

Reflecting on global child poverty [CH]

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"Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings... Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. While poverty persists, there is no true freedom."

Nelson Mandela, Trafalgar Square Speech (2005)

Globally, poverty is the biggest killer of children today. According to the World Bank (2013) 1.2 billion people worldwide, one third of whom are children under twelve, live in extreme poverty, severely deprived of food, shelter, safe drinking water, health and education. Every day 19,000 children under five years of age die from poverty related causes across the world (UNICEF, 2012). That equates to 13 children every minute and the actual number may be far greater with an estimated 51 million children unregistered at birth (UNICEF, 2010).

“Children living in poverty experience deprivation of the material, spiritual, and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society” (UNICEF, 2005).

Helen Penn in her book *Unequal Childhoods: Young Children's Lives in Poor Countries*, questions the willingness of early childhood practitioners in rich countries and others who advocate for and profess to care about children, to tolerate the vast scale of child poverty in developing countries.

“In the North we justifiably value life and the right to life and are shocked by child deaths or abuse in our own country, but overlook the prevalence of those same phenomena in the South.” (Penn, 2005:172)

This chapter explores some of the key current debates on child poverty including the debate about aid donation and the consequences to young humanity of the globalization of a capitalist economic system. You will be encouraged to reflect upon and question your own assumptions about what is in the best interests of children who live in poverty, and explore through logical reasoned argument, whether you have a moral responsibility to distant vulnerable children. It will encourage you to draw on the writings of contemporary moral philosophers such as Peter Singer, who argues that we should give aid to the point of marginal utility and Garrett Hardin who argued that aiding impoverished and starving people is morally wrong and results in disastrous consequences for humanity. It is hoped that through this chapter you will be helped to reflect on your own moral position and improve your thinking on one of the most important global moral issues of our time.

A note on philosophical reflection [A]

Philosophical reflection involves thinking critically about your moral behavior and attitudes in order to examine your life and your beliefs about life. The aim is to achieve greater understanding and make positive changes to behaviour based on this. Socrates is attributed with the uncompromising claim that the ‘unexamined life is not worth living’ (Longstaff, 2013). He thought that people should seek the truth in order to create fair and just societies. There is of course, in this complex and unsettled world, a certain appeal in not examining too closely and this might well lead to a more pleasant life. Socrates himself paid the ultimate price for challenging the status quo and was sentenced to death for corrupting the youth of Athens. When offered a reprieve if he gave up his questioning of the orthodoxy, he refused; for him, thinking critically about life was his reason to live.

According to Elder (2010) Socrates was concerned with cultivating various intellectual dispositions in order to develop critically reflective thinking. Intellectual humility involves questioning what you actually know about yourself, others and the world around you. It involves identifying your assumptions and any false beliefs you might have and being aware of your potential for prejudice and self-deception. Intellectual empathy is about being aware of and giving due weight to perspectives that are different from your own and involves sympathizing with and looking for insights in the views of others. Intellectual integrity involves holding yourself to the same standards you expect from others and examining inconsistencies in what you say and do. It is about questioning your own reasoning and

whether you are willing to change your position when a more reasonable one appears. Intellectual autonomy is about taking responsibility for your own thinking and questioning the extent to which you uncritically accept the views of others, and your willingness to stand alone on issues where you do not conform to the established views.

I have attempted to employ these traits during the construction of this chapter on global child poverty by asking clear questions throughout, although I freely admit that my skills of philosophical reflection require much refinement so I hope you will forgive, and of course challenge, any holes in my arguments. This is by no means a fully comprehensive discussion of the topic; it is simply my initial reflections on the issue which I hope will inspire you to think more deeply about it too. At the end I challenge you to construct your own reasoned argument based on what you have learned.

What is poverty?[A]

Poverty is often simply stated as the number of people in the world living on an income of below US \$1.25 a day. This measure is based on an attempt to convert national currencies to an amount required to purchase the same goods and services in those countries as US \$1.25 would buy in the United States. It represents the average of national poverty lines for the fifteen poorest countries in the world and is referred to as the absolute poverty line, below which it is very difficult for a person to survive. Robert McNamara, former President of the World Bank, described absolute poverty as:

“...a condition so limited by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, squalid surroundings, high infant mortality, and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency.” (Annual Meetings Speech, Nairobi, 1973)

Individual countries, however, have differing concepts of poverty. It is difficult to imagine that anyone living in the US or Western Europe could survive adequately on \$456.25 per year which is what the \$1.25 a day threshold equates to. Great Britain, therefore, defines poverty in relation to the average income in the country; people living on less than 60% of the median income are said to be living in poverty. According to the BBC News broadcast on 8 December 2013, in the period 2011-2012, this amount was £128 per week for a single person which, at the time of writing, is equivalent to around US \$30 per day and will usually be

enough to pay rent and buy food, clothing, electricity and some heating, there will also be access to fresh drinking water and running hot water, an inside toilet and probably items such as a television and telephone. Healthcare and education are free. In contrast, Afghanistan, having suffered many years of war, famine and little foreign investment, defines the poverty line as the amount needed to provide 2100 calories to each person. 36% of the population lives below the \$1.25 threshold. These people do not have access to many of the goods and services available to the poor in the UK. Only 53% of the rural population has access to sanitation and safe drinking water and 55% of Afghan children are failing to grow and develop properly due to food scarcity, particularly in the first two years of life (World Bank, 2014). There are clearly problems in comparing poverty between nations although it is broadly accepted that the amount needed to provide a minimum quality of life in developed countries is significantly more than that needed to provide a minimum quality of life in developing countries. Economist, Amartya Sen (1997) argues that instead of trying to make detailed analyses of the cost of consumer goods needed for survival in particular countries, we should look at the capabilities of people to achieve the things that will lead them to live the kind of life they value. This might mean having a job and being able to provide food, shelter, healthcare and education for their children. It might also mean satisfying psychological needs such as for cultural identity, security, belongingness, dignity and respect.

What does child poverty mean in developing nations?[A]

Child poverty is different to poverty experienced in adulthood (Ortiz et al, 2012). It has long term permanent physical, intellectual and social-emotional consequences. It can stunt children's growth and destroy their opportunities to live fulfilling lives performing the roles expected of them in their societies and communities. Most children who live in extreme poverty today live in Sub-Saharan Africa, South and East Asia and Latin America.

Generally speaking, children that live in rural areas experience much higher rates of poverty than those that live in towns and cities. Severe deprivation of shelter and sanitation affects around a third of children in the developing world with 20% of children using unsafe drinking water (Gordon et al, 2003). 61 million children of primary school age have either never attended school or dropped out without completing their primary education with girls being 60% more likely to be deprived of education than boys (UNESCO, 2012). Minujin & Nandy (2012) argue that in addition to the accepted multi-dimensional measures of poverty (household income, health, education etc.), there are two extra indicators that should be

added when considering child poverty and these are for protection and attachment and these things are closely linked. A child who is deprived of parents is often deprived of protection and an estimated 13 million children in developing countries have lost both parents in many cases due to HIV/AIDS which is prevalent in Africa. Many orphans are forced to live on the streets foraging for food in bins and landfill sites or are forced into prostitution or armed conflict living their lives in fear and without love, comfort or security. A recent report from UNICEF (2013) indicates that 26% of children under five globally are stunted (low height for age). The damage caused by stunting in the first thousand days of life, from conception to the age of two, is irreversible. It is a slow process indicating that a child has suffered repeated debilitating illnesses, insufficient food and nutrients for growth and inadequate care. It results in short stature and impaired development of the brain which has long term consequences for a child's cognitive functioning, impacting on school performance, employment prospects and ultimately, where rates of stunting are high, the potential for whole nations to develop. A further 29 million children under five in the developing world are severely wasted (low weight for height) indicating acute under nutrition usually associated with starvation or chronic disease. The malignant relationship between under nutrition and disease cannot be overstated. A wasted child is nine times more likely to die from common childhood infections such as diarrhoea: a stunted child is four times more likely to die.

The impact of extreme poverty on children's lives is a violation of their human rights; there can be few greater injustices than robbing infants of their potential to survive and develop fully during their lives (UNICEF, 2013). According to Milanovic (2012) poverty is often thought of as a problem for individual nations since national governments control access to resources such as income, healthcare and education. This, he says, gives a limited two dimensional perspective of the issue and in order to get a fuller picture, it must be considered in a global context. This is because globalization has brought with it a greater dependence on other countries for income generation and developments in technology have allowed for comparison of lifestyles and a more acute understanding of our own position in the world's hierarchy of wealth. Increasing recognition of the need for a global response to addressing poverty and its associated social issues culminated in the identification, at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, of eight Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015. The goals are inextricably interlinked in terms of improving outcomes for the world's children and reflect the world's stated priorities to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, achieve universal primary education,

promote gender equality, combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and develop global partnerships. The UN announced in 2010 that one of its primary targets: to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015, was achieved five years ahead of schedule. This is thought to be in large part due to the dramatic economic growth and subsequent progress made by China whose number living in extreme poverty fell from 60% in 1990 to 12% in 2010. The new target is to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030 but this has come under criticism from some who say that poverty reduction is about more than economic growth and that inequalities in wealth and opportunity are increasing within countries and this is hindering progress towards goals to improve infant and maternal health and increase access to education. Pogge (2012) is skeptical of the UN's announcement that the poverty target has been achieved early, pointing out that the number of people in extreme poverty is continually decreased by around 50,000 deaths each day from poverty-related causes. Ironically, these premature deaths help to improve the poverty count on a daily basis.

The link between poverty and educational outcomes is crucial for understanding the potential for social mobility and escaping poverty. We have already seen how stunting impairs brain development making educational achievement more difficult and even if the family improves its situation later in life full recovery is not usually possible. Poor health, food scarcity and social problems such as unemployment and unmanageable debt put families under a great deal of stress which also undermines educational attendance and achievement. Engle & Black (2008) reviewed a range of early childhood intervention programmes in developing countries and found that, with a combination of healthcare, feeding, parent education and attendance at child development centres, it is possible to improve children's readiness for school; that is, their ability to engage with and profit from it. This has important implications for later social mobility, as low or non-engagement with pre-school and primary education is associated with illiteracy, lower rates of secondary education, unemployment and higher rates of imprisonment in adulthood (Minujin & Nandy, 2012).

In a world where there is so much wealth, why do so many children live in poverty?[A]

In order to understand how some people became rich and some people became poor it is necessary to look back in history over the last 500 years to what many see as the beginning of

globalization; when the countries of Western Europe began to dominate the rest of the world through exploration and colonization. Colonialism is the subjugation, exploitation and physical occupation of the territory of one group of people by another for settlement or commercial purposes. Examples of this are the Spanish and Portuguese conquests of the countries of South America from the early sixteenth century, and the establishment of British colonies in India in the early nineteenth century. This process of political and economic domination was often violent, hugely destructive and in many cases included slavery, death and the enforced migration of native people (Canella & Viruru, 2004). It resulted in unequal relationships between indigenous populations who had their land, resources and livelihoods taken from them, and the colonists who, convinced of their own cultural and intellectual superiority, imposed their laws, language, religion, knowledge and values on the local people as well as trade restrictions, taxation and other economically harmful practices which forced many into extreme poverty.

Having gained natural resources and cheap or free labour, the colonists needed to create markets for their products. Colonies were therefore often required to produce a single commodity or crop (e.g. gold, sugar, coffee) year after year for cheap export to the motherland. As a consequence, farmers were prevented from producing the range of foods needed to feed their families and from making their own tools, clothes and other necessities. Instead, they were forced to buy them from their colonial rulers which transformed millions of people from subsistence farmers into labourers and consumers, dependent on the markets and the goodwill of the mother country (Watts, 2013). The subsequent accumulation of resources in Western Europe and later North America created a huge imbalance making the countries of the North extremely rich and those in the South increasingly poor.

The impact of colonialism is complex and endures to the present day; decades after many countries have regained their independence. It is one of the main reasons that poor countries remain poor. Although decolonized nations have regained control of the resources they were once plundered for, they find themselves in the context of the global market economy and control of this lies with North America and Europe. These countries are often unable to use their natural resources to solve the hunger and nutrition problems of their peoples partly because they are still exporting cheap raw products to the rich countries of Europe and North America who turn them into finished products which they can then export for a far greater profit.

Colonization of the mind [B]

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Reflective Activity

The powerful allegory of colonizers arriving with a rifle in one hand and a bible in the other is much cited (e.g. Crouch & Stokl, 2014).

What is meant by this?

What, do you think, are its consequences?

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The psychological consequences of colonialism are well documented (e.g. Canella & Viruru, 2004) and involved a significant change in mentality, culture and religion for many colonized peoples. The work of church missionaries, for example, to convert all to Christianity can be seen as part of the wider aggressive imposition of culture introduced by the colonizers "...in a sea of persistent savagery" (Andrews, 2010: 665). Concepts of racial and cultural superiority were central to the psyches of the colonizers who viewed indigenous peoples as objects, destined by god to slave for the white man. Equality was not tolerated between white and black people and this resulted in the eventual destruction of psychological and spiritual frameworks, loss of language, culture and sense of identity. It created billions of marginalized people who have still not recovered their place in society today. This may all seem far removed from the contemporary issue of child poverty but children do not live their lives isolated from the political, social and economic landscapes around them and are impacted by their legacies just as adults are. It is important to understand that whilst inequality and poverty are not the same thing, inequality is a root cause of much child poverty in the world today (Sen, 2009).

What are the links between capitalism and poverty?[A]

From the end of the First World War the European empires were gradually dismantled as many colonized countries made bids for independence. Many writers including Susan George, a prominent political and social scientist, in her classic study of world poverty: *How the Other Half Dies: The Real Reasons for World Hunger* (1976), have drawn links between global poverty and the capitalist economic system that the decolonized nations found

themselves in. They point to the presence of the same paradox that affected England during the industrial revolution and indeed many other countries undergoing industrial development; that increasing prosperity was accompanied by rising levels of poverty, only now this existed not only within nations but on a global scale. Capitalism can be defined as private ownership and control of the factors of production (e.g. land, factories, mines, labour) where sale of the product accrues profits for the owner. Just as control of the factors of production is fundamental to development of private business, control of the resources of the South is fundamental to development in the North as we shall see from the case study below.

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Case study – Mali [B]

Mali, an ex-French colony which gained its independence in 1960, is a landlocked country in West Africa and one of the poorest countries in the world. In the 1990s Mali had experienced widespread student and trade union unrest in protest of the corrupt and dictatorial regime of the time. Under this rule strict austerity programmes were implemented in order to satisfy the debt repayment demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and this had resulted in severe hardship for the Malian people. In 2008 Mali was in a relatively stable period when the global food crisis hit triggering food riots around the world in response to growing hunger. The food crisis hit rich countries as well as poor who responded by attempting to buy up agricultural land in many African countries in order to secure food supplies for the future. In Mali, where 75% of people were subsistence farmers, American agricultural developers in partnership with the Malian government, began drawing up plans for a vast industrial sugar plantation known as the Sosumar sugar project, which it was hoped would stimulate economic development for Mali. The plans meant that thousands of local farmers would lose their land and, as compensation, were offered the opportunity to become contracted sugar cane growers for the Sosumar project. Many of these families had farmed the same land for generations, their lifestyles changing very little over hundreds of years. Government acquisition of the land (in this case to lease to the American developers) is a prerequisite for economic development in a capitalist system. People will usually only be persuaded to sell their labour and work for an employer if they do not have access to land. A market for a product can only fully develop if it is taken out of the context of subsistence farming, where people are only producing enough for themselves and their families, in order to produce excess product that can be sold on the open market. In many developing countries like Mali, the small farmers do not actually own the land; their occupation of it dates back to times of

pre-ownership so that leaves them vulnerable to intervention by governments who can simply take the land from them when they decide they need it ignoring the rights of the people who live there. In 2006 Mali had adopted food sovereignty as government policy which is a political concept embracing the idea that a country should produce its own food rather than rely on the world food market. This should have resulted in more investment in small farmers including giving them land rights, in order to help them produce more and sell more to improve their standard of living, a development plan thought to be appropriate to Malians and their traditional ways of life. Instead, increasing violence was accompanying the arrival of foreign investors such as those associated with the Sosumar project. If Malians did not give up their land peacefully, it was taken forcibly using violent methods such as tear gas and electric batons, in direct violation of Malian and international human rights laws. In this way many Malians were persuaded to accept the US \$600 per year salary offered by the Sosumar project to cultivate the sugar cane. The Sosumar project was financed by a number of organisations including the African Development Bank and release of the money depended on the Malian government adhering to their guidelines which eventually ensured that those who were involuntarily displaced and did not want to work for Sosumar were offered land outside of the proposed plantation as compensation. It was hoped that the Sosumar development, which was the biggest investment in Africa at the time, would reduce poverty in Mali and lead to benefits such as improvements in enterprise, development of modern farming methods, the building of hospitals and schools and better employment prospects for young people. The major criticism of the Sosumar project and others like it is that most of the powerful elite in Africa, as in most countries, are far removed from the lives of the common people. They have often been educated in colonial schools and view the western model of economic development as the only viable option leaving them open to the accusation that they are imposing economic models that do not fit with African values and culture. In 2012 a military coup seized power in Mali as a result of political unrest in the north of the country. The banks suspended funding for the Sosumar project and all foreign employees were removed from the project making it unlikely now that it will go ahead. The coup was seen by some to represent a chance to return to food sovereignty policies and meaningful development for Africa, but to others it represented the frustration of dreams to develop global markets resulting in a better quality of life. In 2013 French armed forces intervened in the conflict but the future in Mali remains uncertain and levels of infant mortality and malnutrition remain high with an estimated one third of the country's children stunted.

How have the Malian people been affected by colonization and the globalization of a capitalist economy?

What are the implications for young children?

'Land Rush – Why Poverty?', an informative documentary about the Sosumar project can be accessed via the following link:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_pKnP-2mOQ

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Within any developing economy, whether national or global, most of the benefits go to the owners of the means of production which increases inequalities in the population – the rich become richer and the poor become poorer, almost inevitably suffering from erosion of human rights and loss of political and economic power as is demonstrated in the case study above. A recent study by Oxfam reported that the wealth of the richest 85 people in the world amounted to the same as the total wealth of the poorest half of the world's population (Alvaredo et al, 2013). It goes on to say that this astounding statistic is a sobering reminder that growing inequality exists because the wealthy elite have the economic and political power to manipulate the rules of the economic system to their benefit.

As the colonies gained independence, the debts of the colonial powers were transferred to the newly formed governments and the only solution offered by the North was more loans with high interest rates in order to repay the initial debts. This resulted in even higher states of dependency upon the North, who imposed conditions on these loans allowing them to dictate policies on agriculture, infrastructure and trade and bestow special privileges on foreign corporations such as by allowing monopolies over mineral extraction. According to George (1988) many people think that the loans go to developing countries to help people in poverty but the reality is that most of it ends up back in the hands of Western corporations who make huge profits building infrastructure in those countries. The debts themselves, of course, are not paid by governments but by taxpayers and ensure that millions of people remain in extreme poverty; every child born in these countries is already shouldering a big share of the burden. Developing world debts are a serious barrier to poverty reduction and as a result, recent initiatives such as the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI) have helped to ensure that the debts of qualifying countries are reduced or written off. However, some countries are unable to meet the requirements of debt relief if, for example, they cannot preserve peace and

stability due to ongoing political conflict and civil war. Another chief criticism of debt relief initiatives is that debt relief is too slow and debts are not cancelled until structural reforms are implemented in countries leaving them to struggle with repayments and the cost of reforms at the same time.

The Singer Solution to Child Poverty [A]

Writing in The New York Times Magazine (1999), American philosopher Peter Singer argues that the money American's spend on luxuries, rather than necessities, should be given to help alleviate the suffering of impoverished and starving children in developing countries. He cites the following tale to facilitate thinking about this moral issue:

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Bob is close to retirement. He has invested most of his savings in a very rare and valuable old car, a Bugatti, which he has not been able to insure. The Bugatti is his pride and joy. In addition to the pleasure he gets from driving and caring for his car, Bob knows that its rising market value means that he will always be able to sell it and live comfortably after retirement. One day when Bob is out for a drive, he parks the Bugatti near the end of a railway siding and goes for a walk up the track. As he does so, he sees that a runaway train, with no one aboard, is running down the railway track. Looking farther down the track, he sees the small figure of a child very likely to be killed by the runaway train. He can't stop the train and the child is too far away to warn of the danger, but he can throw a switch that will divert the train down the siding where his Bugatti is parked. Then nobody will be killed -- but the train will destroy his Bugatti. Thinking of his joy in owning the car and the financial security it represents, Bob decides not to throw the switch. The child is killed. For many years to come, Bob enjoys owning his Bugatti and the financial security it represents.

Do you think it was wrong of Bob not to throw the switch?

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Discussion [B]

Most of you will probably think it was wrong of Bob not to throw the switch, but Singer points out that many of us have the opportunity to save a child's life by donating to aid organizations and choose not to. He states that \$200 (allowing for the costs of administration,

fundraising and delivery) would give a child safe passage through their first five years and drastically increase their chances of survival. If you think it was wrong of Bob not to throw the switch then surely it must follow that it is wrong not to donate \$200 that you would otherwise spend on luxuries such as a holiday, meals out in nice restaurants, or new clothes simply because the old ones are out of fashion? You might argue that only Bob can save the child on the track, but millions of people are in a position to afford to give aid. Singer counters this argument with the reasoning that even if all of those millions of people were in exactly the same situation as Bob and chose not to throw the switch in order to protect their cars, this would still not make it right for Bob to do the same. You might ask the question that even if you gave your \$200 and saved the life of a child, there would still be millions of other children whose lives needed saving, so at what point should you stop giving? It is important at this point to understand Singer's utilitarian position which is that we can determine whether acts are morally right or wrong by their consequences. The utilitarian view of morality holds that if we have a choice of how to act, the right choice to make is the one that will result in the most human happiness. Singer deliberately focuses his argument on children, not because he thinks that the life of a child is more valuable than the life of an adult, but because children cannot be said to have caused their own impoverished situations. His argument rests on two basic presuppositions:

- 1) Suffering and death due to lack of basic needs such as food is bad.
- 2) If we can prevent this without causing excessive suffering to ourselves, we have a moral obligation to do so.

The logical conclusion to these statements is that we have a moral duty to help the poor and suffering of the world, but it is uncertain as to what lengths we should go to do this. At what point is the sacrifice to ourselves too great? Singer argues that we should give to the point of marginal utility; that is the point at which our own basic needs are satisfied and the consumption of more material goods or services is not necessary. The consequence of using your extra money to go out for meals in nice restaurants might mean a slight increase in your happiness but this is not morally as important as the increase in happiness to the child who can live as a result of that money. In other words, unless you value nice meals in restaurants more than the life of a child, you should give that money to aid the child. Perhaps the most important point Singer is trying to make is that giving aid to poor and starving children should be seen as a moral obligation rather than a charitable act which is the view that many of us might have.

We will leave Singer's argument for the time being and reflect upon a different point of view. Garrett Hardin, American ecologist and philosopher, argued that aiding impoverished and starving people in distant, overpopulated countries, is morally wrong and results in disastrous consequences for humanity (Hardin, 1974).

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Living on a Lifeboat [B]

Hardin uses the metaphor of the lifeboat to make his point that helping poor and needy people in developing nations will risk disaster for everyone. He invites us to imagine that each rich country is a lifeboat full of people and that each poor country is also a lifeboat, but these lifeboats are vastly overpopulated resulting in people continually falling into the water. These people swim about in the water trying to gain entrance to the rich lifeboats which appear to have room for them. The rich lifeboats, however, although not quite at full capacity, have limited room and to let some people on board would compromise the safety margin and make the boats more likely to sink. The rich people have to make a choice. They cannot admit all the people calling out to them in the water. To do so would result in inevitable disaster for the rich boats and all on board them. They could admit maybe ten percent of the people in the water but this would compromise the safety principle and would mean constant vigilance to ensure that nobody else was trying to climb aboard. In any case how would they choose which ten percent to admit? On what grounds would they discriminate? The cleverest ten percent? The closest? The youngest? The other choice, of course, is to preserve the safety margin and admit no more people to the rich lifeboats ensuring their survival and that of all on board including their immediate families.

You are on a rich lifeboat. What choice would you make?

End box here

Discussion [B]

Hardin's argument is built on the premise that the population in poor countries is increasing at a much faster rate than the population in rich countries and that overpopulation is a root cause of poverty and hunger (Hardin, 1999). His solution to this problem, as an ecologist, is to do nothing and let nature take its course and affect its own solution to overpopulation in the form of famine and disease. Like Singer's solution to global poverty, Hardin's is also rooted in utilitarianism as he believes that this will ultimately lead to the greater level of

human happiness for the greatest number of people. Hardin recognises that some of you might find this solution deplorable and guilt might persuade you to offer your unjustly held place in the lifeboat to someone in the water. This, he says, might alleviate your conscience but it will not alter the lifeboat ethics. The person who takes your place is unlikely to feel guilty about his sudden change in fortune. If he did, he would not get into the boat. You might argue that the developed world has a duty to help those in poor countries as a result of past exploitation and atrocities inflicted during colonization. Hardin counteracts this by stating that we must think of a way forward from the current situation in order to ensure that we do not leave a world that is overpopulated and devoid of resources for future generations.

In order to give serious consideration to Hardin's argument it is necessary to think a little more deeply about the links between population and poverty. According to Marris (1999) English cleric Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) was the first to develop the idea that population growth has a negative influence on prosperity. In other words, human beings depend upon food for life and food comes from the land. The amount of land available to grow food is limited and therefore if the population increases to the extent that the land cannot provide enough food, famine, war, disease and death will be the outcome which will return the population to a more sustainable level. Prosperity will then cause the birth rate to rise and the whole cycle will begin again (Malthus, 1798).

Hans Rosling, a Swedish medical doctor and statistician discusses this in a modern context refuting the whole idea that the population is exploding out of control and supporting the idea that we should give aid to developing countries. The population is indeed increasing, he says, but this is due to population momentum and will level out by the end of the century (Rosling, 2006). Despite the popular belief that saving the lives of poor children will lead to population growth, the reality is very different as he explains in the BBC2 documentary *This World: Don't Panic – The Truth About Population* (2013). Of the total 7 billion people currently living on our planet, the population is growing fastest amongst the poorest 2 billion where child mortality is highest. For the other 5 billion people on earth, the birth rate is lower and simply replaces the adult population as they die. This means the population has stabilized amongst this section of the population and has stopped growing. The reasons that the population has stopped growing in much of the world are related to improvements in medicine meaning that many more children are surviving and people no longer have to compensate for high rates of infant mortality by having lots of babies. The availability of

modern contraceptives and improvements in the rights of women to be educated and have control over their own bodies has also been a causative factor. Therefore, if the lives of poor children are saved and the poorest 2 billion people are helped out of poverty, those parents will also decide to have fewer children. Before the population stops growing however, another 4 billion people will be added to the total population, but this depends on saving the lives of the poorest children now; if we do not, this number will only increase.

Can aid end poverty? [A]

By the late 1960's, most developed countries had created budgets for overseas assistance and development with the overall effort being coordinated by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and increasingly this aid has been targeted at those living in absolute poverty. Official aid either goes directly to the governments of aid receiving countries (bilateral aid) or is distributed via organisations such as the World Bank (multilateral aid). There is a United Nations target that wealthy countries should transfer 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) to assist developing nations. Most donor countries have never hit this target. The UK government announced that the target had been hit by them for the first time in 2013. According to the poverty action group, One, a person on an income of £25,000 in the UK will pay an average of £5465 in tax for the year and of that, £52 will go to the overseas aid budget. As we have seen, Singer would advocate that this is not enough and that perhaps we should adopt the Marxist ideal; from each according to his ability to each according to his need. According to Hardin (1968) however, there is a fundamental error in the principle of sharing. Unrestricted access to a limited resource (food) will eventually deplete that resource to the detriment of all because some groups of people will over exploit it for their own gain and will not fulfill their parallel responsibility to look after and replenish it. Some countries will only make deposits in the 'world food bank' and some will only make withdrawals resulting in a huge disincentive for developing countries to solve their own food shortage problems.

Very few critics, however, are against all types of aid, particularly short term humanitarian aid which is given in times of crisis such as when the recent Typhoon Haiyan struck and devastated much of the Philippines in 2013. That said, in recent years there has been a growing body of criticism both towards official government aid and that given by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Save the Children. One of the most prominent

arguments cited against aid is that it does not reach those people who need it most and it is often undermined by corrupt governance. In 2012, for example, many donor countries withheld aid to Uganda after reports that prominent Ugandan government officials had been involved in the long term theft of huge sums of money donated for humanitarian development purposes including from primary education and health service funds. Economist Dambisa Moyo argues that aid has had a negative impact on Africa by perpetuating the poverty cycle and hampering economic growth using the example of an African mosquito net producer who was forced out of business by well-meaning aid agencies who were giving out nets for free (Moyo, 2009). Official aid, she says, actually fosters corruption by engendering a culture of dependency, propping up corrupt governments and making those countries unattractive to both domestic and foreign investors which has a harmful effect on economic growth. Charitable aid agencies are often criticized on the basis that they have high administrative expenses and are driven by the needs and objectives of their own organisations and governments which are not necessarily congruous with the needs of the local populations. According to Marris (1999) there is an upper limit in the economic development of any country to the amount of external resources that country can soak up and inevitably most of the resources must eventually come from within the country itself. Although aid, on its own, is unlikely to produce sustainable development, it cannot, on the other hand, be blamed for the failure of development (Riddell, 2008). Penn (2005) agrees with this pointing out that we share a global responsibility for the past, present and future state of our planet and the inhabitants of it wherever we live. It is not for the countries of the North to impose their values under the assumption that rich world industrial living is the norm that all should aspire to. Instead, the focus should be on achieving the lifestyles that people value.

Contemporary German philosopher Thomas Pogge (2001) brings another uncomfortable strand to the discussion and that is the concept of justice. It one thing, he argues to do nothing to help impoverished people if you are not contributing to their suffering but it is quite another to do nothing when you are actively contributing to and profiting from their impoverishment. Part of the problem, he states, is that many citizens of the rich countries of Europe and North America do not realize that extreme poverty in developing countries is a condition that they are actively contributing to. Pogge is heavily influenced by seventeenth century English philosopher John Locke whose theory of natural rights asserts that people in their natural state (without government or sovereign rule) would be entitled to a proportionate share of the Earth's resources (Pogge, 2005). Thus, the basis of any just society should be

that the poorest people are at least as well off as they would be in a state of nature. Unlike Singer, who advocates that we have a moral duty to help the poor, Pogge concentrates on the ethical principle of non-maleficence; our moral duty to first do no harm which is rooted in his belief that there is a global institutional order that is shaped by rich countries and imposed on poor countries. This, he states, is giving rise to extensive and severe violation of human rights and causing radical inequalities both between and within nations which could be avoided through institutional change.

The institutions that Pogge refers to are the Washington based World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These organizations are the agents of the richest countries in the world and were set up at the end of the Second World War to rebuild the economies of Europe. They later began to offer loans to poor countries but usually with conditions attached that they privatize their economies and offer western corporations access to their raw materials and markets. Consequently many developing countries became locked in a cycle of debt that they could not escape and this contributed to rising food insecurity and appalling rates of child mortality in these countries. As we have seen, even when debts are cancelled or reduced many countries are still unable to escape poverty as austerity measures alone are not enough to support recovery and they are subject to institutional control in other ways such as through tied aid (aid that must be spent in the country providing it or a small group of nominated countries) and policies that are dictated by the World Bank and the IMF giving rise to a form of neocolonialism.

There is an underlying assumption by rich countries that it is in the best interests of poor countries for them to integrate into the existing international economic order. In order to do this they need to develop their 'export baskets' which typically contain cheap, raw products (e.g. iron) and develop the capability to manufacture connected, finished, sophisticated products (e.g. cars) which will enable economic growth (Felipe et al, 2010). The World Trade Organization (WTO) is an international body that deals with the rules of trade between countries. Part of its mission statement is to ensure a level playing field for all and it has recently pledged to offer more leniency to developing countries and make their needs a priority. Despite this it has been plagued with criticism such as the accusation that it pays large subsidies to rich world farmers which has created barriers for small farmers who are being forced out of business and into increased levels of poverty. The battle over intellectual property rights has also been well documented with the WTO's decision to protect the rights

of the large pharmaceuticals to make profits resulting in the inability of governments in many developing countries to be able to afford or make affordable versions of medicines that would provide lifesaving treatments for their populations. Consequently, the WTO along with the IMF and World Bank are frequently accused of pushing through free market policies that serve the financial interests of their major stakeholders; the USA, Japan and the European countries of Germany, France and the UK, sometimes at great cost to people living in poverty in developing nations (Stiglitz, 2003).

According to George (1976) the world has enough resources to support a much larger population than it has now but:

“Unfortunately for the millions of people who go hungry, the problem is not a technical one...Whenever and wherever they live, rich people eat first, they eat a disproportionate amount of the food there is and poor ones rarely rise in revolt against this most basic of oppressions.” (George, 1976:23)

She cites the example of Goldman Sachs, a US based global investment banking firm which shared its profits of 2.2 billion dollars among its 161 partners, whilst Tanzania, a developing country in East Africa, had to share its 2.2 billion dollar gross national product among 25 million people. Even though the figures may now be dated George maintains that the arguments remain the same.

Bagby (2007), describes how English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, in his book *Leviathan* (1651), considers the life of the human being in his natural state without government or the social contracts that structure civil society and describes such a life as one which is lived in fear of death and danger: “...solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”, a characterization that Amartya Sen (2009) attributes to those that live in extreme poverty today. According to Hobbes, in order to avoid this state of being, individuals must sacrifice some rights in order to secure the protection of the sovereign power and subsequently any abuses of this power cannot be resisted. Pogge (2001) agrees with this stating that people who are preoccupied with the daily struggle for food, in many cases stunted and illiterate, do not have the means to resist their rulers and therefore become subject to oppressive practices which prevent them from changing their situations. The global neoliberal economic system we have now which is based on free markets, free trade, deregulation and privatization, is designed by the rich, for

the rich. The radical inequalities that now exist are caused and maintained by three main conditions; the legacy of colonization, the impact of shared institutions which affect the circumstances of poor people through trade, loans, military aid, exports etc., and the widespread exclusion of people from their share of natural resources. Even where countries have corrupt governments in power, their continuing ability to rule often depends on loans provided by the World Bank and IMF in the full knowledge that funds will be diverted to buy the weapons needed to maintain power. In other words, we in the North are causally implicated in the situations of those living in poverty in the South and therefore have a collective responsibility for these human rights violations. Today, Pogge continues, there is a new chapter in the global book of poverty because today poverty is completely avoidable. Sachs (2006) agrees believing that global poverty can be eradicated by 2025 if wealthy nations urgently increase the quantity and quality of aid to poor countries. For Pogge, however, eradicating poverty is not a matter of charity; it is a matter of justice, and reform of the global mechanisms and institutions that create and perpetuate inequalities and oppression is one of the biggest factors needed to achieve this.

Minujin & Nandy (2012) propose the case for a human rights rather than a needs based approach to addressing child poverty not least because human rights frameworks offer internationally agreed standards for living which the presence of child poverty directly contravenes. Although children's rights are often criticized on the basis that they reflect and promote a global view of childhood from a predominantly liberal Western perspective, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has been ratified by all the countries in the world with the exception of the US and Somalia indicating that there are some universal values and a well defined consensus on what is needed to live a decent and dignified human life. By implication, the Convention places obligations on nation states to examine the relationship between child and state and by extension the global economic structures that perpetuate child poverty. It offers the potential for the Convention to be used to hold both governments and key international institutions to account for failing to protect children from the effects of extreme poverty.

[Start box here]

What should early childhood practitioners do about child poverty in developing nations?[B]

Try to reflect critically on this question and produce a reasoned response. The following questions may help you to do this:

What assumptions is your argument based on?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of your argument?

How reliable is the information that supports your argument?

What ideas and theories inform your argument and are they consistent with each other?

What are the logical conclusions and implications of your line of reasoning?

[End box here]

Conclusions [A]

Pogge has convinced me that there has to be a fundamental shift in the institutional structures of our global society if child poverty is to end. I do not accept personal causal responsibility for the many human rights violations inflicted on the countries and peoples of the South because I did not have a choice in the economic system I was born into any more than poverty stricken children in developing countries did. However, I believe that it is unjust that these children continue to suffer at the hands of an economic system many would say I benefit from (I would not necessarily agree that I benefit from this system, but I will leave this argument for another time) and therefore I have a moral responsibility to try to change it. If Western economies do not respect human rights then we are all at risk of violations, not just those in developing countries. Maybe what is needed is collective action at global level; perhaps a democratically elected world government would at least ensure some coordinated working between the nations of the world although, of course, there are many objections to this idea including that it would make the existence of many cultures more difficult and it would be impossible for citizens to leave if they were unhappy. If early childhood practitioners are concerned with protecting children's rights then it is not unreasonable to expect that they should work towards a system of institutional reform. According to Nagel (2005) theories of global justice are still embryonic and therefore perhaps the most useful thing that many early childhood practitioners, policy makers and academics can do is to recognise the importance of the issue of child poverty, keep thinking and talking about it and start trying to alter the perception that alleviating poverty is merely a good cause that they might or might not contribute to.

On the basis that any proper solution to global inequalities is a long way off, I am also convinced that some form of humanitarian assistance is needed in order to help people who are suffering now. I have already countered Hardin's argument with Roslings view that saving children's lives now will not mean that the population increases and in fact will ensure that it continues to decrease. In any case, it is difficult to think of any situation where it is morally acceptable to let thousands of children die every day. Singers argument that we should donate to the point of marginal utility rests on the idea that those who donate will have to take into account that most people will choose not to donate so the amount of money needed to lift people in the developing world out of poverty will have to be raised by relatively few people in affluent countries; if all people with money to spare donated something, nobody would be required to reduce themselves to marginal utility. If this donation was worked into current taxation systems and adjusted according to income level it would involve very little impact on current lifestyles in affluent countries. However, in the absence of effective collective action at a global level it is difficult to see how any donation, which comes with no strings attached and is sensitive to local needs and culture, can do any real harm.

Recommended reading [3]

Penn, H (2005) *Unequal Childhoods: Young Children's Lives in Poor Countries*. Abingdon. Routledge

A detailed consideration of child poverty and inequalities in childhood both within and between nations with a focus on case studies in four particular countries: Kazakhstan, Swaziland, India and Brazil.

Minujin, A & Nandy, S (2012) *Global Child Poverty and Well-Being. Measurement, Concepts, Policy and Action*. Bristol. Policy Press

A comprehensive and thoughtful analysis of the issue of child poverty and the way forward, with contributions from many of the key writers in the field.

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