists in ceasing to make an economic contribution to the national economy that one belongs to. This solution is, however, not one that Pogge recommends. Instead, he suggests that individuals take compensatory action. By taking such action, one can continue to make economic contributions to the national economy of which one is part and yet steer clear of being an active collaborator in the harming of others. Compensatory action can take either of two forms. Either, one can work actively to protect the victims of injustice. This can, for example, be done through the transfer of funds to poor populations. Alternatively, one can be involved in attempts to achieve institutional reform of a type such that if this type of reform were replicated in other national settings, enough would have been done in order to eliminate the harms perpetrated by the current global order (Pogge 2008:142).

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19 See Love (2011).
20 In recent years, Pogge has invested much energy in a collaborative effort to propose and defend a novel incentivizing mechanism for the research and development of pharmaceutical products. This mechanism, which is entitled ‘The Health Impact Fund’, is meant to complement the current patent regime, and it is designed with the aim of greatly reducing those negative effects that, according to Pogge, are inherent to the current patent regime. For a presentation and defense of the Health Impact Fund, see Hollis and Pogge (2008).
21 Pogge can instructively be seen as siding with members of the Minimalist Position here. Pogge accepts the tenet of the third aspect of Nozick’s theory of justice in holdings (rectification of injustice in holdings).
5. Intermediate Position II

The exemplar of Intermediate Position II is John Rawls. The work of Rawls most pertinent to the issue of global poverty is *The Law of Peoples* (1999). In this work, Rawls addresses the issue of what political principles should regulate the mutual political relations between well-ordered peoples. What should the foreign policy of well-ordered peoples be? In particular, how should well-ordered peoples relate to outlaw peoples and peoples of burdened societies? Rawls’ thoughts about justice at the global level is perhaps best understood via a brief recapitulation of his influential views about what justice at the domestic level looks like.

In *A Theory of Justice* (1971), Rawls famously employed the thought experiment of the original position to derive those principles of justice that should guide the design of the basic structure of a closed, self-contained society. According to Rawls, parties to the original position would, behind a veil of ignorance, agree to the following two principles: (1) Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all (the liberty principle). (2) Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle (the difference principle), and (b) attached to offices and positions.

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22 According to Rawls, there are five types of domestic societies. Liberal peoples, decent peoples, outlaw states, societies burdened by unfavorable conditions and societies that are benevolent absolutisms (Rawls 1999:4). Liberal peoples are ones that are governed by a liberal conception of justice such as, for example, Rawls’ own preferred liberal conception of justice: Justice as Fairness. Decent peoples do not subscribe to a liberal conception of justice, but they have what Rawls calls a ‘decent consultation hierarchy’. This means, among other things, that all members of decent peoples are given a genuine opportunity to voice their political objectives and that the practices of religious minorities are not disallowed. All members of decent peoples also have a right to play a substantial role, through associations and groups, in the political decision-making process, though, say, women or members of religious minorities cannot hold high political office (Rawls 1999:3). Liberal peoples and decent peoples constitute well-ordered peoples. Outlaw states are regimes that refuse to comply with a reasonable Law of Peoples. Such regimes are aggressive and operate on the assumption that the fact that war advances, or might advance, the regime’s rational interests is a sufficient reason to engage in warfare. Burdened societies are not aggressive towards other peoples, but are facing unfavorable conditions that make it difficult, if not impossible, for such societies to become well-ordered. Such unfavorable conditions can be the result of historical, social or economic circumstances. Benevolent absolutisms are societies that honor human rights but because members of such societies are denied a meaningful role in the political decision-making process, such societies are not well-ordered (Rawls 1999:4).
open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity (the fair equality of opportunity principle) (Rawls 1971:302). Rawls’ endorsement of the difference principle places him squarely in the camp of liberal egalitarians. A just society can, and must in many cases, move well beyond the minimal state, as described in Nozick (1974), and allow significant re-distributions of wealth from well-off individuals to less advantaged ones.

Moving on to the international level, Rawls makes use of a second original position to derive the Law of Peoples. The parties to this original position are to be thought of as representatives of entire liberal peoples.23 As with the first original position, the parties to this second original position are subject to a veil of ignorance. This means that the representatives are ignorant about the size of the territory, the level of economic development, the relative strength of and the size of the people whose fundamental interests they represent. The representatives do, however, know that conditions exist such that constitutional democracy is possible (Rawls 1999:32). Rawls now suggests that representatives to this original position will agree to a set of eight principles, and these principles will constitute the basic charter of the Law of Peoples. The principles are:

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23 What does Rawls’ term ‘people’ mean? It seems fair to say that this term is not entirely clear. One problem with this term consists in the fact that in the sections in which Rawls purports to explain what he means by ‘people’, he exclusively talks about liberal or decent peoples. This makes it somewhat difficult to know if there can be peoples that are neither just nor decent (Rawls 1999:23-30). However, as a first approximation, it can perhaps be said that ‘people’ is not synonymous with ‘nation’ or ‘state’. Members of a people often share a common ethnicity, language, culture and history. They have sympathies towards each other which they do not have towards members of other peoples. Just and decent peoples are not moved primarily by an interest to consolidate or increase their own power. This demarcates to some extent such peoples from states which are often anxiously concerned with their power and military and economic capabilities (Rawls 1999:28). Pogge is quite critical of Rawls’s notion of a people. He doubts that this notion is clear and significant enough to play the role that Rawls assigns to it. Prominent among Pogge’s complaints is the claim that there are many parts of the world in which official borders do not correlate with those characteristics that are normally taken to define a people (shared ethnicity, language, history, etc.). Not all members of a people live in one state, some states are the home of members from more than one people and not all individuals belong to exactly one people (Pogge 1994:197).
1. Peoples are free and independent, and their freedom and independence are to be respected by other peoples; 2. Peoples are to observe treaties and undertakings; 3. Peoples are equal and are parties to the agreements that bind them; 4. Peoples are to observe a duty of non-intervention; 5. Peoples have the right of self-defense but no right to instigate war for reasons other than self-defense; 6. Peoples are to honor human rights; 7. Peoples are to observe certain specified restrictions in the conduct of war; 8. Peoples have a duty to assist other peoples living under unfavorable conditions that prevent their having a just political and social regime (Rawls 1999:37).24

Rawls now continues his derivation of the Law of Peoples with a third original position. The parties to this original position are representatives of decent, but nonliberal peoples. Rawls submits that such representatives will agree to the exact same principles as those agreed to by representatives of liberal peoples in the original position. In other words, there is complete congruence with respect to what principles representatives of both liberal and non-liberal, decent people will agree to (Rawls 1999:69).

Among the principles of the Law of Peoples, it is principle eight about the duty of assistance that is of most importance in connection with the issue of global poverty. It is this principle that gives the best indication of what moral duties well-off individuals have to alleviate poverty among poor populations. According to Rawls, the long-term goal of the duty of assistance is to bring poor, burdened societies into the ranks of well-ordered peoples (Rawls 1999:106). Rawls’ duty of assistance has a strong focus on creating and maintaining domestic institutions of the right, well-ordered sort. The aim of the assistance that well-ordered peoples

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24 In addition to these eight principles, Rawls also suggests that representatives of liberal peoples will agree to setting up three international organizations: “One framed to ensure fair trade among peoples; another to allow peoples to borrow from a cooperative banking system; and the third an organization with a role similar to that of the United Nations [..]” (Rawls 1999:42).
should offer to burdened societies is to realize and preserve just, or decent, institutions. The kind of institutions that Rawls have in mind here are those institutions that make up the basic structure of society. It is therefore the legal, political and economic institutions of a burdened society that needs reform. Such reform requires monetary resources, and it is such resources that well-ordered societies have a duty to provide. Rawls is adamant in emphasizing that the aim of the duty of assistance is not to increase the average level of wealth within a burdened society (Rawls 1999:106).

Why does Rawls focus so intensely on institutional design in burdened societies, and not on, say, the well-being of individuals in such societies, when it comes to the issue of what the proper object is of the duty of assistance? One reason as to why Rawls has this focus has to do with his views on what the causes of a people’s wealth are. Consider this widely cited passage:

I believe that the causes of the wealth of a people and the forms it takes lie in the political culture and in the religious, philosophical, and moral traditions that support the basic structure of their political and social institutions, as well as in the industriousness and the cooperative talents of its members, all supported by their political virtues (Rawls 1999:108).

The wealth of a people is not, on Rawls’ view, something that is primarily caused by this people having access to natural resources. What is really important for wealth accumulation and prosperity is the basic structure of society and its inhabitants’ features in terms of industriousness and political and moral traditions. This view has implications for what the target and cut-off point is for the duty of assistance. When burdened societies have been assisted in creating just, or decent, institutions and thereby have been assisted in i) managing their own affairs reasonably and ii) becoming members of the Society of Well-ordered Peoples, there is no further need for assistance to such societies. The target and cut-off point of the duty of assistance has been

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25 For an influential critique of this focus, see Pogge (1994:210).
reached, and this is so even in cases where the assisted societies are still relatively poor (Rawls 1999:111).

An implication of Rawls view about what the target and cut-off point is of the duty of assistance is that a global difference principle is not appropriate. Rawls is very clear about this implication, and he explicitly rejects that a difference principle, of the kind so important to his theorizing about justice at the domestic level, should be introduced at the global level (Rawls 1999:116). Rawls’ reason for rejecting a global difference principle is that it has a counterintuitive implication. He attempts to bring out this implication by drawing attention to the following thought experiment:

Two liberal or decent countries are at the same level of wealth (estimated, say, in primary goods) and have the same size population. The first decides to industrialize and to increase its rate of (real) saving, while the second does not. Being content with things as they are, and preferring a more pastoral and leisurely society, the second reaffirms its social values. Some decades later the first country is twice as wealthy as the second. Assuming, as we do, that both societies are liberal or decent, and their peoples free and responsible, and able to make their own decisions, should the industrialized country be taxed to give funds to the second? (Rawls 1999:117).

Rawls rejects that an affirmative answer to this question is appropriate, but it is such an answer that would be given if a global difference principle were in place. With such a principle in place,

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26 Rawls suggests that if a previously burdened people is not satisfied with its level of wealth, after it has received assistance enabling it to be well-ordered, it can either increase savings or borrow from other members of the Society of Peoples (Rawls 1999:114). Given Rawls’ views about the causes of wealth and the target and cut-off point of the duty of assistance, a relatively poor member of the Society of Peoples has no legitimate claim on assistance which will allow it to raise its average level of wealth or introduce various welfare improving services for its members.

27 Pogge has criticized Rawls for the fact that his theory of justice at the global level lacks a difference principle and any other, alternative egalitarian distributive component (Pogge 1994:196,208). Pogge also finds it objectionable that Rawls’ theory presupposes the existence and moral acceptability of national borders. In line with a general and well-known cosmopolitan sentiment, see e.g. Caney (2005), Pogge finds it difficult to understand how Rawls can justify the enormous distributional significance that national borders have for determining the life prospects of individuals (Pogge 1994:198). In Rawls’ liberal conception of justice at the domestic level, there is a strong focus on creating a basic structure of society that will secure that undeserved, and morally irrelevant, features of individuals, such as their gender, race, innate capabilities and social/economic background, will play a minimal role in determining the life prospect of individuals. In light of this focus, which Pogge sympathizes with, it is very difficult for him to see why Rawls, at the international level, leaves this focus behind and allows that individuals’ life prospects are, to a very significant degree, determined by the country into which they are born. It does, for example, make a huge difference to x’s life prospects if she is born in, say, Malawi and not in Monaco.
there would be a continuing redistribution of funds between peoples as long as one people were less wealthy than another one (Rawls 1999:117).

Rawls ends his discussion of the duty of assistance by contrasting his own view with a cosmopolitan position represented by Pogge (1999) and Beitz (1979). Rawls takes the cosmopolitan position to be ultimately concerned with the well-being of individuals in poor countries and not with the justice, or decency, of the institutions that constitute the basic structure of such countries. Rawls takes the cosmopolitan position to have the undesirable feature that continued redistribution of funds from the wealthy to the poor is needed in cases where just, or decent, institutions have been secured for people x but the average level of welfare of people x is low as compared to the average level of welfare of more affluent peoples (Rawls 1999:119).28

From these considerations, it should be clear that Rawls advocates a view that saddles affluent people in developed nations with limited duties of assistance, as compared to the Maximalist Position and Intermediate Position I. As compared to the Minimalist Position, Rawls’ position does, however, saddle affluent people in developed nations with substantial duties of assistance. In the Minimalist Position, there is no room for Rawls’ version of a duty of assistance to burdened societies. Of course, if these societies are burdened as a consequence of rich nations’ harmful behavior/policies, assistance, in the form of reparation, is required of rich nations. Rawls’ duty of assistance does not, however, leave rich nations unaffected just because such nations have not been materially involved in the causing of the less than ideal conditions in burdened societies. Rich, well-ordered societies owe assistance to burdened societies merely in virtue of being materially so much better off than they are.29

28 For an influential reply to Rawls on this issue, see Pogge (1994).
29 For a more detailed overview of some of issues that lie at the heart of the debate between Rawls and his critics, see Brock (2010). Martin and Reidy (2006) is a useful volume of commentaries on The Law of Peoples.
6. Conclusion

After this overview of four normative positions on global poverty, we wish to conclude with some general considerations on the topic of what role empirical sciences such as economics and political science should play in normative considerations about global poverty. Our view is, perhaps relatively uncontroversial, that much normative theorizing about global poverty must, in order to be worth serious attention, be informed and underpinned by empirical knowledge. In order to substantiate this claim, it is instructive to offer some examples, from the positions surveyed in the previous sections, of how empirical knowledge is vital for the plausibility of normative conclusions.

Starting with the Maximalist Position, the perhaps most perspicuous empirical assumption underlying this position is Singer’s contention that affluent individuals in developed countries can easily and effectively alleviate the suffering of far-away needy individuals through contributions to aid organizations such as Oxfam and UNICEF. In the last decade, a number of publications have stressed the counterproductive consequences of development aid (Easterly 2009, 2006), (Terry 2002) and (Kennedy 2005). Common concerns include the idea that development aid feeds a cycle of dependence in recipient countries, promotes corruption and constitutes a barrier to developing countries taking responsibility for their own economic and social development. Easterly has recently criticized Singer’s metaphor about the shallow-pond and the drowning child by drawing attention to putative disanalogies between that example and the case of donating to an aid organization. First, affluent individuals cannot directly save a sick and malnourished child on the other side of the globe. Such individuals have to work through

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30 This is especially so when normative theorizing leads to practical injunctions about what policies and/or behavior patterns ought to be implemented/furthered along.
intermediaries, and these might not be efficient, accountable, competent and knowledgeable with respect to the execution of the task they have been given. Second, it is very clear what needs to be done in order to save the drowning child. It is, however, misleading to suggest that this in any way resembles the epistemic status of affluent individuals with respect to what needs to be done in order to alleviate chronic poverty and the malnutrition and disease burden that follow in its wake. Alleviating chronic poverty and its tragic bedfellows is an extremely complex and difficult task.\(^{31}\)

Another empirical issue that is of interest in connection with the Maximalist Position is that of how to maximize the number of individuals who contribute to poverty alleviation. If one shares Singer’s desire to reduce human suffering, and if individuals’ contributions to poverty alleviation is an effective means by which to realize this desire, then one ought to share Singer’s interest in maximizing the number of individuals who contribute to poverty alleviation. Disciplines such as social psychology and behavioral economics are ones that are well-placed to shed light on the issue of how this interest of Singer’s is best realized.\(^{32}\) Lichtenberg (2010) has recently suggested that if the aim is to alleviate human suffering, then there is reason to place the bar, for what amount of money/resources people ought to contribute to the alleviation of suffering, at a relatively moderate level. Putting the bar at a relatively high level is risky from a practical point of view because such a relatively high bar simply puts many people off and turns them into non-contributors (2010:575). If these empirical claims are true, then the standard for giving contained in Singer’s idea about income brackets as a means to determine how much

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\(^{31}\) For a discussion on aid between Singer and Easterly during which Easterly puts forth the above claims about Singer’s thought-example, see [http://bloggingheads.tv/diavlogs/24804](http://bloggingheads.tv/diavlogs/24804) [Accessed 7/19/11].

\(^{32}\) In (2009: Chapter 4), Singer surveys some of the recent literature on the psychological factors that lead people to behave in the ways they do. Singer suggests that this empirical knowledge is put to use in an attempt to get people to give more to charity than they currently do.
individuals ought to contribute to poverty alleviation is in one sense superior to the standard for giving expressed by (C* ) and the standard contained in his remarks about the potential need for reducing oneself to the material circumstances of a Bengali refugee. The sense in which this standard is superior to the other two is that it is the one that is least likely to turn people away from participating in the practice of contributing to poverty alleviation. It is certainly both easier and less painful for affluent individuals to meet the former standard than any of the latter two.

Moving on to the Minimalist Position, it is clear that knowledge of the past is crucial for a proper assessment of the issues of i) whether or not the current, global distribution of wealth is morally justified, and ii) whether or not certain individuals among the global poor are entitled to reparation from certain members of the global affluent. Without detailed historical knowledge, the third aspect of Nozick’s theory of justice in holdings does not imply anything practical with respect to the question of who owes what to whom, as a matter of reparation, in today’s world. On the issue of what happened in the past and how past events have influenced today’s global distribution of wealth, it is worth noting that Narveson and Pogge are in clear disagreement on this issue. Consider the suggestion that a partial solution to the problem of global poverty consists in a redistribution of wealth from rich countries to poor ones as a matter of reparation for past injustices. Narveson is not inclined to see such redistribution as justified. The reason for this is that he rejects the view that rich countries, in general, became rich and poor countries, in general, became poor because the former badly exploited the latter (Narveson 2005a:334). This view is in stark contrast to Pogge’s:

Those with libertarian sympathies sometimes claim that inequalities and group disparities – no matter how extreme – are unobjectionable if they arose recursively through chains of voluntary transactions under some appropriate market rules. In response, I adopt an economical way to sideline such claims by pointing out that its antecedent is plainly false: actual historical rules and transactions both massively violated any credible
normative standards and therefore cannot confer legitimacy on the present global distribution. More broadly, I then argue that a history pervaded by such monumental crimes should not be allowed to give rise to radical inequalities (Pogge 2010:235).

The likely effect of an increase in free trade on the level of global poverty is another empirical issue that is of key importance to the Minimalist Position. As described in section 3, the main libertarian answer to the structural problem of global poverty is an increase in free trade. The credibility of this answer cannot, however, be settled a priori from the armchair. The view of the Minimalist Position that it is unfair to exclude certain producers from market opportunities in affluent countries is a normative one. The view that the termination of such an exclusion will have an effect of such and such a magnitude on the level of global poverty is an empirical one, and the truth of the former view can co-exist with the falsity of the latter and vice versa.

The issue of what effect an increase in free trade will have on the level of global poverty has recently emerged as a serious dividing point between Pogge and Joshua Cohen. Cohen takes a somewhat conservative view and cites an estimate to the effect that a complete elimination of all trade barriers in agriculture and manufacturing would produce a US$ 22 billion gain for developing countries (Cohen 2010:27). Pogge takes issue with this number, and cites another source for the view that access to protected markets in the North will yield an extra US$ 700 billion of annual export earnings for producers in developing countries (Pogge 2010:183). The gap between these two numbers is significant, and the Minimalist Position’s main solution to the structural problem of global poverty, together with Pogge’s claim about the negative effects of the global order on the global poor, would increase in plausibility if the higher number turns out to be vindicated. The important point for present purposes is, however, that any such vindication has to come from one, or more, of the empirical sciences and cannot come from within the halls of philosophy.
Turning to Intermediate Position I, it is clear that one of its fundamental tenets is a largely empirical one. The tenet in question is Pogge’s central claim that the global order harms the global poor. Leaving to one side important conceptual issues of what constitutes harm, what the proper baseline is for claims about the harming effects of the global order (Patten 2005) and what the impact on global poverty is of the global order as opposed to the global institutional order (Reitberger 2008), it is evident that the truth conditions for Pogge’s central claim are empirical in nature. Mathias Risse (2005) is a commentator on Pogge who disagrees with Pogge on empirical issues. Risse seeks to show that the global order does not harm the poor if one adopts those baselines of comparison that Pogge has suggested. Contrary to what Pogge believes, when these baselines are invoked, it becomes clear that the global order has caused significant improvements over that state of general misery that human life historically has been immersed in. In order to substantiate this view, Risse points to a number of statistical facts about how things, since 1950, have dramatically improved in terms of i) percentage of world population being poor, ii) worldwide income per capita and iii) worldwide life expectancy (Risse 2005:11).  

Intermediate Position II also has its share of relatively heavy empirical assumptions. Consider first Rawls’ claim about the causes of the wealth of a people. Rawls’ view on this matter entails, for example, that geographical and meteorological features of the landmass that a people has historically occupied has a very minimal, if any, causal role to play in the explanation of the wealth of the people in question. Similarly, Rawls’ view entails that the history of a people

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33 Cohen is another critic who is in disagreement with Pogge on empirical issues. He attributes to Pogge what he labels ‘the strong thesis’. This is the view that most of the global poverty problem could be eliminated through minor modifications in the global order that would entail at most slight reductions in the incomes of the affluent. Cohen finds the strong thesis unsubstantiated (2010:20). For a reply to Cohen that involves a vigorous defense of a number of the empirical assertions upon which his (Pogge’s) position on global poverty rests, see Pogge (2010:175 - 191).
is not an important factor when it comes to giving a causal explanation of that people’s level of wealth. Rawls might be correct in his views about what the primary causes of the resource wealth of a people are, but there is a very substantial literature in development economics on this issue that is largely, if not fully, ignored by Rawls (see, for instance (Sachs and Warner 2001). It is from this literature, and not from the writings of Rawls or any other philosopher, that a reliable conclusion about what the causes of wealth are has to come from.

Second, one can ask about what the empirical evidence is for Rawls’ contention that an effective way of moving burdened societies into the ranks of well-ordered societies consist in transferring funds, through aid, to burdened societies. Rawls must believe that such a transfer of funds is an effective means to achieve the end in question. If Rawls does not believe this, then, barring an explanation/argument to the effect that the duty of assistance is not primarily a duty to provide monetary resources to burdened societies, it is very difficult to make sense of Rawls’ idea of a duty of assistance. This issue is especially pertinent given the existence of the literature in development economics that suggests that aid, in the form of loans and grants, sometimes have negative effects on governance in a burdened/developing society (Knack 2001).

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