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Altruism in the International Environment

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ALTRUISM IN THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

LEA BRILMAYER¹

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My topic is foreign aid, certain of the attitudes that we have towards foreign aid, and what if any moral grounding those attitudes might have. Foreign aid right now is in the news. While it is likely that the most drastic proposals to slash the foreign aid budget will be defeated, there is no denying that some fairly drastic measures are on the table and are being taken rather seriously. Regardless of what happens in Congress this year, and regardless of what our president decides to do about any measures that Congress does adopt, the issue is likely to crop up as important during the next presidential election. While far from the only touchy issue on the contemporary political agenda, American foreign aid seems to strike a raw public nerve.² What nerve is this, and why is it so raw?

We could, perhaps, chalk the whole reaction against foreign aid up to simple public mean spiritedness, and to the political posturing that caters to it. There's plenty of both to go around. But there is probably also something else at stake. The public mood that we are experiencing now is a close cousin of the problem of so-called "compassion fatigue." Compassion fatigue occurs when those who are ordinarily sensitive and caring stop being sensitive and caring out of a sense of futility. It is the fatigue of Sisyphus, who was perpetually doomed to roll a large rock up a hill only to have the rock then roll back down. Americans now have little confidence in foreign aid programs. They are inclined to give up on

¹Benjamin F. Butler Professor, New York University School of Law. The author wishes to thank Liam Murphy, Thomas Pogge, Martin Shapiro, and Pippa Tubman for their contributions; and also the Law and Jurisprudence Colloquium at N.Y.U. Law School for a rewarding opportunity to discuss this paper. Research support was generously supplied by the N.Y.U. Law School and in particular by the Filomen D'Agostino and Max E. Greenberg Faculty Research Fund. All rights reserved. Professor Brilmayer participated in the Sixtieth Cleveland-Marshall Fund Lecture given on September 21, 1995, at Cleveland-Marshall College of Law.

²According to one newspaper article, polls consistently "show that sixty to eighty percent of Americans oppose foreign aid." Tom Carter, *Small Cost Doesn't Prevent Big Attacks on Foreign Aid*, THE WASHINGTON TIMES, Nov. 6, 1994, at A1.

the whole enterprise because they see it as an endless process of bailing out corrupt dictatorships in countries where the birth rate is high, the agricultural and manufacturing potential is low, and an interminable series of droughts and wars pushes populations from a precarious position into an intolerable one.

This ought to be a golden opportunity for international legal philosophers to participate in public discussion. International poverty, and what to do about it, has been a perennial topic among those who care about the theory of international relations and the moral issues that it raises. But international moral theory has a tendency to see the issue simply as a question of allocating resources: do "we" have to share what we have with "them"? It is assumed that the reason that we don't want to is that we want to keep our money for ourselves. The philosophical interest in international wealth redistribution falls roughly speaking into three categories. The first interest concerns the question of *altruism*; whether we have a duty to share with others. The second, related, concern involves questions of *partiality*: whether our altruism ought to be directed to the poor in our own country as opposed to the poor in other countries.³ Third is a question of *demandingness*; what significance to attach to the fact that if we took our responsibilities seriously it would require us to make very great sacrifices in our current standard of living.⁴

There is another question, though, which comes closer to what I think is bothering many people, and which returns us to the problem of compassion fatigue. The pessimistic mood of foreign aid's opponents reflects a sense of futility about the ability of some foreign aid recipients ever to get themselves back on their feet.⁵ This, the problem of achieving eventual self reliance, is the phenomenon that I want to investigate below. If indeed it is the case that some nations will always be dependent on foreign aid, does this matter? It should be immediately evident that this question has a direct parallel in the domestic welfare debate, where a movement is currently afoot to impose definite time

³This question is sometimes facetiously summed up with the characterization of international aid as a process by which money from poor people in rich countries is collected and given to rich people in poor countries.

There has been much debate on the question of whether national borders ought to matter in wealth redistribution schemes. See, e.g., Oldenquist, *Loyalties*, 79 JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY (1982); Judith Lichtenberg, *National Boundaries and Moral Boundaries: A Cosmopolitan View*, in PETER BROWN & HENRY SHUE, BOUNDARIES: NATIONAL AUTONOMY AND ITS LIMITS (1981); CHARLES BEITZ, COSMOPOLITAN IDEALS AND NATIONAL SENTIMENT, JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY (1983); SAMUEL SCHEFFLER, FAMILIES, NATIONS AND STRANGERS: THE LINDLEY LECTURE (1994).

⁴Liam Murphy, *The Demands of Beneficence*, 22 PHIL. & PUB. AFF. 267 (1993).

⁵Mark Matthews, *Does Foreign Aid Help? Some Claim It May Hurt*, BALTIMORE SUN, Dec. 18 1994 at 1A (citing objections by American conservatives to the effect that U.S. aid creates dependency.) Senator Mike McConnell was quoted as saying, "I can't think of a single country, not one, that has graduated from foreign aid." *Id.* There are, however, prominent counter examples; Europe was a major recipient of foreign aid at the end of the Second World War; South Korea was, as well. See *infra* note 21.

limits on welfare eligibility on the grounds that it should not be possible to make a "career" off of welfare.⁶

I want to investigate the distinctive nature of the self reliance problem by comparing some of our attitudes towards foreign aid with our attitudes towards spending money on the environment. It is an interesting comparison in several respects. Like foreign aid, environmental spending involves a mix of altruistic and instrumental motives. Like foreign aid, commitments to spending on the environment are sizable and potentially open ended. Unlike foreign aid, however, we do not have a sense that there is something morally unfortunate about an indefinite commitment to spending for sewage treatment or air quality controls. These are costs that we would prefer not to have to pay, but they are morally neutral. The reason, I argue, is that they do not implicate self reliance.

Development professionals will find nothing novel with the suggestion that eventual self reliance ought to be an important goal of foreign aid. Although trite to development professionals, however, self reliance is a difficult concept for international moral theorists to explain. In attempting to show that international wealth redistribution is a moral obligation, as opposed to voluntary charity, moral theorists have tended to emphasize the poor's entitlement to resources currently held by wealthy countries. If such entitlements exist, however, it is not clear why we should morally regret the necessity for foreign assistance. By insisting on the existence of such entitlements international theorists cut themselves loose from ordinary moral intuitions about the desirability of self reliance, intuitions that are common not only in contemporary American debates about foreign aid but among recipients of foreign aid themselves.

It is reasonable to have moral reservations about foreign aid. But clear-sighted identification of what these moral reservations are does not propel us to the conclusion that foreign aid should be eliminated. It is important to keep in mind that there are three states of affairs to consider, rather than two. In order of moral preference, the optimal situation is one in which all nations are self reliant. The worst is the one in which large numbers of people are suffering greatly. And foreign aid occupies a position in the middle; it is second to self reliance, but better than mass starvation. The debate should not proceed as though we could, by cutting off foreign aid, move directly from our second choice to our first. Instead, we may find ourselves with the least desirable alternative. But by the same token, we should not ignore that fact that continued dependence on foreign assistance is distinctly undesirable.

Finally, there are ways to craft foreign policy that would do a better job at encouraging self reliance than our foreign policies do now. Some of these have to do with the way we structure foreign aid and others do not. We should be looking for these and I will conclude with some suggestions.

⁶See, e.g., Leslie Phillips, *Senate on Welfare: No Longer "A Right,"* USA TODAY, Sept. 20, 1995, at 5A; Kimberly J. McLarin, *For The Poor, Defining Who Deserves What*, N.Y. TIMES, Sept. 17, 1995, § 4 (Magazine) at 4.

I. OUR INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

If the current debate over foreign aid is about nothing other than money, then Americans are very small minded indeed. James Gustave Speth of the United Nations Development Program recently pointed out that the contribution of each American to that agency is roughly equivalent to the price of a can of cat food;⁷ yet in the current political climate U.N.D.P. funding is in serious danger of being drastically curtailed. Part of the problem undoubtedly is that Americans are unaware of how small a contribution we are actually making to international development; surveys consistently demonstrate that Americans think foreign aid is a very much larger portion of the federal budget than it actually is.⁸ The very fact that Americans consistently make this mistake is suggestive of the possibility that larger symbolic issues lurk in the shadows, for our consistently mistaken empirical beliefs call out for an explanation that the actual state of the world cannot provide. More directly to the point, however, if all that was at stake was the extent of American altruism, one would not expect that Americans would be as willing as they are to commit to spending money to protect or clean up the environment.

The amounts of money currently being spend on environmental protection and clean up dwarf the size of the foreign aid budget.⁹ To appreciate the true

⁷James Gustav Speth, *Foreign Aid for the Price of Cat Food: From Job Creation to Clean Water, Helping Others is Helping Us*, WASHINGTON POST, Aug. 6, 1995, at 66.

⁸Barbara Crossette, *Foreign Aid Budget: Quick How Much? Wrong*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 27, 1995, at A6; Carter, *supra* note 1; *Reform Foreign Aid*, editorial, CHRISTIAN SCI. MONITOR, Sept. 21, 1993, at 19 [hereinafter *Reform Foreign Aid*].

Both the New York Times article and the one from the Herald Tribune cited a University of Maryland poll in which 75 percent of respondents agreed that the United States spent too much on foreign aid. The median figure cited as an estimate for how much of the U.S. budget went to foreign aid was 15 percent. The true figure, as calculated in the Times article, is about one percent. "When asked about an 'appropriate' expenditure for aid, respondents to the January poll said about 5 percent of the budget, or about five times what is spend now." Crossette, *supra*.

According to the Washington Times article, this totals about 45 dollars a year for the average American family. Carter, *supra* note 2. As much as 70 percent of that aid is spent in the United States, going to farmers, aid contractors, and others for work done overseas. *Id.* The Christian Science Monitor article cited the figure of two percent of federal outlays, but it is not clear whether this calculation excluded military aid (as did the other surveys). *Reform Foreign Aid, supra*.

⁹If only the most narrowly focused federal government spending is taken into account, this may not be the case. In 1994, the EPA spent \$6,436,000,000 while the federal government spent \$7,714,000,000 on international development and humanitarian assistance. CONGRESSIONAL QUARTERLY, Feb. 11, 1995, at 427 and 429. However, these figures do not take into account governmental spending on the environment other than that undertaken by the EPA (for example, spending by the military to reduce pollution at military bases, or construction of sewage treatment plants by local governments). More importantly, however, much of the environmental spending is government mandated but privately incurred (for example, installation of catalytic converters on automobiles). My thanks to Julie Books for generously bringing these figures to my attention.

costs of environmental protection, of course, we must take into account not only direct costs such as expenditures on cleaning toxic waste sites and building sewage treatment plants but indirect costs such as the higher prices we pay for consumer goods that are less environmentally harmful. Our expensive environmental legislation ranges from the Endangered Species Act to Superfund to mining reclamation regulations to the Clean Water Act to the phasing out of chemicals harmful to the ozone layer to laws encouraging recycling. The point is not that we should not be spending money on such things, or even that they ought to have a lower priority than foreign assistance. I am strongly in favor of environmental protection legislation in general, even when it costs money. My point, instead, is that our willingness to spend on our natural environment contrasts sharply with our resentment of spending on our international human environment.

For in the most literal sense possible, after all, the other nations of the world—rich and poor—are part of our international environment. "Environment" means an entity's surroundings; the physical and social context in which it operates. When we speak of "environmentalism" what we normally have in mind is our natural environment, but all of the reasons that we take our natural environment into account have analogs in our human environment as well. What we do affects our environment, and these effects in turn influence the things that then affect us. The fact that what we do affects others gives rise to an altruistic or idealistic concern for our environment; the fact that these effects in turn have consequences for us gives rise to an instrumental concern.

The altruistic or idealistic component of our concern for the environment involves an awareness and interest in other people, creatures, and natural features of the landscape in their own right. Whether one thinks of the natural environment—the plants and animals that surround us, or their physical habitat—or of the international human environment—the other countries of the world—our actions have environmental impact. These may be good or bad. When we have concern about the well being of other people and creatures simply from a wish to do no harm, or to do some good, this intrinsic interest in the environment is based on altruistic motives.

In contrast to this altruistic concern with the impact of our activities on others, one might care about the environment because of the consequences that it has for us. One might, for instance, take the position that the extinction of species only matters because of their potential economic benefits (such as their ability to attract ecotourism or to introduce us to hitherto unknown chemical

Regardless of whether one is thinking of environmental or aid expenditures, one might also wish to take into account voluntary assumption of extra costs. Thus, instead of comparing the amount one is required to spend on environmental protection to the amount that is spent out of tax dollars on foreign aid, one might compare the amounts that Americans choose to spend on the environment to the amount that Americans choose to spend on humanitarian work overseas. Thus, one would include donations to the Sierra Club and extra costs voluntarily incurred to promote recycling or dolphin-friendly tuna (when calculating environmental costs) and donations to Oxfam or church groups (when calculating foreign assistance costs).

compounds with desirable medicinal properties.) If we cut down the rain forests, we will be depriving ourselves of a valuable resource in the long run. Similarly, if we pollute our water or air supply, or deplete the ozone layer, we are destroying the very basis of life. The harm we do to our environment will come back to haunt us.

The same is true with our human environment. Careless or self serving foreign policy is likely in the long run to hurt us as much as it hurts our neighbors. Providing training and weapons to military dictators or terrorists can be a very shortsighted policy. Those who we trained in Afghanistan have since turned their weapons on the West; our support for the Shah of Iran led in the long run to countless problems from the regime that supplanted him; and the same was true with our allegiance to corrupt governments in South Vietnam and Nicaragua.¹⁰ This is not to say that long run self interest and morality will always coincide; it would be nice if that were true, but it isn't. Our political, as well as our natural, environment can absorb a good deal of abuse without turning on us, and conversely sometimes well intentioned actions backfire. The point is merely that whatever we do to the people and creatures around us may eventually have an effect on us; and interest in what our effect on others is likely to be has instrumental as well as altruistic value.

The sensibilities involved in a concern for the natural and the human environment are therefore somewhat analogous. Partiality (whether the obligations that we have to help extend to those who are unlike us) is as much a philosophical issue in the one context as in the other. In neither case is it possible to dismiss the concern simply by pointing out that "they" (Rwandans, Bangladeshis, whales or redwood trees) are different from "us". Both the instrumental and the intrinsic interest remain. And in both cases the financial commitment necessary to solve problems is considerable—both raise issues of "demandingness", to borrow the favored philosophical term. Yet while it would be politically foolish to write off the environment publicly, in some quarters at least it is considered politically advantageous to cut oneself loose from concern for other countries. Some politicians say "why should we take care of the Mozambicans, or Bosnians, or Somalians—let them take care of themselves" although few would say outright "if the dolphins can't make it on their own, its not our problem".¹¹ Even those politicians who actually care very little about environmentalism find it advantageous to pay it lip service. Disregard for the rest of the world, in contrast, is considered respectable. There is even a respectable word for it: isolationism.

¹⁰On the continuing problems created by the freedom fighters we helped fund in Afghanistan, see e.g., Christopher Harmon, *Sudan's Neighbors Accuse it of Training Terrorists*, CHRISTIAN SCI. MONITOR, Dec. 19, 1995, at 19; Daniel Schorr, *Afghan Ties Come back to Haunt Us*, USA TODAY, Feb. 26, 1995, at 11A.

¹¹But some popular politicians survived unscathed despite notorious insensitivity to the environment; see for example Ronald Reagan's well known comment that acid rain was caused by trees. See William Safire, *Lives vs. Trees*, N.Y. TIMES, May 16, 1991 at 23 (citing Reagan's remark that acid rain is caused by trees).

We feel responsible, in other words, for what happens to our natural environment but not for what happens to our international human environment. In part, the added responsibility simply reflects stronger causal connections, for if we dump sewage into our bays and estuaries there is a direct causal link between the harm and our actions, whereas if Bangladeshis starve the causal link (if any) is more attenuated.¹² But this cannot be the whole story, for Americans rally to save dolphins caught in the nets of Mexican fisherman and to protest French nuclear testing in the South Pacific. To say that we feel responsible for the natural environment is simply to state the conclusion; it is to say that when something bad happens, we feel a duty to do something to correct the situation. When the natural environment is at stake, we share responsibility with the Mexicans and French simply because we are human beings. When international poverty is at issue, the Bangladeshis are on their own.

Clearly the difference lies somehow in the fact that dolphins are animals, redwood trees are plants, and Bangladeshis and Bosnian's are (only?) people.¹³ This does seem a bit perverse; after all, it might be thought that other human beings deserve more concern than plant and animal species, rather than less. But intuitively it is the fact that they are people that encourages residents of wealthy countries to leave with them the responsibility for taking care of themselves. To say that other human beings are ultimately responsible for themselves is not to say that when they are poor the reason must be that they are lazy or stupid. The world's poor are anything but lazy, and even in this most cold hearted of political climates we do not hear the argument made that Bangladeshis would be as well off as we if only they would work a little harder. Instead, two other arguments are commonly employed to explain why international assistance is misconceived.

II. OF CHUMPS AND RATHOLES

Opposition to foreign aid is commonly fed on one or both of two related fears. The first is that we are being taken advantage of by cynical Third World strongmen who divert international assistance to purposes other than what it was intended for. We are, we fear, being taken for chumps. The second is the possibility that aid money, even if used for its intended purposes, will not solve the problem. Ten or twenty years down the road, we will find ourselves in

¹²There are, of course, causal connections between economic conditions abroad and American actions; my point is not to deny that they exist but only to note that they are less direct. The causal connections include the impact on Third World nations of colonialism; the economic devastation caused by political support for corrupt military regimes; and the physical destruction brought about by U.S. military support for insurgencies. In some circumstances, such causal connections are direct (e.g. the destruction of Vietnam brought about by U.S. supported war). But it is hard to argue that all Third World poverty is the result of Western imperialism.

¹³Compare Edward Luttwak, *If Bosnians Were Dolphins...Armed Assistance to Bosnia-Herzegovina*; 96 COMMENTARY 27 (1993).

exactly the same situation as we are today; poor countries will be just as poor and the need for our assistance will be just as great (or even greater, given population increases.) This might be called the "rathole" problem, in honor of the rather unattractive metaphor that giving international aid is like "throwing money down a rathole." Neither has a precise parallel in the context of the natural environment. The first of these problems is of tremendous practical importance but not of such great philosophical subtlety; the second is more philosophically interesting, and we will deal with it at greater length in the sections that follow. But both are arguments that must be taken seriously by anyone who wishes to understand or influence American views on international assistance.

It is easy to understand Americans' fear of being taken for chumps. It cannot be denied that some dictators, and their cronies, have been made very rich indeed off international assistance. Of course, the problem of corruption is not limited either to the foreign aid context or to assistance by Americans. It is easy to think of domestic cases in which government moneys have been siphoned off through corruption or mismanagement. And in the international context, unscrupulous individuals are equally adept at skimming off large sums of money from countries other than the United States. Such activities are not limited to grant assistance, moreover. Politically powerful individuals have made themselves rich off of international loans, not only denying their countrymen and women the benefits of those loans, but also leaving them with a crushing burden of repayment.

Sometimes the opportunities for corruption are limited to those at the top of the political hierarchy (and their families and cronies); on other occasions, international aid provokes an equal opportunity free-for-all. One thinks for example of the difficulties of providing food aid in Somalia and Rwanda.¹⁴ In Somalia, food aid was stolen (and sometimes later resold) by gangs of thugs who operated virtually with impunity. International organizations were compelled to buy the gangs' cooperation in order to protect their personnel and generally to be able to function. In the Rwandan refugee camps (especially those across the border in Zaire) food aid was appropriated by members of the defeated Rwandan army, who used it to consolidate their power in the camps. You don't need to be at the top of the food chain to be corrupt; you only need to be higher up on it than the people you prey on.

The anger this provokes in those who supply the aid is threefold. First, well intentioned assistance is not reaching people who need it very much; second, it is being used instead to support brutality against those very helpless people; and third, we feel unable to do anything about it, and the responsible individuals know that very well. By holding those who need our assistance hostage, the powerful are holding us hostage as well. We are hostage to our

¹⁴See, e.g., Keith Richbur, *Food Aid Failing to Reach Rwandans; Malnutrition Rises as Thugs Pilfer, Divert Camps' Supplies*, THE WASHINGTON POST, Nov. 22, 1994, at A1; Adams Lusekelo, *Rwandan 'Mafia' Selling Refugee Food Aid*, REUTERS, July 12, 1994; Michael Maren, *Donated Food Helps to Corrupt Somalia*, NEWSDAY, Dec. 23, 1992, at 87.

good intentions, being unwilling simply to abandon those who we want to help to their predators. But it is precisely the fact that these predators are relying on our good intentions to keep us from folding up shop and walking away that makes us feel like chumps.

There is something of an analogy in domestic aid policy. If the bugaboo of international aid is the corrupt dictator or his thugs, the bugaboo of domestic assistance programs is the welfare mother who drives a Cadillac.¹⁵ Set aside for the moment the question of whether such people exist, or how many.¹⁶ What matters here is the level of anger that even an occasional case of this sort provokes. The proverbial woman who collects checks under several different names, has large numbers of children out of wedlock, does nothing all day but watch television and spends her food stamps on steak makes the hard working taxpayer's blood boil for many of the same reasons as the corrupt dictator who spends money on mansions, expensive clothing and fancy travel while the country's poor live in shacks and pick through the garbage.

Indeed, the domestic aid context has those who play the role of hostages, just as the international aid context does. Think of the various aid programs targeted at the children of the poor. Here—as in the international aid context—the assistance program depends on the cooperation of those who have power over the intended recipients. In the international context, this means those with physical power over the poor (typically the government, but also sometimes private thugs) and in the domestic context this means the parents of the children. Those with power over the needy, it is feared, can use those needs to extort assistance money and then appropriate it for themselves. The domestic fear is that in our desire to help poor children, we will hand resources over to those who will divert it to other purposes.

Imagine a lifeboat full of people in which a few are strong and have weapons while the others are weak and defenseless. We want to throw a packet of food and blankets into the lifeboat, but we know that as soon as we do that it will be grabbed by the single individual with the gun. We know that the more food and water we throw into the lifeboat, the more we strengthen the hand of those able to grab it. Not only will they be physically stronger because they have the food, but they will be able to use their superior control over resources we have provided to manipulate the rest. Short of entering the lifeboat itself—breaking up or otherwise interfering with the family unit, or helping to overthrow a corrupt government—what is a moral person to do?

¹⁵Cheryl Wetzstein, *Brooklyn Welfare Queen's Scam Sets Record for Aliases, 'Kids,' Cash Stole*, THE WASHINGTON POST, May 21, 1994, at A1 (describing one particular instance of welfare fraud).

¹⁶Richard Morin, *'Cadillac Welfare Mother' Defies Facts and Compassion*, PLAIN DEALER, May 1, 1994, at 8C. The author cited a survey in which 65 percent of those interviewed responded that welfares encourages women to have larger families than they would otherwise have had, even though the birth rate among women on public assistance was actually lower than that in the population at large. *Id.*

Yet the lifeboat analogy illustrates that what is at stake is primarily a practical and strategic rather than primarily an ethical problem. What is needed is strategic solutions; ways to deliver assistance that are not vulnerable to being appropriated by the unscrupulous. Relief agencies sometimes deliver food aid in cooked form, rather than in large sacks of grain. Obviously, this is an inconvenient way to do business. But cooked food cannot be stolen, stored or sold the way that sacks of grain can. What is required, basically, is the ingenuity to find ways to target more precisely the persons who we really want to help. And this requires, among other things, the ability and willingness to distinguish between countries that are ruled by thugs and those with legitimate and caring governments, and to act on this distinction even when the thuggish ones are willing to cooperate with us on other matters.

We said a moment ago that the fear of having one's good intentions abused (the "chump" problem) was only one of two legitimate concerns that plague American attitudes towards foreign aid. The other is the "rathole" problem; the fear that no matter what we do to help, the situation will not improve and we will be stuck in a perpetual cycle of dependence. Sometimes by "throwing money down a rathole" (or, "throwing good money after bad") critics of foreign aid mean to be referring to the corruption or inefficiencies they find endemic to our foreign policies. This is the issue just addressed; it is a practical rather than a theoretical problem. But there is another meaning to the rathole metaphor, which presents more serious moral problems.

This other meaning concerns whether the long run impact of the aid program will be to remove the need for any foreign aid at all. What some fear about foreign aid is that it must be of indefinite duration; that year after year for the foreseeable future the need will continue. The aid will have no lasting effect on reducing poverty; it will merely permit a minimum level of existence for the world's poor on a day-to-day basis. Ten or twenty years from now, the same countries will still be poor, and equally in need of aid. In fact, given population growth and environmental degradation, the need for aid will probably have increased. So runs the rathole logic.

There is a close analog in the American fear of "becoming bogged down" in Haiti, Yugoslavia, or Somalia.¹⁷ It is bad enough that American lives are put at risk in intervening militarily in these countries (we think). But the greater problem is that we fear that there will be no natural end to intervention. Five or ten years down the road we will still have our troops there, maintaining an uncertain peace at substantial cost. The reason is that civil order and good

¹⁷The evidence on what Americans want out of foreign aid policy is contradictory, with some indications that the public is not isolationist but many politicians catering to the position that the United States cannot become "the world's policeman." Compare, e.g., Thomas Friedman, *Global Mandate: The Public Isn't Isolationist*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 5, 1995 (Magazine), at 15; Jon Stewardt, *Polls Dispel Myth of 'Isolationism'*, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, Mar. 12, 1995, at 6 with Mark Shaffer, *Boisterous Crowd Greet Gramm in Phoenix*, THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC, Feb. 26, 1995, at A18 (citing campaign position of Phil Gramm); Steven Greenhouse, *Conflict on G.O.P. Agenda Intense in Capitol Meetings*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 29, 1995, at 10 (position of Lee Hamilton).

government (like economic development) cannot be imposed from the outside. Whatever our willingness to bear the cost for a short time, it is bearable only because biting the bullet and bearing the cost will bring the situation to a reasonable solution.

There are many empirical uncertainties involved in making such projections, and there is likely to be tremendous room for disagreement over whether the situation in any one country, given adequate amounts of aid, would be likely to improve in ways sustainable without continuing international assistance. In order to present the issue in its starkest form, then, we might do well to take it in the form of hypothetical example. Readers may recognize various aspects of this hypothetical example from countries that they know around the world; and I have tried to make the example sufficiently plausible that resemblances to actual existing countries will be unavoidable. But the example is decidedly not based on any particular real world nation, and I am deliberately not representing that it is an accurate description of the general state of affairs.

III. THE CASE OF THE QWERTY

Consider the hypothetical nation of Qwertyland, the country where the Qwerty live. It is an arid country, with a low proportion of arable land and a population that exists largely on subsistence agriculture and herding. The population is rather too large for the country to sustain by these means, and it is increasing rather rapidly. There is little manufacturing and a very poor infrastructure. Currently the average life expectancy is around fifty, the literacy rate is well below one half, and the average income hovers around two hundred dollars a year. Tuberculosis, polio, AIDS, and malaria are endemic. For as long as history relates, large numbers of Qwerty children have died at a young age, both from these diseases and from intestinal infections stemming from the lack of clean water. There are no known mineral deposits and the country does not have a particularly strategic geographical location (e.g. it has no good ports, access to markets, or places for military installations). This is the sort of country that one would expect to be poor, and Qwertyland is.

Qwertyland does not have the financial resources for a decent public health system. In particular, it would like to immunize its children against preventable diseases such as polio and diphtheria, but it cannot afford to. Public health officials from other nations and international organizations have visited Qwertyland and estimated the cost to provide every Qwerty child with a nutritionally adequate diet and a minimum level of health care. Their estimate is that it would cost fifty million dollars a year. The Qwerty would continue in pretty much their traditional way of life, but mobile clinics would visit every Qwerty village twice a year to immunize children and monitor nutritional needs.

The United States is considering an aid program that would contribute the necessary fifty million dollars; and given that Qwertyland currently has a reasonably honest and competent government, it feels confident that the money will be well spent. However, aid officials in the United States can find no reason to believe that income levels will rise in Qwertyland over the next few decades so that the Qwerty will be able to pay for the medical supplies that they need. Larger sums probably cannot be raised through existing agriculture and Qwertyland does not seem to have any natural advantages in large scale

manufacturing. Indeed, aid officials reluctantly acknowledge that the greater likelihood is that occasional drought and insect plagues will make crops worse, rather than better, in some years; and projected increases in population growth will make the contemplated medical assistance even more expensive.

Compare the Qwerty to the Poi. Like the Qwerty, the Poi are currently ruled by a reasonably competent and democratic government with good probability of political stability. The Poi are also poor, but mostly because for the last decade the country was immersed in civil war. Prior to the outbreak of war, Poi was self sufficient agriculturally and its standard of living had been gradually improving. Poi has an excellent port and now that the war is over it is being prepared for reopening. Once the country's devastated infrastructure is rebuilt, the country's economic prospects look good, although it will take a long time for it to reach a development level that we would characterize as comfortable.

Certainly there are practical reasons to favor the Poi over the Qwerty if there is only money enough for foreign assistance to one of them. If we help the Poi get back on their feet, then we will be free to go to the aid of the Qwerty, whereas if we start by giving money to the Qwerty we will never find a natural place to stop. Also, if we help the Poi now, then once they are economically better off they may be in a good position to help other nations in turn. Helping the Poi looks like a good investment. Helping the Qwerty is undoubtedly good from a humanitarian point of view, but doesn't have the same practical advantages.

But I am not primarily concerned with the practical problems. For one thing, it is far from clear in our present circumstances that there is only money to help a single country. Neither am I concerned primarily with what philosophers have referred to as "demandingness"; with the fact that we would have to sacrifice a very great deal in order to bring the rest of the world up to a reasonable standard of living.¹⁸ It will cost each American approximately twenty cents a year to fund the Qwerty's health program—even less, to borrow Speth's analogy, than a can of cat food. It will not destroy the traditional Qwerty way of life to supply assistance of this sort, nor will it turn the Qwerty into passive welfare dependents with no productive employment. The only way that it will change their lives is that they will be free of preventable childhood diseases. I am concerned purely and simply with the argument that there is something the matter with the Qwerty depending on us indefinitely for their health care needs.

At first it seems that the problem arises from the continuing nature of the need; from the fact that if fifty million dollars is needed this year, then fifty million dollars (at least) is going to be needed again, year after year. This seems to be the nature of the complaint that no progress is being made; it isn't doing any good, because we aren't getting anywhere closer to the point at which it won't be needed. All the money is going into present consumption. The problem with focusing on the simple fact that the money will be needed in comparable amounts every year is that there are other circumstances in which

¹⁸On this point, see Peter Singer, *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*, in *INTERNATIONAL ETHICS* (Charles Beitz ed. 1985).

it would not seem bothersome in quite the same way that the expenditures would not diminish. Compare how we see environmental problems.

Lets say that we find out that it will cost two hundred dollars to equip each new car that is manufactured with a catalytic converter that will virtually eliminate the pollutants that the car emits. The fact that we pay the price to install these devices for the next five years will in no way diminish the need to install them on cars thereafter. The need to pay the two hundred dollars per car is perpetual (assuming that we do not come up with an even cheaper way to prevent pollution in the future). Most environmental problems, in fact, are probably of the sort that require continuing solutions. Sewage treatment plants need money to operate and maintain them, as well as the occasional enlargement of capacity. A decision not to use DDT requires expenditures on more expensive or less effective chemicals as long as it remains in effect.

Think how strange it would sound if someone made the following argument. "It is a waste of money spending two hundred dollars per car to prevent air pollution. Spending that money per car does not solve the problem of air pollution; we are only going to have to keep spending that money year in, year out, for the foreseeable future. For people to spend that money to forestall the inevitable is just throwing money down a rathole." This argument would seem very strange because we take it for granted that whatever is spent at one point in time will also have to be spent later.

The difference between the case of the Qwerty and the case of catalytic converters lies in how we perceive the problem, and what would count as a solution. With catalytic converters we have solved the problem if we have found a way to reduce air pollution at an acceptable cost. With the Qwerty, there are really two problems. One is to improve the social indicators in Qwertyland; to lower infant mortality, raise life expectancy, and reduce debilitating illness. The other is to increase the Qwerty's self sufficiency; to improve the social indicators in a way that will be self sustaining once we leave. Sending them fifty million dollars every year for the indefinite future may solve the first problem, but it makes no dent in the second.

A state of affairs in which the Qwerty live longer and healthier lives is certainly morally preferable to a state of affairs in which their lives are nasty, poor, brutish and short. But to common intuition, it is morally far inferior to one in which the Qwerty can generate the currency they need to buy medicines on world markets, or can manufacture them themselves. There is something morally unfortunate about a world in which the Qwerty are perpetually dependent on outside assistance. This intuitive sense that such a world is morally unfortunate, however, is one which existing accounts of international resource inequality find hard to explain. The reason is that most existing arguments for international assistance tend to characterize assistance as a right or an entitlement.

IV. SELF SUFFICIENCY AND ENTITLEMENTS

In attempting to make as strong a case as possible in favor of providing basic assistance, international moral theorists have tended to undercut what seems intuitively obvious to most people involved in the foreign aid process—both on the sending and the receiving end. The common intuition is that it is a cause for which we should contribute. Resources are initially distributed so that some can support

themselves while others cannot; and that simply transferring wealth to the less fortunate is a distinctly second best solution. By trying to show that there is an entitlement to such redistribution simply by virtue of the fact that one is needy, international moral theorists have moved far away from common assumptions that it is much better for people to rely on the resources that they themselves have created.

There are several different ways to phrase the entitlement argument; they overlap in practice, but in theory have slightly different focuses. The first posits simply that the poor have an entitlement to something that the wealthy currently own. The claim may be founded on the simple fact that the poor are necessitous and the wealthy could assist them at no great cost. The second asserts that the poor in fact already own the resources that are currently in the hands of the wealthy, and the wealthy are wrongful in withholding those resources. The third relies on the intuition that it is morally arbitrary that rich nations possess the resources located within their borders; all of the resources of the world are in reality the property of the world in common.

The difference between the first and the second is similar to the difference between a contract and a property right. If I agree to sell you my house but then indefensibly refuse to convey it to you, you have a contractual right to it. You do not currently own the house, although you have a future right to be awarded the house by a court and therefore to come to own it. If the house has already been conveyed to you and I wrongfully refuse to move out, then your interest is a property right and not a contract right. The third is really a philosophical argument that would support either of the others. It supplies a reason for believing either that the poor currently own a fair share of the world's resources or that they have a right that those resources ought to be transferred to them. It is the version of the argument that (inspired by John Rawls' Theory of Justice) is espoused by Charles Beitz and Thomas Pogge.¹⁹

What matters here is not so much the difference between the variations on the entitlement argument, but the fact that an entitlement is claimed. If in fact such an entitlement exists, then obviously the proper thing to do is to transfer the resources or some equivalent. It can hardly be a cause for regret that the resources are transferred. And if the entitlement exists year after year into perpetuity, then the proper solution is to transfer the resources year after year. Again, the fact that the transfer goes on indefinitely into the future cannot be considered morally unfortunate.

If one accepts both of these arguments, however, it becomes rather difficult to explain why it is desirable for every nation to have the resources required for economic self sufficiency. The import of these arguments is that the nations of the world, in an important moral sense, already are self sufficient. The reason is that they either already own a fair share of the resources or are already entitled to own them. The fact that oil wells are located in Saudi Arabia or Alaska does not give any special right to their proceeds to the Saudis or the

¹⁹JOHN RAWLS, *A THEORY OF JUSTICE* (1971); THOMAS POGGE, *REALIZING RAWLS* Ch. 6 (1989); CHARLES BEITZ, *POLITICAL THEORY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS* (1979).

Americans. The poor of the world already have an entitlement to that oil, or a portion of it; it is not really a question of "redistribution" but merely of making sure that the oil, or the money that it generates, gets to its rightful owner.

The Qwerty, to return to our hypothetical, own a share of the world's oil (or diamonds, or wheat) as it comes out of the ground; in fact, even before. Thus, there is no violation of the principle of self sufficiency if we simply take the oil that is produced in Saudi Arabia, sell it, and hand the proceeds over to the Qwerty for them to use in purchasing medical supplies. It was the Qwerty's oil all along, and we are merely giving them what was rightfully theirs, just as if we were returning to the Qwerty traditional lands that had been wrongly seized by Saudi Arabia and that happened to have oil wells on it.

But whatever philosophers favoring foreign aid may be convinced of, it is hard to convince the average person of the plausibility of this intuition. Even if it is conceded that the distribution of resources is morally arbitrary and that there exists some sort of obligation to help those in need, it still seems implausible that all we are doing is delivering to the Qwerty something that they already own, and that they actually are self sufficient when they fill their needs from the proceeds of this oil. It seems that it would be morally preferable if the oil wells actually were located in Qwertyland, and that it would be nice if the Qwerty found some oil wells of their own.

Imagine that Qwertyland is adjacent to Saudi Arabia and that oil prospecting is going on along the border. The geologists doing the survey think that they have located a new oil field of vast potential; there are geological reasons to believe that it is there, but it is unclear exactly where the field is located. It could either be located in Qwertyland, or in Saudi Arabia. It seems to be that it is entirely reasonable for a morally sensitive person to hope that it is located in Qwertyland. The Saudis already have a lot of oil, and the wealth that goes with it. The Qwerty are just barely hanging on; they need the money for food, medicine, and educational projects. If philosophers are correct about the moral irrelevance of the location of assets, however, it is hard to see what difference it makes.

Perhaps the difference is a practical one; there are not now in existence adequate international institutions to make sure that the money does get distributed to the Qwerty. If the Qwerty had their own oil wells, they would feel more confident and would be able to plan their development intelligently. While certainly there are practical reasons under the current scheme of things that it is better for the Qwerty to have their own oil, though, it does not seem that solving the practical problems will relieve the Qwerty of the preference to have the oil well on their own land. Even if there were some international organization that took possession of extracted mineral deposits and distributed the proceeds in the promptest, most secure and efficient mean imaginable, the Qwerty would undoubtedly feel much better off to drill for oil and pump and sell it themselves.

Or, perhaps what matters is that if the oil is on their land, the Qwerty will get the money in the form of jobs and salaries, rather than cash payments—and having a job carries with it other advantages (personal fulfillment as well as material advantages). But this cannot be the whole story. I have been assuming that the Qwerty will retain their traditional agricultural and herding life style even if the mobile clinics are supplied by outsiders. They are not going to

simply hang around collecting welfare checks, losing both their traditional culture and their self respect in the process. Or, we might require the Saudis to give all the jobs on the new oil field to Qwerty, if we cared about the collateral benefits of job creation. It would still not feel the same as if the oil was in fact located on Qwerty soil.

In the standard philosophical terms, it is hard even to make much sense of these preferences. To traditional proponents of wealth redistribution, assets are not already "in" the hands of the individuals or countries where they happen physically to be located. The people in the country where they are located are simply serving as custodians or trustees of the resources, acting on behalf of the assets' real owners. The international distributive mechanism is simply an administrator, an accounting system that keeps track of who the rightful owners are. There is no more reason to regret this (other than possible practical costs) than to regret the fact that someone at your bank is engaged in trying to keep track of how much money is in your bank account, and to make it available to you when you need it.

I think that this is contrary to deeply held intuitions. It is contrary to the intuitions not only of people in the developed countries (whose intuitions might be brushed aside as mere rationalizations for self interest) but also, more importantly, to the intuitions of those in developing countries. I think that everyone would understand the sense in which it was desirable—and not merely as a practical matter—that the oil field turn out to be on Qwerty soil. I think that everyone can understand why it would be better for the Qwerty to generate the funds to purchase their own food and medical supplies than to receive that money as part of some international distributive scheme. It is just that existing philosophical accounts give no way to explain this intuition.²⁰

The Qwerty might very well explain their preferences in terms of Qwerty sovereignty. Partly, sovereignty means simply that they want to be able in practice to rely on receipt of the resources, so that they cannot be blackmailed (for example, by being compelled to vote a certain way in the United Nations or to hand over suspects for extradition when they do not want to). An efficient international redistributive machine might take care of this problem. But that is not all that sovereignty means. If the Qwerty were asked to choose between a world in which all nations were subject to an international redistributive scheme that moved resources from one place to another to suit shifting patterns of basic needs, and a world in which it happened that all countries had the resources necessary for effective economic development, they would recognize that the former would not preserve their sovereignty the same way that the latter would.

²⁰One cannot, of course, rule out the possibility that this attitude is simply a consequence of the existing organization of the world into sovereign states with rights to assets located on their own soil. It is possible that if the world were reorganized so that nations were just administrative units of a larger world entity with common rights to all of the world's natural resources, perhaps this intuition would disappear. Whether such a world would be a better place than the one we currently reside in is, obviously, beyond the scope of this paper.

This brings us back to our analogy to the environment. For we started by asking why we are not bothered by continuing expenditures on environmental protection, while we consider our development efforts a failure if they involve an indefinite commitment. Sending fifty million dollars per year to the Qwerty in perpetuity is "being bogged down" in Qwerty development, while spending two hundred dollars a piece on sewage treatment is just the cost of having clean water. The difference between the two, we said, had something to do with the fact that foreign aid concerns our human environment, as opposed to our natural environment. But now it should be possible to see that in fact the two situations are governed by the same principle, rather than different ones.

The common principle concerns what is the ideal that we are seeking; it is a hands off ideal that reflects respect for the independence of both the natural and the human environment. In the case of the natural environment, we are willing to spend money indefinitely to achieve the goal of not degrading the beauty of what currently exists. The environmental ideal does not mean changing the natural environment to suit our ideas of natural beauty; of eradicating creatures that are aesthetically displeasing given human tastes or of turning bramble thickets into gardens and dredging swamps for sandy beaches. It means leaving things untouched; and being willing to spend money to do that.

The analogous ideal in the context of foreign aid is a world in which each nation or society supports its own culture, using its own resources. We should ideally take a hands off approach to other nations; while we interact with them (as we do with our nature environment) we should respect their cultural identities, and not try to change them. Spending money to support other cultures for an indefinite period of time seems troubling because it is too intimate an involvement, and an asymmetric involvement at that. The ideal is that they should be independent, possessed of the integrity to pursue the ideals and objectives peculiar to them.

The difference between the two areas, however—between our human environment and our natural environment—is that competing with this hands off ideal in the context of the human environment is the sense that urgent human needs must be met. Independence is only one priority; another is making sure that people are fed, clothed, and educated. People in other countries are fellow human beings; they are the same as us, at the same time as they are "others" whose distinctiveness must be respected. Our greatest principled unease with foreign aid, I think, comes not from a desire to keep our money for ourselves but from our sense of the difficulty of striking a balance between the need to become involved and the need to maintain a distance.

V. CONSEQUENCES FOR FOREIGN AID POLICY

Some of the possibilities for improving our foreign aid regime are obvious consequences of just about any analysis of what foreign aid ought to be for. There are evident problems with directing foreign aid in ways that can easily be appropriated by corrupt dictators or economic elites; no one attaches a high priority to filling the Swiss bank accounts of such individuals. We must always be looking for ways to direct foreign aid more effectively into the hands of those persons for whom its benefits are intended; the world's poor.

The arguments that I have made here, however, suggest additional considerations that, while well known to development professionals, have not been adequately kept in mind by those with a more theoretical concern for world poverty. The first suggestion I would make is a rhetorical one: to not try to base the entire case for aid upon a one dimensionally depressing and unrelievedly apocalyptic depiction of the hopeless state of poor nations' economies. Philosophical accounts of world poverty often start with graphic statistics on malnourishment, poor health, and squalid living conditions. These are understandable given the urgency of the needs that these accounts address. But by emphasizing the extreme difficulty of some people's economic conditions, such accounts make the goal of self sufficiency seem impossibly distant. The fact that there have been substantial success stories in the history of foreign assistance is often left unnoted.²¹

In terms of practical recommendations, there is one in particular that I would like to emphasize. It is that we recognize that the single most important development assistance that we can give to other nations is to trade with them. Trade has virtually none of the undesirable dependency consequences of foreign aid. In most cases (if perhaps not in all) the countries in question are willing or even eager for investment from this nation and others. The people in developing countries by and large want jobs, not a hand out.

Some of the impediments to foreign investment have been generated by the political climates in the developing countries themselves; political rhetoric about "domination by foreign multinationals" and the history of nationalization of private industry (including foreign private industry) have not encouraged private economic development. The general suspicion of outside enterprise has led to restrictions on repatriation of profits and limitations on percentage of ownership. Other impediments include social and political unrest; corruption and inefficiencies; and poor infrastructure.

None of these explains or justifies, however, American trade restrictions on goods from other nations. The explanation for our trade restrictions lies instead in domestic political concerns, such as the desire for electoral support from powerful interest groups including trade unions and American manufacturers who fear competition from the outside.²² The purported justification is that it is unfair for workers in other countries to take away jobs from Americans; they work for very low wages and our workers cannot possibly compete.²³ Sometimes, it is added, the workers are themselves abused through unsafe

²¹ See generally, Robert Cassen (ed.) *DOES AID WORK?* 10 (Robert Cassen ed. 1994). The work briefly discusses Korea, Thailand, Brazil, Colombia and other success stories are briefly discussed.

²² On the impact of U.S. trade policy on developing nations, see *PROTECTIONISM AND WORLD WELFARE* ch. 17 (Dominick Salvatore ed. 1993).

²³ See, e.g., Jay Mazur, *NAFTA: No Gain, More Pain*, *NEWSDAY* June 2, 1993, at 85; Timothy Spence, *GATT: A World of Fear for American Labor*, *STATES NEWS SERVICE*, Nov. 23, 1994; Mark Trumbull, *American Workers Bid Adios as Jobs Go South*, *CHRISTIAN SCI. MONITOR*, Jan 3, 1995, at 11.

working conditions, employment in dangerous industries at a very young age, or compelled prison labor. Thus we should not cooperate with their exploiters by buying goods so produced.

The exploitation of prison and child labor presents us with a difficult problem, because it is not clear that prisoners or children are really working voluntarily. With regard to free adults, however, I would simply ask whether the workers themselves would welcome the "assistance" that our boycotts purport to bring. In most circumstances, they do not.²⁴ Where they do not, the argument for trade restrictions is essentially a self interested one; that we would rather preserve the jobs created by sale of products in American for American workers, even at the expense of higher prices to the American consumer and, possibly, the commercial interests of American exporters who find themselves faced with retaliatory sanctions.

What this amounts to, of course, is a compelled subsidy to American manufacturers and their employees from Americans who pay higher prices. And it contrasts in an interesting way with the compelled subsidy from American taxpayers to the world's poor that foreign aid represents. The subsidy to Americans that trade restrictions entail is disguised; it is off budget. The American consumer does not know how much extra he or she is paying for protected goods, and probably does not even know whether or not the goods he or she is buying receive trade protection. American workers whose jobs exist (or, whose salaries are as high as they are) only because of trade protection do not think in terms of welfare; they consider themselves gainfully employed.²⁵ If we opened our markets, and used the money saved on consumer goods to compensate displaced former employees, it would start to feel like welfare. Welfare creates a feeling of dependence.

Welfare, in addition, is politically visible in a way that subsidies created by trade protection are not. Overt income maintenance is vulnerable to budget cutting attacks, so that its continued existence is far from certain. Overall it is much more attractive to have a job than a check. It boosts your self esteem and is more likely in the long run to continue. But that is precisely the problem faced with developing countries that are given foreign aid, and is one of the key

²⁴This does not mean that there are no situations in which trade boycotts are welcomed. Many South African black leaders, for example, supported concerted action against South Africa trade in order to protest apartheid. Whether such protection is desired in a particular case is an empirical question, not one that can satisfactorily be answered *a priori*. Unfortunately, most American trade barrier promoters who style themselves "protectors" of the oppressed in other nations have not asked whether the oppressed in other nations actually welcome that protection.

²⁵Welfare is, to some degree, in the eye of the beholder, and even those who find themselves receiving it sometimes find it necessary to characterize the assistance differently. Compare the reactions of one worker who received financial assistance under a U.S. government program designed to alleviate the consequences of NAFTA to workers who the agreement displaced. "Lewis [the worker] does not approve of long-term welfare. But he approves of the NAFTA assistance: 'I don't think that's so much socialistic . . . It's smart.'" Trumbull, *supra* note 23.

reasons that they, also, would rather create jobs through trade. They are even more vulnerable to political hostilities than domestic workers. Foreign nationals don't vote. Foreign aid is a highly visible part of the budget, and its continued existence cannot be depended upon. And then there is the issue of dependence; the preference for self sufficiency over requiring redistribution of the wealth that others create, even if it is called an "entitlement" rather than "charity."

What is precisely at stake is the question of which group should receive the jobs, and the self sufficiency that comes with them, and which should be relegated to public assistance. The thrust of my entire argument has been that the purpose of our foreign aid policy ought, in the long run, to be promoting self sufficiency rather than simply providing a basic level of subsistence. So it should come as no surprise that I favor increasing commercial opportunities for the developing world to sell goods in American markets. I find it perverse for us to be giving foreign aid, with all of the inefficiencies and opportunities for corruption that it entails, while denying other nations an honest and fair opportunity to compete.

I realize that this solution is not going to solve all problems of foreign aid. The Qwerty, as I have described them, may not be directly benefitted by a regime of free trade, although it would definitely help the Poi. But they will be indirectly benefitted, in the sense that money spent on aid to other nations that are now self sufficient will be directed to the Qwerty; indeed, the Qwerty may qualify for assistance from some of the newly self sufficient nations that benefitted from the open U.S. trade regime. Moreover, the fact that not all problems of dependency can be met in this way does not mean that we should not solve the ones we can.

I already said that I am not saying anything that development professionals will take as novel. They already know that if you give a person a fish he or she will be happy for a day, while if you teach him or her how to fish she will be happy for a lifetime. As our trade laws show, we are not currently doing everything we can to support the self sufficiency of other nations. That ought to be our first priority, and philosophers and international moral theorists should be explaining why.

VI. CONCLUSION

There are probably those who impute bad motives to the people seen as responsible for the current regime of international aid dependence. It is possible, after all, that we do not promote self sufficiency because we do not want other nations to be strong and independent.²⁶

I am inclined toward a different explanation. It is equally possible that we have been insufficiently concerned about the problem simply through inattention and indirection. I don't think that the lack of philosophical attention

²⁶For an overview of the variety of motivations going into food aid, and a discussion of its uses as a political weapon, see Vernon Ruttan, *The Politics of U.S. Food Aid Policy: A Historical Review*, in *WHY FOOD AID?* (Vernon Ruttan ed., 1993).

to the question of dependence stems from any evil motives. I think, instead, that the reason is the urgency of concern with basic standards of living. The question of how the moral argument for basic subsistence standards fits with the moral argument for independence has simply not been addressed, perhaps because it might be thought to lend support to those who would deny that foreign aid is good at all.

Philosophically, it is difficult to explain exactly what the argument is. The argument that other nations ought ideally to be economically independent is no attempt to place the blame on those who are poor; for poverty can be a consequence of simply bad fortune (just as wealth can be a result of luck.) Neither is it an attempt to deny that moral obligations exist to help those who find themselves in dire straits; for when the goal of self sufficiency conflicts with urgent need simply to keep people alive and minimally healthy, the latter should prevail over the former. My claim is simply that it is extremely unfortunate that one nation should depend on another; that it is a cause for regret, even moral regret. This is a hard argument to make philosophical sense out of, and I have not made much progress on it here.

On the other hand, international moral theorists ignore this intuition at their peril. Their arguments are unlikely to be influential in the public domain if they refuse to try to understand this intuition. Because I share their basic goals, I hope that supporters of foreign aid will start to address this basic issue. In that way, we can hope for progress in our international environment.

