Desmond McNeill

Asuncion Lera St.Clair is professor of sociology at the University of Bergen (Norway) and scientific director of the Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (CROP), a Programme of the International Social Science Council (ISSC). Her research focus are critical poverty studies, development and climate ethics, sociology of knowledge, social theory and ethics, and multilateral institutions. St.Clair recent publications are Development Ethics: A Reader, Ashagate, with Des Gasper (eds). ‘Climate Change and Poverty: The Responsibility to Protect’; ‘The Framing of Climate Change: Why it Matters, with Karen O’Brien and Berit Kristoffersen and ‘Towards a New Type of Science for Climate Change,’ also with O’Brien and Kristoffersen, all three articles are published in Climate Change, Ethics and Human Security ,K. O’Brien, A. L. St. Clair, B. Kristoffersen (eds.) Cambridge University Press. And Global Poverty, Ethics, and Human Rights: The Role of Multilateral Organisations (With Desmond McNeill), Routledge.
Abstract

In this paper we argue that questions about responsibility for eradicating poverty may be restated as ‘who is response-able?’ – in other words, ‘who is capable of responding in such a way as to remedy the harm?’; and an important part of the answer is international organizations. Created and maintained by ourselves acting collectively – these organizations play an important role in making and applying global rules that often determine the capabilities of people to live dignified lives. And in the case of development organisations they are specifically mandated to act on behalf of the poor. This gives these organisations, and particularly the latter, a special responsibility. We argue that multilateral organizations are ‘response-able’, in the sense that they are uniquely placed to act by virtue of the powers that we, the people of the world, have given them: economic resources, expertise, and the political legitimacy they enjoy by virtue of their mandates. We argue further that people have a responsibility as individuals to ensure that the organisations fulfil these tasks to the best of their ability: to use their power, expertise, and political position to promote a fair and egalitarian world driven by the avoidance of poverty.

KEYWORDS

multilaterals, poverty, responsibility, human rights, ethics
Poverty, Human Rights and Global Justice: The Response-Ability of Multilateral Organisations

INTRODUCTION

How should we, the inhabitants of rich countries, respond to the continued existence of extreme poverty in the world? If not directly responsible, we are in fact benefiting from the system that produces and perpetuates this poverty and we are – surely – able to take some appropriate action. In an age of globalisation, we suggest that the question ‘who is responsible?’ (for extreme poverty) may be restated as ‘who is response-able?’ – in other words, ‘who is capable of responding in such a way as to remedy the harm?’; and an important part of the answer, we argue, is international organizations. The current international economic and political system is indeed one in which the outcomes are unjust; and we, the rich, who benefit from the system, contribute to the structural social processes which sustain it. Within this system, international organisations – created and maintained by ourselves acting collectively – play an important role in making and applying the rules; and in the case of development organisations they are specifically mandated to act on behalf of the poor. This gives these organisations, and particularly the latter, a special responsibility. But, we shall also argue, this responsibility is unlikely to be realized under present circumstances. A major hindrance is their governance: they are controlled by states which, both rich and poor, ‘donor’ and ‘recipient’, are conservative and resistant to change; and citizens of the world do not sufficiently challenge them.
Most of us, most of the time, distance ourselves from a sense of personal responsibility in relation to structural injustice, because we believe that we operate according to acceptable norms, and cannot see a determinate link between our actions and the structurally caused limitations on the lives of others. Consequently, we tend not to think that we ourselves have obligations to remedy such injustice. But in the highly globalised world of today this is not an adequate response to the challenge of poverty. These are times of convergent economic, environmental and civilizational crisis\(^1\), but also times of unprecedented wealth; and we have to ask searching questions of the established international organisations. As Thomas Pogge argues, to understand our world and our role within it we must question ‘politics as usual’ and what lies behind the pro-poor rhetoric of expert institutions, to really see the extent of our complacency and the need of citizenship action for forging an institutional order designed to avoid poverty (Pogge, 2010).

A number of authors have called for cosmopolitan democracy, global citizenship or global systemic reform\(^2\). Others have explored philosophical conceptions of global justice, global ethics and development ethics\(^3\). Drawing in part on such ideas, we argue the need to integrate principles of justice and ethical reflection in the professional work of international organizations. We note that ideas on social justice, ethics, human rights and ethical development that were proposed decades ago have had little impact on the professional work of these international organisations, and we argue for a new conception of responsibility that is well suited to the current situation - of a highly globalised world, and the large scale social structural processes that are the sources of poverty today. This conception is a hybrid of individual and collective responsibility that calls for less conservatism and more openness to normatively-informed perspectives as a crucial element of the legitimacy of these organisations. We follow Thomas Pogge’s conception of global justice, centred on the
normatively informed design of a global institutional order that is driven by the avoidance of poverty. We complement his view with Iris Young’s proposal of a social connection model of responsibility (Young, 2006), which in our view, is both an individual and a collective view of responsibility based on the fact that social relations today are transnational and often institutionalized. We argue that multilateral organizations are ‘response-able’, in the sense that they are uniquely placed to act by virtue of the powers that we, the people of the world, have given them: economic resources, expertise, and the political legitimacy they enjoy by virtue of their mandates. We argue further that people have a responsibility as individuals to ensure that the organisations fulfil these tasks to the best of their ability: to use their power, expertise, and political position to promote a fair and egalitarian world driven by the avoidance of poverty. This is the major claim that we put forward in this paper. But we begin by demonstrating that such calls for action are not new and that the problem lies in the inability (or lack of will) of multilateral institutions to use those ideas and give them policy relevance.

**THE GAP BETWEEN IDEAS AND ACTION: DEVELOPMENT ETHICS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND POLICY RELEVANCE**

The primary rationale for foreign aid has been a sense of duty towards people of other nations. But aid has turned out to be problematic in practice. It has, from the start, been state-based, and a complex machinery has been constructed to link the rich person and the poor person - separated as they are by national boundaries. In the case of multilateral development assistance, this machinery involves three parties: the government of the rich person, the government of the poor person, and an international organisation. The relationship between rich and poor, in different countries, is thus a complex mix of morality and politics; and the
moral responsibility of the rich to the poor is mediated through a plurality of institutions. One of the fundamental ways in which the relationship between poor and non-poor people is framed is through the ideas that drive the mission, policies and practices of global development institutions. And these are largely determined by knowledge produced inside these organisations themselves. In the last decades the narratives have changed, and now include explicitly normative language - of morality, human rights and global justice. But this sense of duty and the actual workings of multilateral organisations as well as other regulative global institutions are in permanent conflict, leading to a pervasive resistance to normatively driven ideas at the practical level.

It is important to see how some ideas, originally quite radical, have been drained of their political force and never implemented; how excellent proposals have been stifled in the depoliticised space dominated by the bureaucrats and economists that rule international organisations (Bøås & McNeill 2004; St. Clair 2006 a, 2006b, 2010). One important reason for this failure - as we demonstrate at length in our recent book (McNeill & St Clair, 2009) – is the conservatism of nation states governing these institutions. If extreme poverty is to be eradicated, international organizations – as ‘response-able’ actors – must be made answerable to the citizens of the world and not only accountable to the narrow self-interest of nation-states.

Even if ethics and human rights are currently high on the international development agenda, and these topics may appear novel to some development researchers and policy-makers, it is more accurate to say that they are now back on the agenda after a period of over fifty years. In analyzing normative views it is important to understand their histories and what happens in the complex processes of institutionalization. The United Nations organisations that were created in the aftermath of the Second World War were a manifestation of concern for the
well-being of all citizens of the world; and the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights was an attempt to provide the moral foundations for such concern. But as the colonised countries gained independence, and the phenomenon called ‘development’ became established, they took divergent paths. ‘Development’ became a specialised arena dominated by ‘donor agencies’ dealing with their ‘recipients’, and by professional development experts sharing an arcane language in which fundamental ethical issues were almost entirely absent. In the early years, aid was largely an activity for engineers and agriculturalists; but soon economists began to assume a central role as experts, both in preparing national development plans and in the appraisal of development projects; and they continue to retain this dominant position.

For many years, ‘the development business’ was overshadowed by the Cold War which created an intensely political context for the provision of aid funds while at the same time discouraging explicit mention of politics by development professionals (Ferguson, 1994). The competition between East and West led also to a disassociation, and even competition, between civil and political rights on the one hand, and socio-economic rights on the other, which further deepened the rift between the project of development and its moral foundations. It was not until the fall of the Berlin Wall that development organisations began seriously to address ‘non-technical issues’; but these were presented as questions of governance – corruption and public management; and the debate was primarily about relations within poor countries, with the context of neoliberal globalization taken for granted. With the signature of the Millennium Declaration came a renewed focus on the challenge of global poverty, and the mainstreaming of human rights in development. We argue in this paper that this shift is significant. It requires that international institutions be seen not only as expert and efficient providers of resources and technical advice, but also as institutions which are responsible in a
moral sense, and in which scientific knowledge is consistent with earlier ideas about the moral
grounds for the development enterprise.

Even though the ‘development business’, and global development institutions, began only in
the second half of the last century, the sorts of questions that arise – of ethics and human
rights –go far back in history. Below, we seek to trace the progression of some ideas from the
origins of development ethics to today’s concern with global ethics, universal human rights
and global justice as it relates to poverty, showing how key concepts that are often seen as
very new, for example the emphasis on human development rather than on economic growth,
and the role of justice and fairness in relation to the poor, have had substantial predecessors.

For example, the first major challenge to mainstream development thinking – the Dependency
School in Latin America – usually seen as a political rather than an ethical movement,
focused on the divisions of wealth and power between the North and the South, and argued
that such inequalities reflected a system of exploitation and the perpetuation of marginality.
This school of thought has inspired major works on international relations and critical
development studies. But these have not had an impact on development policies. Rather, they
have remained as an external critique to, for example, the knowledge base of the World Bank.
Also in the late 1960s, and perhaps less known, Latin America was the cradle of liberation
theology – a powerful mixture of religion and activism that places at its centre of analysis the
role of values in relationship to the poor, questions of justice on earth, and human rights as
guarantors of people’s dignity. Liberation theologians were among the first to propose that
socio-economic rights be used as the instrument for lifting people out of poverty and
protecting the marginalized. The notion of ‘liberation’ as an ethic and as a substitute for
‘development’ is very much alive in Latin America and the Caribbean today, not only among
liberation theologians. It has inspired important works linking Marxian critics of modernity, early critics of development, and writers in theology and political and ethical philosophy with contemporary critics of neoliberal economic globalization. Among the most visible and influential liberation thinkers is Enrique Dussel (1978, 2007) who characterized the modern era as ‘the age of globalization and exclusion’.

The renewed interest of the Catholic Church in worldly matters following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) is one of the substantial forerunners of the notion of human development. One of the most influential authors on the liberation theology’s key thesis - ‘the option for the poor’ – was Louis Joseph Lebret, who was a source of inspiration for Denis Goulet who, building on the legacy of Lebret, emerges as the founder of development ethics as a coherent field of study (Novak 1984, p.134 in Hebblethwaite, 1994, p. 848.). He is also the first to engage directly with the knowledge production of the then emerging UN institutions: analyzing UN reports, and explicitly assessing development policy (Gasper 2006, p. 4). What Goulet achieved was: ‘to get to the roots of the development enterprise, put ethics on the development agenda, criticise morally problematic aspects of theory and practice, and advocate more just and participatory development policies and institutions (Crocker, 2006).’

The work of Goulet is of utmost importance, precisely because he engages directly with the professional work of development organisations. In what is perhaps his most influential work, The Cruel Choice: A New Concept in the Theory of Development, Goulet (1971a) argued that development, as practised by the major donors and multilateral agencies, was primarily ‘maldevelopment’: rather than leading to improved well-being and better societies, development was generating pain and disorder in local communities. In the name of reducing poverty, development aid – Goulet (1971a, p.14) warned – provided a rationalization for the rich world’s desire to domesticate the development of the Third World. Development experts were ‘one eyed giants, blind in their analysis of the goals of development and ignorant of the
role of power, and treating instrumentally the values and knowledge systems of indigenous peoples and the large majority of the population in developing countries (Goulet, 1980).

Goulet consistently emphasised the importance of moral awareness of the suffering of others in the search for fair and equitable development; including reflection on the negative consequences of unlimited consumption, which jeopardizes environmental sustainability and inhibits solidarity with the poor at home and abroad. Goulet argued for an ethic grounded on people’s lived experience; for embedding ethics in research methodologies, planning and project work. The mission of development ethics, says Goulet, is to keep hope alive without falling into the role played by plantation preachers during the times of slavery – ‘namely, assuring good conscience to the rich while providing spiritual, “other worldly” solace to the victims of unjust structures’ (Goulet 1995, p. 26). Most of Goulet’s writings predate the much more influential work of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, and UNDP’s human development agenda initiated by Mahbub ul Haq. Well before Sen, Haq and Nussbaum⁵, Goulet advocated that “authentic development aims toward the realization of human capabilities in all spheres” (Goulet 1971b, p. 205), and that economic growth and technological modernity must be treated as, at best, potential means to desired human values, not vice versa. At the same time he insisted that principles of ethics and/or religion had to be confronted by, and relate to, the full realities and complexities of modern economies (Goulet, 1960).

Goulet’s ideas survive partly because of the influential work of today’s most well known development ethicist, Amartya Sen, and of Martha Nussbauman and a wide range of scholars pursuing their ideas. Sen’s capabilities approach emphasises the intrinsic and instrumental importance of widening people’s choices in order to live productive and creative lives.
according to their needs and interests; or, as he often phrases it, to focus on the lives that people have reasons to value (Sen 1985, 1999). Freedoms have, for Sen, both an intrinsic and an instrumental aspect, yet these are inseparable. Poverty is a kind of unfreedom, often determined by socio-economic conditions and structural causes. To remove unfreedoms involves identifying the ways in which people’s agency is constrained. In Martha Nussbaum’s version, capabilities provide the basis for political principles and constitutional guarantees (Nussbaum, 2001), and she views the core role of governments as fundamental development actors entrusted with endowing citizens with the required conditions for realizing central human functionings. Sen, and to a lesser extent Nussbaum, has been extremely influential, especially because the capabilities approach provides the intellectual basis of the human development concept, as espoused by the UNDP in their Human Development Reports thereby linking the normative ideas to concrete practical work of a UN organization.

Even if Sen is more explicit in his later work on justice (Sen, 2009), Sen’s writings are cautious in relation to political issues, such as the global responsibilities of the multilateral agencies. Perhaps it is for this reason, as well as his intellectual standing as an economist, that Sen, unlike Goulet, or Lebret before him, has achieved such substantial influence on policy-makers. The capabilities approach enjoys considerable legitimacy and is widely used by development experts and researchers. But even the capabilities approach is far from being the dominant perspective in development work. Capability scholars struggle to make their work relevant to mainstream development economics and to compete with the prevalence of World Bank driven perspectives. Current work on the capabilities approach is focused largely on developing methodologies to measure and operationalize the approach in an effort to lead to practical changes. A key issue here is the difficulty of breaking the dominance and well-sold legitimacy of the World Bank poverty statistics, which lead to complacency and inaction.
among politicians and the public, as they tend to show we are well on our way to achieve our poverty reduction goals (Pogge, 2010). A capability metric will show a very different picture.

Another development, also in response to increasing concern with globalisation, is a considerable interest in ‘global ethics’. The German Catholic theologian Hans Kung (1991) was probably the first to use the term - referring to values related to all cultures, all religions and for all societies. Kung (1998) further developed this notion to directly address questions of economics and global politics. He took as a point of departure what is an old idea in moral and political philosophy:

‘Just as within the state every government, though it needs power as a basis of its authority, also needs the moral basis of the consent of the governed, so an international order cannot be based on power alone, for the simple reason that mankind will in the long run always revolt against naked power. Any international order presupposes a substantial measure of general consent’ (Kung 1998, p.48).

Global ethics has clearly ‘taken off’ as a topic – as is evident from new journals and special issues, publications (such as Commers et al., 2008), and in philosophical literatures the global scope of ethical thinking has become more prominent since the 1970s (Pogge & Horton 2008). But among policy-makers, development researchers and activists, global ethics has been eclipsed by (or reinterpreted as) human rights. As Charles Taylor (2007) phrases it, human rights have become ‘the global ethic of our secular age.’ In the next section, we trace the progress of this concept in relation to the development field, which culminated in its convergence with efforts for fighting poverty.

**Human Rights: The Global Ethic of a Secular Age**
Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Address to the US Congress on January 6, 1941 was an optimistic statement about the possibility of changing the course of history. He called for a new global moral order marked by four fundamental freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of religious orientation, freedom from want and freedom from fear. Freedom means the supremacy of human rights everywhere.... (Roosevelt, 1941) (emphasis added).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1948, but its origins can be traced much earlier in time, at least to the European enlightenment, the French revolution and related social movements of critique, contestation and social transformation during the 18th century such as Mary Wollstonecraft’s declaration of the rights of women (1792). Some trace it as far back as the Spanish conquest of the American continent, and the work of former colonizer and later Dominican Priest and first Bishop of Chiapas, Bartolome de las Casas (1484-1566), who claimed that all human beings (including the indigenous peoples of the Americas) had entitlements, and dedicated his life and works to denouncing the brutality of the Spanish conquest. The spirit of De las Casas has survived over the centuries in the region, and inspired many social movements for freedom and transformation. And Latin American thinkers participated actively in the drafting of the Universal Declaration, because (according to Carozza, 2003) of this particularly strong human rights tradition in the region.

Even though an International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was signed in 1966, the Cold War and its influence on global institutions served to intensify the separation between liberal rights (associated with personal freedom, property, and bodily harm protection) and socio-economic rights (focused on the minimum necessary for the respect and protection of people’s dignity). The first international attempt to formalise the relations between development and human rights and to unify this ‘dichotomy of freedoms’ was the formulation of the Right to Development and the Vienna Declaration (1993) which
states that widespread extreme poverty inhibits the full and effective enjoyment of human rights (Vienna Declaration Part I & 14).

Another milestone was the creation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in 1993, with the important task of raising moral awareness by producing and commissioning work on the relations between poverty and human rights. OHCHR’s Special Rapporteur Arjun Sengupta deserves special mention for his contribution to the materialization of the Vienna Declaration by focusing attention on the implementation of the right to development through encouraging the international community to support states in meeting their duties (Sengupta, 2000). Sengupta argues that if the right to development is to be considered a full right, then the fundamentals of equity and justice must guide all processes of development, from questions of production to the trade-offs between equity and growth; and he adds that respect for the agency of the poor and their participation in policies and projects that will affect their lives is one of the key aspects of a coherent implementation of human rights principles (Sengupta, 2000). But neither the Right to Development nor the principles of the Vienna Declaration had much impact on development policy and practice until the Millennium Declaration in 2000, and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan’s advocacy for the mainstreaming of both poverty and human rights throughout the whole UN System. Mary Robinson, appointed by Annan, brought charisma and leadership as High Commissioner for Human Rights (from 1997 to 2002), and continued to engage personally in dialogue with many UN agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions even after the end of her term. The Millennium Declaration clearly argues for a united global society, and speaks the language of global responsibilities, as well as reaffirming both the UN Charter and the Universal declaration; and even though the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are thin versions of the principles stated in the Declaration, human rights have permeated the UN System.
language and agenda. Kofi Annan’s Report, *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*, provides a holistic view of the different roles of the UN (security, development and human rights) and builds on the notions of freedom from want, freedom from fear, and freedom to live a life with dignity. Annan’s push for universal human rights in their relation to development appeared at first to have a significant influence in the UN System, including the Bretton Woods institutions, but these agencies have in practice been quite cautious in turning the rhetoric into practice (See McNeill & St Clair 2009).

A rather radical use of Human Rights in relation to poverty emerges in the OHCHR’s draft guidelines *Human Rights and Poverty Reduction: A conceptual Framework* (OHCHR, 2002), a key document which attempted to provide input to poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs), basing the analytical relations between rights and poverty on an already normatively-grounded view of poverty - capability poverty – which permitted a direct link with freedoms and unfreedoms.

‘The reason why the conception of poverty is concerned with basic freedoms is that these are recognized as being fundamentally valuable for minimal human dignity. But the concern for human dignity also motivates the human rights approach, which postulates that people have inalienable rights to these freedoms. If someone has failed to acquire these freedoms, then obviously her rights to these freedoms have not been realized’ (OHCHR 2002, p.10).

The guidelines include the explicit statement that poverty is not only a denial but also that it may be seen as a ‘violation of human rights.’ It appears that this idea takes off shortly afterwards; but it does not develop much further at the global institutional level. In its place
emerges a softer, less controversial and more instrumental understanding of the relations between human rights, poverty and development; the so called human rights based approach, which in our opinion tones down the political and moral aspects of human rights. Even if important work is continuing linking human development, capabilities and human rights (Fukuda-Parr, 2008), it is this thinned out version of human rights-based approaches to development that has spread both inside and outside the UN.

On the other hand the more political and ethical notion of ‘poverty as a violation of human rights’ has taken off strongly among activists and radical academics (Pogge, 2007) and inspired a line of thinking that focuses on implementation of socio-economic rights as tools to fight structural injustice. While thinned out versions of rights based perspectives focus on the material limitations of poor states to implement them, more critical scholars seek to understand the hindrances posed by structural unfairness in the implementation of rights. To promote socio-economic rights in societies where economies are driven by neoliberal economic policies, high levels of inequality, and low social cohesion tends to lead to elite capture of the benefits from human rights legislation. Objections are often raised about the complexities and high costs of operationalizing socio-economic rights, without making comparable assessments of the complexities and high costs of operationalizing liberty rights. But the problem is not material constraints per se, or the difficulties in legislating socio-economic rights, but unfair power relations and structural injustices. An important aspect that requires further work is the actual role of the courts and politicians in these issues, and analyses of the enabling conditions for legal enforcement of socio-economic rights (Gloppen 2009; Gloppen et al., 2010). In parallel with the debates at the UN level and within academia, the link between human rights and poverty has emerged as a key theme among critics of globalization, following the earlier tradition of using rights language in support of political
struggle and activism (Gills, 2006; Kiely, 2005; Robinson, 2002). Writers from David Harvey (2005) to Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007, 2008) - one of the key theorists of the alter-globalization movement - are also using the language of rights as a tool for struggle. As activist and scholar Paul Farmer claims, promoting social and economic rights is the most important struggle of our time, but we should no longer speak of rights in a depoliticised way but point towards the easy capture of human rights language for goals inconsistent with the intrinsic value of rights. If we forget that human rights violations are fundamentally a question of structural violence, as Johan Galtung argued decades ago, all the new rhetoric of rights will lead our generation simply to ‘manage social inequality ’ (Farmer, 2003). Paraphrasing the fundamental task of Amnesty International, Farmer eloquently argues in his Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights and the New War on the Poor that we must ‘bear witness’ about the plight of the poor; simply writing may bring no change in their lives – but to move beyond bearing witness requires compassion, solidarity, and above all, activism.\textsuperscript{10}

We suggest that one can not only further academic debate, but also make some active contribution to promoting a fairer world, if one adopts a concrete conception of responsibility that is well suited to our modern age of globalisation and international organisations, based on the concept of global justice.

\textbf{GLOBAL JUSTICE}

As mentioned in the introduction, we endorse Thomas Pogge’s conception of global justice as the design of a normatively informed global order that is centred on the avoidance of poverty (Pogge 2007, 2010).\textsuperscript{11} We acknowledge predecessors of this idea, as well as a multiplicity of meanings for the terms global justice. But we endorse this view not only because it centres our attention on avoiding poverty. Much as we may wish to believe we are moral actors, the truth is, Pogge rightly argues, that ‘the dominant Western countries are designing and
upholding global institutional arrangements, geared to their economic elites, that foreseeably and avoidably produce massive deprivations in most of the much poorer regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America’ (Pogge 2010, p. 3).

Pogge blames expert institutions such as the World Bank for generating misleading data and promoting complacency among citizens regarding institutional arrangements that are unfair to the global poor. It is not coincidental that anthropologist James Ferguson makes a similar claim, criticizing the ‘de-moralizing’ discourse of multilateral institutions because their amoral scienticism ‘diffuses’ or ‘sheds away’ the real moral issue: the responsibilities of the west and global institutions towards the poor. To emphasize this demoralizing narrative, both Pogge and Ferguson make vivid analogies with the Holocaust and the moral response of the West after WWII.

Following David Cohen (1993), Ferguson notes:

‘Just as contemporary Germans have had to assess their collective responsibility for the Holocaust…both sides of the Cold War will have to assess their responsibility for the “militarization and impoverisation of three-quarters of the globe,” as well as for the creation of “conditions, interests, orientations, institutions, routines, and cultures that define the possibilities of much of the globe”’ (Cohen 1993, p.4 cited in Ferguson 2006, p. 178).

Pogge complements this claim by arguing that:

‘The global economic regime that our countries designed and impose kills more efficiently than the Nazi extermination camps; the daily suffering from poverty and disease greatly exceeds that caused by WWII in its darkest years…We citizens have enough information to know what is going on, or at least to find out easily, if we care….Our politicians celebrate themselves, and us, for our “selfless development
assistance”, and we like to listen to those stories…If we do not shut our eyes, we also know that our efforts against poverty abroad are tiny compared to our means and tiny also relative to the poverty we systematically produce through unjust policies and social institutions’ (Pogge 2010, p.2).

Following Feguson and Pogge the task ahead is then to ‘re-moralize’ the debate on what to do about pervasive and increasing poverty.

But to enter the world of moral discourse, and adopt the language of ethics and human rights, constitutes a challenge to these institutions, and to global power relations. In a recent book (McNeill & St. Clair, 2009) we use detailed case studies of the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO and the Inter-American Development Bank, to explore in detail some of the hindrances that limit their willingness to take on these responsibilities, showing how the same powers that give them the capacity to respond, often act as constraints on their action. The power of a multilateral organisation derives from factors such as its financial resources, the expertise of its staff, and its relations with collaborating governments. But these, we show, are not easily combined with an emphasis on ethics and human rights. In the case of the World Bank for example, the organisation’s narrow focus on economics as the science required for reducing poverty, and the tendency for their expert knowledge to be built on ideas produced internally by this same institution, act as major hindrances to critical reflection on its responsibilities. In the case of the UNDP, the strength of the organisation in being so closely associated with its member states acts also as a major constraint to action, since the organisation cannot risk any hint of ‘conditionality’ to exert pressure on governments that fail to live up to their human rights obligations.
Re-moralizing the debate requires further investigations of the professional work of institutions entrusted with the task of fighting poverty, to make them accountable not only to states, but to the public, and to the poor themselves. In this last section, we argue for a conception of responsibility suitable for multilateral organisations.

RESPONSIBILITY AND RESPONSE-ABILITY

Moving forward the debate raised by ethics, human rights and global justice in relation to poverty requires appropriate conceptions of responsibility. Multilateral development organisations should transcend the political limitations on their action; be willing to use the language of morality and not only of economics; and be governed by the interests of all the people of the world and not just their governments. We suggest the need to focus attention on the responsibilities of multilateral organisations themselves, as part of the task of a redesign of the global system that is more able to respond to the challenge of global poverty. We propose a conception of responsibility that is able to account for the new situation - of a highly globalised world, and rapid changes in all types of relationships, and structures, that shape people’s lives and people’s choices. And we contend that the later work of Iris Young (2004, 2006) offers a suitable conception of responsibility: political, forward looking, and based on transitional social relations. Young’s perspective accounts for both individual and collective responsibility and points towards institutions as moral agents. To this conception, we suggest, furthermore, that the question ‘who is responsible?’ may be restated as ‘who is response-able?’, and in issues of global poverty, the answer is international organizations.

As we have argued in more detail in our latest book, multilateral organisations could use their power, expertise, and political position to promote a fair and egalitarian world driven by the
avoidance of poverty. We argue further that we have a responsibility, as individuals, to ensure that the organisations fulfil these tasks to the best of their ability (McNeill and St.Clair 2009).

In her two key articles ‘Responsibility and Global Labor Justice’ (2004) and ‘Responsibility and Global Justice: A Social Connection Model,’ (2006) Young pinpoints the central dilemma. Young asks ‘how should moral agents, both individual and collective, think about our responsibilities in relation to structural social injustice?’ (Young 2006:102). Her reply is that obligations of justice are fundamentally driven by social relations, and as such it is the role of political institutions to generate responses to any obligations that may follow. Along the lines of Pogge, Young contends that structural injustice is a consequence of the concomitant action of both individuals and institutions acting in pursuit of interests, within given institutional rules and accepted norms. The intersection between individual and collective responsibility is a political issue, but by ‘political’ she implies far more than government; she refers to the ways in which people organize collectively, and evaluate and reform such collective organisations. Global obligations of justice, Young contends, ‘are grounded in the fact that some structural social processes connect people across the world without regard to political boundaries’ (Young 2006, p.102). As many globalization scholars, Young contends that the well being of all people in the world today are created through global relations, global actors and global norms. Structural injustice, Young argues, is transnational, and any conception of responsibility should also be transnational. Individual responsibility must be channelled though collective action, and this entails, as Pogge has also argued, that we need to design normatively based transnational political institutions (Pogge 2008, 2010; Young, 2006).
This, we believe, is a useful approach for understanding our responsibilities in the highly
globalised world of today - where ‘social structures’ and social relations operate on a global
scale serving as the backbone for individual action, enabling certain individual actions while
constraining others (Young 2006, p. 112). This is a position that merges collective and
individual responsibility (French 1991, 1992). It is also a position that calls for action, a
‘forward looking conception’ of political responsibility whereby individuals discharge their
responsibilities on institutions.

Thus one has obligations of justice to others not in general because morality requires
alleviating suffering, but on the more specific ground that one participates in (and even
benefits from) social structures that make others vulnerable to harm. This is also why Young
rejects what she calls the nation-state view concerning obligations of justice. As members of
a political community, each of us has responsibilities to contribute to making the institutions
of this community more just; and our fellow citizens have grounds for complaint if our
national institutions fail to treat them justly. The basis of their appeal, on this account, is the
fact of their membership with us in a common national community. In contrast, Young argues
that people have responsibilities beyond states as long as they are involved in global social
relations of any kind, and she points to the obligation to engage in establishing institutions
that will enable us to discharge our responsibilities. Thus political responsibility with respect
to structural injustice often requires transforming of institutions and the tasks they assign.
This is everyone’s task and no one’s in particular; it is a shared task (Young 2004, 2006).

Merging this theory of responsibility with the definition of global justice that we
endorse, as institutional justice materialized through the design of a global institutional order
that avoids poverty, it is then possible to argue for institutional responsibility. Even if
individuals have no direct causal blame for the situation of the poor, the institutions we uphold and from which we benefit do have capacities to prevent harm and avoid poverty.

Following principles of collective responsibility met through institutional agency, we propose an institutional, political and forward looking view of responsibility based on capacities rather than causality. Institutions have capacities that individuals do not, for example by virtue of their hugely greater ability to obtain and make use of information, (French, 1994; Green, 2005) and they are more capable than any individual to have knowledge of the remote effects of their actions.

Applying these insights to the question of global poverty, we assert that institutions specialized in delivering development and fighting poverty have the capacities that are necessary to, as Pogge argues, foreseeably act in ways that avoid poverty; they are ‘response-able’, capable of bridging the responsibility gap – both moral and practical – which is apparent to those who see extreme poverty as grossly unjust, but are unconvinced by the claim that they, as individuals, have some obligation to remedy the situation.

CONCLUSION

The existence of specialized international organisations entrusted with the task of combating poverty renders it possible for individuals to respond to the intuitive demands of global justice; something which, in the absence of such institutions, would for practical reasons be very difficult. And because this is possible, it is also, we suggest, a moral duty. They are the agents of individuals whose moral duty is to discharge this responsibility. (And even international institutions which have other purposes, we suggest, have a moral responsibility not to exacerbate poverty). In brief, international organizations are ‘response-able’: they are particularly well placed to act by virtue of the powers that we, the people of the world, have
given them: the economic resources and expertise that enable them to change the world; and
the political legitimacy they enjoy by virtue of their mandates. Individuals have a
responsibility to ensure that these organisations fulfil this obligation; they can and should
discharge their own duties with regard to global poverty by ensuring that the organisations be
endowed with the necessary power and resources to carry on their mandates, and demanding
that they be answerable not to national states but to the people – and especially the poor
people – of the world.

The necessary re-design of international organisations not only calls for the active
participation of wealthy citizens across the planet and new forms of global citizenship. It must
also be informed by detailed knowledge of the way development organisations work, their
strengths and limitations, and of the conservative role that expert knowledge plays in
preventing more public debate on fundamental aspects of the challenges posed by addressing
global poverty as a question of justice.

Notes
1. See Gills, 2010
2. See for example Amstrong, 2006; Archibugi 1995, 2004; Gills, 2010; Held & Koenig-
   see also Gasper & St.Clair 2010.
4. There are, of course, other – more self-interested reasons for providing development
   assistance. On this, and the practical challenges of aid, see, for example McNeill, 1981;
5. The legacy of Denis Goulet is the field of development ethics. For a summary of other precedents and contemporary debates see Gasper & St. Clair (2010).
6. See Alkire & Ritchie 2008; Chiappero-Martinetti (in press); Comim, et al., 2008.
7. Of all the emergent literature on the cross-paths between human rights and development, Philip Alston and Mary Robinson’s *Human Rights and Development: Towards Mutual Reinforcement*, published in 2005, is particularly relevant for our analysis.
8. According to Fukuda Parr, not even the MDGs are being properly implemented (2008).
9. We thank Roberto Gargarella for raising this issue.
10. For a recent account of the role of human rights in fighting poverty see Khan (2009).
11. We acknowledge the forerunners of this view in non philosophical literature as we have argued in other work (Gills, 2006; St. Clair 2006 c).
12. For a state of the art volume collecting the most important variations on global justice see Pogge & Moellendorf, 2008).

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