

# Chapter 1

## Global justice, capitalism and the Third World

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*ABSTRACT: Reflecting on the North-South dialogue, I consider questions of global justice. I argue that questions of global justice are just as genuine as questions of domestic justice. A too-narrow construal of the circumstances of justice leads to an arbitrary forestalling of questions of global justice. It isn't that we stand in conditions of reciprocal advantage that is crucial but that we stand in conditions of moral reciprocity. I first set out concerning the conditions in the North and the South and the relations between them something of the facts in the case coupled with some interpretative sociology. Such investigations show massive disparities of wealth and condition between North and South and further show that these disparities have been exacerbated by the interventionist policies of the west. I then, while remaining mindful of the strains of commitment, argue that justice requires extensive redistribution between North and South but that this can be done without at all impoverishing the North, though to do so would indeed involve a radical reordering of the socio-economic system of the North.*

### **SOME FACTS ABOUT FAMINE**

Let us start with some stark empirical realities. Approximately 10,000 people starve every day. There was a severe drought last year (1983) in Africa and about 20 million people, spread through eighteen countries, face severe shortages of food: shortages that will in some instances bring on starvation and in others, for very many people, will bring about debilitating malnutrition—a malnutrition that sometimes will permanently and seriously damage them. The Brandt Report of 1980 estimates that 800 million people cannot afford an adequate diet. This

means that millions are constantly hungry, that millions suffer from deficiency diseases and from infections that they could resist with a more adequate diet. Approximately 15 million children die each year from the combined effects of malnutrition and infection. In some areas of the world half the children born will die before their fifth birthday. Life for not a few of us in the industrially developed world is indeed, in various ways, grim. But our level of deprivation hardly begins to approximate to the level of poverty and utter misery that nearly 40 per cent of the people in the Third World face.

As Robert McNamara, who is surely no spokesman for the left, put it, there are these masses of 'severely deprived human beings struggling to survive in a set of squalid and degraded circumstances almost beyond the power of sophisticated imaginations and privileged circumstances to conceive'.<sup>1</sup> Human misery is very much concentrated in the southern hemisphere (hereafter 'the South') and by any reasonable standard of justice there is a global imbalance of the benefits and burdens of life—the resources available to people—that calls for an extensive redistribution of resources from the industrial countries of the northern hemisphere ('the North') to the South.

This, of course, assumes that there is something properly called global justice and this, in certain quarters, will be resisted as a mirage or as being an incoherent conception. We can properly speak of justice within a society with a common labour market, but we cannot speak of justice for the world community as a whole. We cannot say, some claim, of the world community as a whole that it is just or unjust. Justice is only possible, the claim goes, where there are common bonds of reciprocity. There are no such bonds between a Taudé of Highland New Guinea and a farmer in Manitoba. In general there are no such bonds between people at great distances from each other and with no cultural ties, so, given what justice is, we cannot correctly speak of global justice. I think this is a mistaken way of construing things and I shall return to it in a moment.

The call for a massive redistribution of resources also assumes, what neo-Malthusians will not grant, namely that we can carry this out without still greater harm resulting.<sup>2</sup> Part of the demand for the redistribution of resources is in the redistribution of food and in the resources (including the technology and the technological know-how) to realize agricultural potential. Neo-Malthusians believe that this redistribution, at least for the worst-off parts of the Third World, is suicidal.

It is a moral truism, but for all of that true, that it would be better, if no greater harm would follow from our achieving it, if we had a world in which no one starved and no one suffered from malnutrition. But, some neo-Malthusians argue, greater harm would in fact follow if starvation were prevented in the really desperate parts of the world, for with the world's extensive population-explosion resulting from improved medicine and the like, the earth, if population growth is not severely checked, will exceed its carrying capacity. An analogy is made with a lifeboat. Suppose the sea is full of desperate swimmers and the only available lifeboat can only take on a certain number. It has, after all, a very definite carrying capacity. If too many are taken on the lifeboat it will swamp and everyone will drown. So the thing is not to go beyond the maximum carrying capacity of the lifeboat.

We are, neo-Malthusians claim, in a similar position *vis-à-vis* the earth. It is like a lifeboat and if the population goes out of control and gets too large in relation to the carrying capacity of the earth there will be mass starvation and an unsettling bringing on a suffering vastly exceeding the already terrible suffering that is upon us. Sometimes our choices are between evils and, where this is so, the rational and morally appropriate choice is to choose the lesser evil. It may be true that we may never do evil that good may come, but faced with the choice between two certain evils we should choose the lesser evil. Better four dead than twenty. But, some neo-Malthusians claim, *vis-à-vis* famine relief, this is just the terrible situation we are in.

Parts of the earth have already, they claim, exceeded their carrying capacity. The population there is too great for the region to yield enough food for its expanding population. Yet it is in the poorer parts of the world that the population continues to swell and, it is terrible but still necessary to recognize, it is the above horrendous situation that we are facing in many parts of the world.

Neo-Malthusians maintain that if we do not check this population explosion in a rather drastic way the whole earth will in time be in the desperate position of the Sahel. Redistributive reform is soft-hearted and soft-headed, encouraging the poor to increase their numbers and with that to increase the sum total of misery in the world.

I shall talk about neo-Malthusianism first and then, after I have considered the International Food Order, turn to a consideration of whether we have a coherent conception of global justice. Neo-Malthusianism, I shall argue, is a pseudo-realism making dramatics out of a severe and tragic morality of triage when the facts in the case will

not rationally warrant such dramatics—will not warrant in these circumstances a morality of triage.

In the first place, while lifeboats have a determinate carrying capacity, we have no clear conception of what this means with respect to the earth. What population density makes for commodious living is very subjective indeed; technological innovations continually improve crop yield and could do so even more adequately if more scientific effort were set in that direction.

Second, for the foreseeable future we have plenty of available fertile land and the agricultural potential adequately to feed a very much larger world population than we actually have.<sup>3</sup> Less than half of the available fertile land of the world is being used for any type of food production. In Africa, for example, as everyone knows, there are severe famine conditions and radical underdevelopment, but African agriculture has been declining for the last twenty years.<sup>4</sup> Farmers are paid as little as possible; masses of people have gone into the large urban centres where industrialization is going on. Domestic food production is falling while a lot of food is imported at prices that a very large number of people in the Third World cannot afford to pay. Yet Africa has half the unused farm land in the world. If it were only utilized, Africa could readily feed itself and be a large exporter of food.<sup>5</sup> The principal problem is not overpopulation or even drought but man-made problems, problems on which I will elaborate in a moment when I discuss the Postwar International Food Order.

Third, the land that is used is very frequently used in incredibly inefficient ways. The *latifundia* system in Latin America is a case in point.<sup>6</sup> In Latin America as a whole, and by conservative estimates, landless families form 40 per cent of all farm families. One per cent of all farm families control, again by conservative estimates, 50 per cent of all farm land. This landed elite has incredible power in Latin America and they use this power to keep the peasantry poor, disorganized and dependent. The *latifundia* system is an autocratic system, but—and this is what is most relevant for our purposes—it is also a very inefficient system of agricultural production. The landowner, not infrequently through his farm manager, has firm control over the running of the farm and over the destinies of his farm labourers. The *latifundios* are very large estates and the land on them is underworked. Much of it is used for pasture. Only 4 per cent of all the land in large estates is actually in crops. There is more fallow land, that is land not even used for pasture but held idle, than there is land in crops. If the *latifundia* land were redistributed to peasants and they were allowed to work it intensively

and particularly if they formed into peasant co-operatives, the food production would be increased enormously. Again, it isn't the lack of land or the size of the population that is the problem but the way the land is used.

Fourth, there is the problem of cash crops: crops such as peanuts, strawberries, bananas, mangoes, artichokes, and the like. Key farm land, once used by local residents for subsistence farming, is now used for these cash crops, driving subsistence farmers off the best land into increasingly marginal land and, in many instances, forcing them to purchase food at very high prices, prices they often cannot afford to pay. The result has been increasing malnutrition and starvation and impoverishment. Previously in New Guinea most of the tribal peoples had a reasonably adequate diet. Now, with the incursion of the multinationals and the introduction of cash crops, severe malnutrition is rife. The good land is used for cash crops and the farming for local consumption is on the marginal land. Mexican peasants, to take another example, did reasonably well on a staple diet of corn and beans. With the advent of multinational food producers, they became a rural, but typically underemployed, proletariat, in one not atypical instance, planting, harvesting and processing in freezing plants strawberries for export and importing food to replace the staple food they had previously grown themselves.<sup>7</sup> The catch was that the food they purchased was typically less nutritious and was at prices they could hardly afford. Again, in those Mexican communities malnutrition is rife but the principal cause here, just as in New Guinea, is in the socio-economic system and not in droughts or population explosion.

In fine, against neo-Malthusians, it is not the case that the basic cause of famine is the failure of the food supply relative to the population. Rather the basic cause of famine is poverty and certain economic policies. People who are not poor are not hungry. We look at North-South imbalance and it is plain as anything can be that this is the result of the workings of the world economic system and a clear indicator of that is the food economy. A stark difference between North and South is in the vast malnutrition and starvation which are principally a phenomenon of the South. But these famine conditions result from the working of the economic system in allocating the ability of people to acquire goods.<sup>8</sup> As Amartya Sen has shown for the great Bengal famine of 1943–4, a famine in which around 3 million people died, it was not the result of any crop failure or population explosion.<sup>9</sup> In 1942 there had been an extraordinary harvest but the 1943 crop was only somewhat lower and was in fact higher than the crop of 1941 which was not a famine year.

Sen's figures show that the 1943 crop was only 10 per cent less than the average of the five preceding years. Yet 1943 was a famine year of gigantic proportions. Why? The answer lies in people's economic position.<sup>10</sup> People have entitlements to a range of goods that they can acquire. Whether they have such entitlements, whether they can command the goods they need, depends on the workings of the economic system. Given—to take a current (1983) example—the minimum wage in Brazil (something for which approximately a third of the workforce labours), if that situation persists, many workers will not have the entitlement to the food they need to survive. In fact, right now a day's wage enables them only to command a kilo of beans. They can, that is, only purchase a kilo of beans for a day's work at the minimum wage. So people in such circumstances, understandably, reasonably and indeed rightly, take considerable risks to loot supermarkets and the like. People starve when their entitlements are not sufficiently large to buy the food necessary to keep them alive. That, to return to Sen's example of the great famine in Bengal, is precisely what happened in Bengal in 1943–4 and is happening again in Brazil and, with greater severity, in a not inconsiderable number of other places.

The food available to people is a matter of income distribution and that, in the capitalist system, is fundamentally rooted in their ability to provide services that people in the economy are willing to pay for. In poorer countries for many people about two-thirds of their total income goes for expenditures on food. Where there is some rapid industrialization newly employed workers are likely, with increased entitlements, to spend more on food. This, under a capitalist system, will force food prices up and it is very likely as a result that the entitlements of very poor agricultural labourers—labourers who own no land and have only their labour power to sell—will fall, until, even with a constant supply of food in their environment, they will no longer be able to purchase food to meet their minimum needs. Where people are on the margin of sustainable life, a famine may be created by such an increase of demand with little or no decline in the food supply.<sup>11</sup> What we need to recognize is that hunger, malnutrition and famine are fundamentally questions of distribution of income and the entitlements to food. And here, of course, we have plainly questions of justice and, I shall argue below, questions of global justice. But in trying to achieve a moral assessment of what should be done in the face of such extensive starvation and malnutrition, neo-Malthusian accounts are very wide of the mark, principally because of their failure to understand what causes and sustains such misery.

## THE POLITICS OF FOOD

In order to make more perspicuous my discussion of global justice and to make even clearer why we should *not* regard the starvation and malnutrition facing the South as a matter of actual food shortages caused by or at least exacerbated by population explosion, I want to do a bit of political sociology and describe—an interpretative description if you like—the rise and fall of the Postwar International Food Order.<sup>12</sup> Since the early 1970s the perception of scarcity and disaster because of that scarcity has been a popular refrain of much of our discussion of the world food economy. But this, as I in effect indicated in the previous section, is more ideology than fact. To understand what is going on, we need to come to understand the political economy of food as it was developed after the Second World War in the capitalist world. The capitalist world, after the last great war, went from the gold standard to the dollar standard with the United States clearly becoming the preponderant world power. In the 1950s and 1960s, the American state, reflecting plainly the interests of its capitalists, developed a policy of food aid to Third World countries. These were countries which were often trying rapidly to industrialize. This food aid, at one and the same time, provided a lot of cheap food for their new and very inexpensive industrial labour force and a respite for the American farmers with their, relative to the market, overproduction. (We must remember that since the Roosevelt years the farmers had come to be a powerful lobby.) But it should also be noted that this food aid programme helped turn self-sufficient agrarian countries into economically dependent countries dependent on food aid. It led to a commodification of food and to placing structurally these Third World countries in the commodity exchange system of the capitalist order.

The easiest way to see how the postwar food order developed and declined is to chart the fate of wheat in the world economy. In the 1950s and 1960s the surplus in wheat in the United States was sustained both for domestic political reasons and to pull the newly emerging Third World countries firmly into the capitalist orbit. It was an astute way to help make the world safe for the flourishing of capitalism. Cheap food exported and subsidized from America encouraged in Third World countries the growth, in the process of industrialization, of urban populations. It encouraged, that is, the formation of a proletariat and a lumpenproletariat from a previously peasant population—a proletariat and a lumpenproletariat dependent on cheap food sold to them principally as a commodity. A previously self-sufficient agriculture in

Third World countries radically declined and ceased to be self-sufficient. Much of the rural population, in a state of impoverishment, as a huge reserve industrial army, was in effect driven into the cities and in tandem with that, as rural production declined, rural life became ever more impoverished.

Though there were in the 1950s and 1960s great hardships for both the new urban workers and the peasants in the countryside, none the less the system based on the export of cheap food from America worked in some reasonable fashion until the early 1970s. Then it began to come apart. This International Food Order 'encouraged a massive increase in the numbers of people in all countries separated from direct ties to agriculture'.<sup>13</sup> In such a situation an increase in grain prices will trigger an increase in scarcity, though the scarcity is not rooted in what 'can technically be produced but in what people with constant or declining real monetary incomes can buy'.<sup>14</sup> What we had facing us in the 1960s was an 'extraordinary growth of urban populations—an aspect of proletarianization—and agricultural underdevelopment'.<sup>15</sup> The capitalist rationale for this activity was plain; food aid was intended to assist capitalist development in the Third World while appeasing the farm lobby in America. The thing was to integrate these Third World societies into the capitalist economic system: a system which was becoming a world system. Cheap foreign wheat facilitated this by facilitating the growth of urban populations, but it also contributed to underemployment and poverty in the countryside in these very same countries. But in the 1970s the International Food Order began to break down. Grain surpluses dwindled, prices rose, food aid was cut back. The food aid programme gradually ceased to have a capitalist rationale. What had happened was that the food aid programme had in the course of time made commercial markets work. By virtue of its very success, food aid became increasingly superfluous from a capitalist perspective. Some of the urban workers could now afford to buy food under market conditions, though many in the urban centres (those marginally employed or unemployed) had the *need* for the food but in a market system no longer had the *entitlement*. Similar things obtained for rural farm labourers rotting in the countryside where agricultural production had been cut back. The difficulty for Third World countries in continuing to get cheap food was exacerbated by the huge Russian-American grain deals of 1972 and 1973. Consumerism and a meat diet American-style became a goal in the Soviet Union and in eastern Europe. And even though *détente* is now a thing of the past, or at least temporarily shelved, the grain sales to the Soviet Union still go on. But



food aid to the Third World has almost vanished, the western agricultural sector continues to decline, farmers become fewer, now pitted against consumers, and food prices continue to rise so that the many poor in Third World countries lose their entitlements. Capitalism, of course, needs a workforce that can reproduce itself but with newly developed industrial enterprises in the Third World a little starvation and malnutrition will not hurt, will not affect the efficiency of capitalist production, as long as they have, as they indeed have, a huge labour pool to draw upon. Individual workers can starve as long as there are plenty of replacements. Things like this happened with the industrialization of the western world under capitalism in the nineteenth century. It is now being repeated in the Third World in the twentieth century.

### GLOBAL JUSTICE AND THE THIRD WORLD

With this sketch of political sociology before us, we can now return to the topic of global justice. There are some who would maintain that talk of justice can only coherently be applied within particular societies or at best between societies similarly situated and in a condition of mutual co-operation. I want to show why this doctrine is false and why it is quite morally imperative for us to speak of global justice and injustice and to characterize these notions in a perspicuous fashion.

Those who would argue against extending justice arguments into a North-South context, and into the international arena generally, will argue that when we talk about what is to be done here we need to recognize that we are beyond the circumstances of justice. For considerations of justice coherently to arise there must, between the people involved, (a) be a rough equality in the powers and capacities of persons, (b) be a situation where people do co-operate but largely on the basis of reciprocal advantage and (c) be a situation where all parties are in a condition of moderate scarcity.<sup>16</sup> It is, many have argued, only in such circumstances that issues of justice are at home. Only in such circumstances, the claim goes, can we appeal to principles of justice to adjudicate conflicting claims on moderately scarce goods. For principles of justice to function, there must be enough reciprocity around for people to find some balance of reciprocal advantage. If they cannot find that, they have no basis for regulating their conduct in accordance with the principles of justice.

However, if these really are the circumstances of justice, it looks at least as if we can have no global justice, for the richest nations do not

seem to be related to the poorest ones in such a way that the rich nations secure a reciprocal advantage if justice is done. It very likely makes more sense for them to go on cruelly exploiting the poor nations as they have done in the past. There is, in short, in most circumstances at least, little in it for them if they would do what, in circumstances of greater equality, we would uncontroversially say is the just thing to do.

The mistake here, I believe, is in sticking with the existence of a skein of actual co-operative reciprocity as essential for the circumstances of justice. The world is certainly not a co-operative scheme. We do not have in place internationally schemes for mutual support. It is even rather far-fetched, given the class nature of our own societies, to regard discrete societies as co-operative partnerships, but certainly the world is not. We do not have in place there the co-operative reciprocal interdependency which, some say, is essential for justice.

However, this condition for the very possibility of justice is too strong. That this is so can be seen from the following considerations. There is a worldwide network of international trade; poor countries stand to rich countries in complex relations of interdependence, indeed in an interdependency relation that places poor countries in a position of dependence. The rich nations, functioning as instruments for gigantic capitalist enterprises, have dominated and exploited underdeveloped countries using their resources and markets on unfair terms. Between North and South—between rich and poor nations—there are conflicts of interest and competing claims under conditions not so far from moderate scarcity such that conditions giving scope for arguments of justice obtain. In intra-state situations we do not need conditions of actual reciprocity of mutual advantage for issues of justice to be in place. The Australian Aborigine population could be too small, too weak and too marginal to mainstream life in Australia for the non-Aboriginal population to gain any advantage from *not* seizing their lands and driving them from them without any compensation. But such an action would not only be plainly wrong; it would be grossly unjust. Yet it is quite possible that the non-Aboriginal population would stand to gain rather than lose from such an action. Still, that would not make such an action one whit the less unjust. What we need to invoke instead is a *moral reciprocity* not resting on actual schemes of co-operation for mutual advantage but instead on a broadly Kantian conception of moral equality in which justice requires that we all treat each other as equals, namely, we are to treat all people as persons and in doing so treat them as we would reasonably wish to be treated ourselves.<sup>17</sup> In other words,

we must, in reasoning justly, be willing to universalize and to engage in role reversal. It does not take much moral imagination for us, if we are relatively privileged members of the so-called First World, to realize that we would not wish to live the marginal existence of many people in the Third World. We would, that is, not wish to starve or have our children starve or to be in one way or another crippled by malnutrition or live, where this could be avoided, without anything like an adequate education or without adequate housing and the like. We would not accept role reversal here. If our feet, that is, were in their shoes, we would not take as morally tolerable, where such conditions could be avoided, such conditions of life for ourselves. But there is no relevant difference here between ourselves and them. If, in such circumstances, we would not will it for ourselves, we cannot will it for them either.

In the light of our conception of the moral equality of people, we could not accept such inequalities as just. Yet it is just such inequalities that the International Food Order, a deliberate policy objective of the United States, acting for the capitalist order, has brought about in the postwar years. Even given Nozickian notions of justice in rectification, it would be correct to say that many people in Third World countries are not being treated justly. However, the injustice of such an order is even more evident if we develop a conception of justice as fair reciprocity. People, through conquest, domination and exploitation, have been made worse off than they were before these relations were brought into place. They have been driven into bargains they would not have made if they had not been driven to the wall. They are plainly being coerced and they are surely not being treated as moral equals.

If we start with an idea of moral reciprocity in which all human beings are treated as equals, we cannot accept the relations that stand between North and South as something that has even the simulacrum of justice. But any tolerably adequate understanding of what morality requires of us will not allow us to accept anything less than a commitment to relations of moral equality. Starting from there we can see that global justice is a plain extension of domestic justice when we remember that in the international arena as well as in the domestic arena we stand (a) in conditions of interdependence, (b) in conditions of moderate scarcity (if we pool our resources) and (c) in conditions where our interests sometimes conflict. Moreover, by any plausible principles of global justice we might enunciate, the relations between North and South are so unjust that extensive redistributions of resources are in order. Whatever critical standards we use to regulate conflicting claims over scarce goods, we cannot, if we have any tolerably good knowledge of

the facts in the case and a sense of fairness, but think the present relations are unjust and require rectification. There is not even in the various states of the North a fair access to basic natural and cultural resources, but viewed globally to speak of anything like a fair access to basic natural and cultural resources, where people are being treated as equals, can be nothing but a cruel and rather stupid joke.

If we start from a premise of *moral* equality as the vast majority of social theorists and moral philosophers right across the political spectrum do, from Robert Nozick to G.A.Cohen, we will believe that the interest of everyone matters and matters equally. There is no not believing in that, if we believe in *moral* equality.

For liberal egalitarians, such as Ronald Dworkin, this will involve a commitment to attain, not equality of condition but equality of resources, while for a radical egalitarian it will involve, as well, under conditions of productive abundance, a commitment to try to move as close as we reasonably can to an equality of condition. While rejecting all such egalitarian readings of *moral* equality, Nozick, with most other philosophers and economists on the right, thinks of moral equality as consisting most essentially in protecting individual rights to non-interference. Individuals in a just social order must be protected in their rights peacefully to pursue their own interests without interference from government, church or anyone else. Even if the kind of redistribution from North to South I am advocating did not bring about financial harakiri for people in the North, it would still involve an interference with their right peacefully to pursue their own interests where they are not harming anyone. Thus such a redistribution would still be wrong.

There are at least two responses that should be made here. The first is to assert that such capitalist behaviour has in fact harmed people. Sometimes this has been intentional, often not. But in any event, harm has been done. This is a factual issue, but if the factual descriptions I have given are near to the mark, and particularly if I have accurately described the workings of the International Food Order, the capitalist order centred in the west has indeed harmed, and continues to harm, very deeply many people in the Third World. (I do not mean to imply that it only harms people in the Third World.) But in our historical circumstances this is unnecessary for we could have an economic system whose underlying rationale was production to meet human needs and which was controlled democratically. Moreover, we now have the technical capacity to develop our productive powers so that the needs of people could be met. But the capitalist order has been massively supported in a very large part of the North and a not

inconsiderable number of people in the North have been the beneficiaries of a socio-economic order that did so exploit. (Of course, there are others in the North who are just victims of that order.) This being so, even Nozickian notions of justice in rectification would require redistribution between North and South.

However, a second response seems to me more fundamental, less puritanical and less concerned with blaming people. To see best what is at issue we should proceed rather indirectly. We not only have rights to non-interference, we also have rights to fair co-operation and these rights can conflict. A very important liberty is the liberty to be able to guide one's own life in accordance with one's own unmystified preferences. Central to liberty is the capacity and opportunity to make rational choices and to be able to act on those rational choices.<sup>18</sup> This is much broader than to construe liberty as simply the absence of restrictions or interference, though it certainly includes that. What is vital to see here is that liberty will not be adequately protected if we limit our rights to the protection of rights to non-interference. We must also give central weight to the rights of fair co-operation. If the right of all to effective participation in government and, more generally, to effective direction of their lives is to be attained, there must be in place in our social organizations a respect for the right of everyone to fair co-operation. It is, of course, evident that respect for this right is not very widespread in the world. It will not only not be in place where there is subordination and domination, it will also not be effective where there is widespread starvation, malnutrition, exploitation and ignorance. What is unavoidable is that in class-based societies rights to fair co-operation and rights to non-interference will conflict. To move towards correcting the imbalances between North and South, we will have to move to a collective ownership and control of the means of production, for otherwise economic power becomes concentrated in the hands of a few and they will dominate and exploit others. But moving to collective ownership will in turn have the effect of overriding the rights to non-interference of Horatio Alger types who, capitalistically inclined, seek to acquire productive property through hard work and honest bargains. (It is hardly accurate or fair to say that there are no capitalists like that, particularly small capitalists.) In following their entirely peaceful interests—they have no wish to dominate or impoverish anyone—they wish to invest, buy and sell, and own productive property. If we are to protect their rights to non-interference, these activities can hardly be stopped, but if they are allowed to go on, the institutional stage is set, whatever the particular agent's own inclinations may be, for the

undermining of rights to fair co-operation. So we have a fundamental clash of rights: rights of non-subordination with rights to non-interference.

To overcome the great disparities between North and South, even to put an end to the conditions of immiseration in the South—starvation, malnutrition, lack of work, extreme poverty—there would have to be significant and varied redistribution from North to South. In doing this we would have to give rather more weight to the rights of fair co-operation than to rights of non-interference. But—and here is what is alleged to be the catch—there is no significant consensus concerning which rights are to be overriding when they conflict.

I think that there would be a consensus if we came to command a clear view of these rights and their relations, along with some other powerful moral considerations, and came, as well, to command a clear view of the relevant social realities. Surely people have a right to pursue their interests without interference. But there are interests and interests. (Indeed, rights are most paradigmatically linked to our vital interests.) There is, among these interests, our interest in maintaining our bodily and moral integrity. To require, for example, that a person (say, a quite ordinary person), quite against her wishes, donate a kidney to keep someone alive whose value to the society is extensive is, that fact notwithstanding, still an intolerable intrusion on that involuntary donor's bodily integrity; to require a person to give up her religion or political convictions to enhance social harmony or even peace is another intolerable intrusion in that person's life—it simply runs roughshod over her civil liberties. But the interference with the peaceful pursuit of a person's interests that would go with a collective ownership of the means of production would not touch such vital interests. Rather what would be touched is her freedom to buy and sell, to invest and to bequeath *productive* property. But these interests are not nearly as vital as the above type of interests which genuinely are vital for our personal integrity. When the price for overriding those less vital interests is, as it is in the North-South situation, the overcoming of starvation, malnutrition, domination, subordination, great poverty and ignorance (certainly vital interests for any person), there is no serious doubt about in which direction the trade-offs should go. That there is not a massive consensus about this results, I believe, not from deeply embedded moral differences between people but from disputes or at least from different beliefs about what is in fact the case and about what in fact can come to be the case.<sup>19</sup> Ideological mystification leads us to believe that there is nothing significant that could be done about these matters or nothing

that could be done short of impoverishing us all or undermining our civil liberties. But that is just ideological mystification.

### REDISTRIBUTION VERSUS CAPITALISM

So we know that from the moral point of view, justice, or at least humanity, requires an extensive redistribution between North and South. We also know, if we have anything of a sense of *realpolitik*, that nothing like this is going to happen within the present socio-economic order. We can, as I have tried to indicate, know something of what morality requires here, but what is far more important to know, and much less obvious, is what are the mechanisms by which this conception of moral requiredness can become a reality in the lives of people so that our societies can be turned around. You may think that what I am about to say is too *parti pris* or perhaps you will even believe it to be vulgar, but it seems to me to be plainly true all that notwithstanding. And, even if it is vulgar, it is better to say something which if true is importantly true than to be evasive out of a sense of nicety or out of fear of saying something obvious.

What I think is plainly true is this: our capitalist masters, in principal control of the consciousness industry, have a plain interest in maintaining something not very different from the present North-South state of affairs.<sup>20</sup> To stabilize things they might, in certain circumstances, where they envisage a threat, favour some minor redistribution of wealth, but it would be very much against their interests, and that of a tiny stratum beholden to them, to make any extensive redistributions—redistributions that would touch their secure power base. Capitalism requires, and indeed can accept, at most a somewhat improved and more efficient version of the present and that, in turn, requires great injustice and inhumanity. It could only marginally improve our lot. A necessary but not a sufficient condition for attaining the end of such global injustice and inhumanity is the shedding of capitalism. As long, that is, as we live in a capitalist system, we are going to have such injustices. At most we might lessen their severity a bit.

If we are morally serious and not ideologically blinkered, we will realize that it is our central social task to get rid of capitalism. But concretely how this is to be done, given capitalist dominance in western industrial societies, is anything but obvious. (This is exacerbated by the technological sophistication of these societies—by their awesome means of surveillance and control.) However, that the way or the ways are not obvious does not mean, if our efforts are over the long haul, that

it cannot be done or that we should settle, as many do, for some reformist tinkering inside bourgeois parameters. We are not going to get justice or even a reign of common humanity that way. Recognizing that there are no quick fixes, we need to continue to struggle, without hiding from ourselves the sobering and indeed depressing recognition that things are probably going to get much worse before they get better.

## NOTES

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- 1 Robert McNamara as cited by Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 159.
- 2 Garrett Hardin, 'Lifeboat ethics: the case against helping the poor', and Joseph Fletcher, 'Give if it helps, but not if it hurts', both in William Aiken and Hugh La Follette (eds), *World Hunger and Moral Obligation*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977, pp. 11–21 and 103–14 respectively.
- 3 Harriet Friedmann, 'The political economy of food: the rise and fall of the Postwar International Food Order', in Michael Burawoy and Theda Skocpol (eds), *Marxist Inquiries*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 248–86.
- 4 *ibid.*
- 5 *ibid.*
- 6 Ernest Feder, 'Latifundia and agricultural labour in Latin America', in Teodor Shanin (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971, pp. 83–102.
- 7 Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins, *Food First: Beyond the Myth of Scarcity*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1977, pp. 256–8, 278–81; Ernest Feder, *Strawberry Imperialism: An Enquiry into the Mechanisms of Dependency in Mexican Agriculture*, The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1978.
- 8 Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981; Kenneth J. Arrow, 'Why people go hungry', *New York Review of Books*, XXIX, 12, 15 July 1982, pp. 24–6.
- 9 Sen, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–83.
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 *ibid.*, pp. 24–37.
- 12 My account here is indebted to Harriet Friedmann's masterful account of this order. See Friedmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 248–86.
- 13 *ibid.*, p. 250.



- 14 *ibid.*
- 15 *ibid.*, p. 268.
- 16 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A.Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, pp. 485–95; John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971, pp. 126–30; Brian Barry, ‘Circumstances of justice and future generations’, in R. I. Sikora and Brian Barry (eds), *Obligations to Future Generations*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1978, pp. 204–48.
- 17 David A.J.Richards, ‘International distributive justice’, in Roland J. Pennock and John W.Chapman (eds), *Nomos*, XXIV, New York: New York University Press, 1982, pp. 275–95; Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. 111–12.
- 18 Richard Norman, ‘Liberty, equality, property’, *Aristotelian Society*, supplementary volume, LV, 1981, pp. 199–202.
- 19 This is powerfully argued by Andrew Collier in ‘Scientific socialism and the question of socialist values’, in Kai Nielsen and Steven Patten (eds), *Marx and Morality*, Guelph, Ontario: Canadian Association for Publishing in Philosophy, 1981, pp. 121–54.
- 20 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *The Consciousness Industry*, New York: Seabury Press, 1974, pp. 3–25.