


REPLY TO RICHARD MILLER

Kai Nielsen

I

 turn now to Richard W. Miller. I first want to thank him for his generous remarks concerning my *Globalization and Justice*, which show the generosity of his spirit and something of the way he engages in argument with me, despite the fact that there must be parts of my book with which he substantially disagrees.

Miller's "The Critique of Globalization" has two parts. There is first a short part where we have a rigorous defense of *compatriot partiality*. We should not, between nation-states and people within those nation-states, urge, let alone require, a *cosmopolitan impartiality*. That calls for a "moral rigorism" that runs against our reflective moral sense. Second, and at greater length and in light of what he concludes in the first part, he comes to a consideration, different from mine, of globalization. I shall comment on both parts.

II

Miller begins by remarking, "[I]f one values, as I do, ordinary moral thinking about the limits of impartial concern and the demands of particular loyalties, it is difficult to see why globalization should be accompanied by demanding duties of affluent people in per capita rich societies to give up advantages in the interests of needy people in poor ones." I don't see why it is difficult to see why they *should* give up *some* advantages, but for Miller—and I take it that is what he means—"to give up" is to give up *substantial advantages*, the giving up of which would deeply affect their lives. This, he believes, people generally

speaking *will* not and indeed *should* not do. To insist that they do so requires a kind of moral fanaticism that is unreasonable.

In the face of vast inequalities in life conditions between different nation-states there is, as Miller puts it, remediable suffering, and gross disparities of wealth leading to all kinds of miseries and early death. Some important things here could be changed, with the political and economic will, that would ameliorate that situation. However, as Miller points out, we see that very little is done beyond some moralized rhetoric, which in effect means that practically nothing is done. Miller asks, "[I]f we ask how much affluent people in the per capita richest countries must be prepared to give up, as a matter of moral duty, in the interest of needy people in poor countries, reflection on the scarce moral convictions of most decent people suggests that the transnational dictates of general beneficence, independent of specific relationships, are fairly small." We—that is, most of us—have a modest sense of general beneficence toward helping those in need apart from any special relationships to them. But that does not cut very deep and is reflected in the amount of it given by our governments to what John Rawls calls burdened peoples—to, that is, the peoples of the very impoverished nation-states of the world. It is in my view scandalously small. Even in the Nordic countries, which do somewhat better than Canada and the United States and the rest of the world, it is very small. And individuals in the rich nations of the world do very little to ameliorate the situation. There is now a little more talk about doing something. But it is difficult to believe it is very serious. The citizens of these countries neither make efforts to vote for governments that would give more aid nor put pressure on their present governments to do something. And they do very little to help by topping off from their own after-tax income. Many are mainly concerned with getting tax cuts. For many other decent people there will be some topping off, but not much.

Miller remarks:

Suppose that your underlying responsiveness to neediness as such, at the level of what you ultimately care about, is great enough that responsiveness expressing greater basic concern would impose a significant risk of worsening your life if you fulfilled your other obligations. Then (in the ordinary moral framework), you have met your general obligation to help the needy. When we think about valuable relationships to dependents and close friends, virtually all of us find abundant material to sustain this limit on general beneficence. Donating to Oxfam the cost of my daughter's college education at a first-rate university (privately financed, on the American plan) would probably save several children in poor countries from early death. Yet I do not violate duty of equal respect for everyone everywhere in spending that money on my daughter's less urgent need if there is a significant risk that economizing would worsen her life. This favoritism expresses an appropriate valuing of my relationship to her, not the appalling valuation of her life as worth the lives of five children in Mali or Cambodia. If responsibility for another's well-being can sustain this limit on the duty of general beneficence, then the life goals of

one's own with which one can readily identify will give rise to an analogous limit. For one is one's own ultimate dependent, with a corresponding responsibility for one's own well-being.

This, normatively speaking, and rightly or wrongly, is an accurate account of how most people react and feel, and react and feel even on reflection. And it is shown in what they do. This empirical fact *about* our commonsense morality (our mores, if you will) seems to me a sad social fact about us though my feeling about it is a normative reaction on my part. Moreover, I do not do any better. Is it right that I should feel a guilty conscience about it? (I leave this with you as more than a rhetorical question.) Even if we do not think that the Gandhis of the world are suckers, we (that is, almost all of us) are not going to follow them. We finance (if we can) expensive educations for our children if they are talented (and sometimes even if they are not, e.g., Bush the elder for Bush the younger), we take (again, if we can) expensive vacations, eat fine meals, seek challenging and well-paid work, and so on. We do these things even when we care about the poor and are firmly on the Left as I am. Are we living in bad faith? Should we be guilty about that and try to change the way *we behave*? Well, yes, if we are very extravagant. But reflect on what Miller describes and what I just have. It would be pushing it to think that those ways of behaving are extravagant. This is what we do and these are our considered judgments, though some of us are ambivalent about them. Can we get them into reflective equilibrium? Miller, I believe, thinks so, and I, though ambivalently, do so as well. G. A. Cohen, another person firmly on the Left, challenges us on this in his *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* and challenges Rawls's *institutional* conception of justice. Yet he offers us no solution.

Yet there are several things we can do. Miller mentions one of them: "Virtually all relatively affluent people in per capita rich countries could be more responsive to neediness without imposing a significant risk of worsening their lives," and, he adds, "if we can, this is our duty." Moreover, as Thomas Pogge and before him Harriet Friedmann have argued and as I have argued as well in chapters 6 and 7 of my *Globalization and Justice*, our governments could considerably increase their foreign aid—increase it to the level where in a few years world poverty would be wiped out—without our being impoverished or our styles of life being changed significantly. Our taxes might be slightly increased, but we would hardly notice it.

That speaks of relieving world poverty so that no one would have to live in the appalling poverty many do now. But it says nothing about attaining equality of condition worldwide. However, if we would bring about a great equalization of all wealth and life changes across the world, it would cut deeply into the wealth of the wealthy nations of the world. And this means into the lives of many people in those countries. And then Miller's point would return like the repressed. The problem would then not be so urgent, for decent foreign aid at a minimum across the world would be established so the

worst horrors would be gone. But why stick with the minimum? That, to repeat, isn't even remotely like equality. It is not—or so it certainly seems—to treat everyone as having equal worth. It is not even to seek to bring about sufficiency for everyone to be able to live a good life, to be able to flourish. However, will people reflectively accept a government that would bring us even to the level of equal provision? Would a party that had that on its platform not be soundly defeated at the polls? I think bitterly that the answer is no to the first question and yes to the second. We are not saints or in a near possible world to saints and that is evident enough. It is also evident (or so it seems) that we should not even try to be, particularly when we can be rather sure that we will fail. We believe, and some of us *perhaps* without self-deception, in the equal worth of everyone's life. Yet isn't Miller right in saying "[s]till, most of us identify with worthwhile but expensive goals from which we cannot readily detach ourselves"? But isn't that where we need some moral rearmament? Isn't that where we should teach ourselves to so detach ourselves? Is that an absurd moral rigorism? Perhaps this is one of a few places where a philosopher should speak in the first person.

Let us make another turn of the screw. Let us go to San Diego and now imagine that I sell shoes in San Diego and my friend, a Mexican, sells shoes just across the border in Tijuana. I see how he lives compared to how I live. Here (pace Miller) it is not *just compassion* that is fundamentally at work but a sense of *fairness*. It isn't fair (or so I reflect) that things are so organized that I live (though hardly opulently) as I do and he does not. And it isn't a fact of nature—like his being struck by lightning and I not. For what is at issue are not arrangements built in nature but social arrangements. Maybe nothing much can be done about him and me, but with a possible change in our socioeconomic world things may be more equitable for his son or daughter and mine or at least for our grandchildren. We should respond with bitter indignation about our situations being as they are as Marx did about his. And when we look at the whole bloody world we should respond with both rage and indignation, as Marx did. And we should try to use our brains and determination, again as Marx did, to deeply change it. That's fine, but people—ordinary decent people aware of at least the central facts—don't do it, and we (or at least almost all of us) don't do it. What should we conclude about us and what should we do given these facts? Isn't Miller just being honest about himself and us?

III

Now let's turn to globalization. I argue in my *Globalization and Justice* that barring some incredible series of ecological disasters or some utter economic collapse, not quickly followed by another better, or at least as good or nearly as wealthy, economic order, globalization, like death, is here to stay. But it need not be *capitalist* globalization. It could be a globalization from below—a

socialist globalization—or it could be some form of authoritarian, statist, non-capitalist globalization. If the Soviet Union had won the Cold War and established itself all over the place, globalization would have gone on, though at a slower pace due to its lumbering technology and oligarchical political structure. But it would have gone on.

Globalization can be good or bad, depending on what kind of globalization it is. In my view it is *capitalist* globalization that is bad, but there are different kinds of capitalist globalization: laissez-faire neoliberal Washington consensus globalization (or at least the ideology of it)—the globalization antiglobalizers know and rightly hate—or corporate capitalist globalization as practiced in Germany, Japan, or Taiwan, or social democratic capitalist globalization such as we know in the Nordic countries. Which kind makes some difference to both capitalist stability and (what is another thing) to human weal and woe. So, while all capitalisms and capitalist globalizations are bad, some capitalisms and capitalist globalizations are worse than others. Neoliberal capitalist globalization, which pretty much until recently has been the form of globalization trumpeted by globalizers and feared and hated by many others, is just one form, and perhaps an ideological form at that. It is, to repeat, this form of globalization that antiglobalizers have principally resisted and many have mistakenly taken to be globalization *period*. But there are some signs that that form of globalization is on its way out. It is just too destabilizing for capitalism and some other form or forms of corporate capitalism may be on its way in, though I don't think it will be substantially better. But it may help to stabilize things for capitalists.

Miller, I *surmise*, would not say that all capitalist globalization is bad. At the conference in which he read a first version of his paper, he remarked, "I have been making room for indictments of globalization as unfair and as exploitative in a framework less socialist and less egalitarian than Kai's own." Miller wants to show that even without challenging capitalism and accepting something like my egalitarianism, we can articulate something with which we can challenge the morality of globalization. The account he articulates is an account that is constrained by certain nonegalitarian considerations. But even with such constraints, he believes, we can show what is wrong—morally wrong—with globalization. I argue, *au contraire*, that capitalist globalization even at its best leaves, and unavoidably so, much to be desired. I am more cynical than Miller as to whether capitalist globalization can have a human face, but perhaps if we had a worldwide social democracy or even some kind of other progressively ordered capitalism—if the United States had someone like a Franklin D. Roosevelt rather than a George W. Bush—capitalism could have a somewhat more human face. But perhaps that is to put it too strongly. With Bush we can have only capitalism with an inhuman face, but suppose the United States had got John Kerry instead. Kerry is surely no Roosevelt or Jefferson, but he is no Bush either. Even with him we would have had capitalism with a somewhat more human face—or at least with a less inhuman face. There are matters of degree here, and they need not be politically unimpor-

tant. (We on the Left should not come to think it doesn't matter. But we shouldn't think it makes a deep difference either.)

Both Miller and I agree that globalization is not going away; it just goes with modernity and its technology: time-space compression and the deep economic, cultural, and political integration modernity makes possible. We both agree that, as we know it, it does some terrible things and that it could, if differently structured, do some very good things. Miller's task to try to humanize capitalism, even if mistaken, is an honorable one. Let us see how it goes.

Miller is not becoming a patsy with his move away from Marxism for the bourgeois order. He has a hard-nosed realpolitik grip on how some important things stand, one that in effect specifies Joan Robinson's insightful quip: "There is only one thing worse than being exploited by capitalism and that is not to be exploited by capitalism." Fit this with the comment by Miller concerning some mainstream economists that globalization provides opportunities that not all countries have been able to seize. Think of some of the poorer countries on the African continent where we get the most "shocking descriptions of growing inequality" and the immiseration of the poor. They mostly have relatively small populations and "suffer the burdens of war, flawed governance, inadequate infrastructure, or disadvantageous location." I am not saying they are to be blamed or held accountable, and I take it that Miller is not either. Neither of us engages in such arbitrary moralizing. But it is not clear that he can lay their ills at globalization's door. But then contrast his remarks about China, India, and other Asian countries. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, as horrible as they are now in certain respects, these nation-states have, Miller contends, pulled out of mass poverty largely based on opportunities created by capitalist globalization and the economic interdependence it brings with it. China, of course, takes itself to be communist (or at least calls itself such), but it firmly is on the capitalist road; its leadership is what in Mao's time would have been called capitalist roaders. Global capitalism goes where the greatest profit is, and hourly labor costs are a sixth in China and India of what they are in Canada and the United States. People in India and China seek work in these incredibly exploitive sweatshops of the globalizing often transterritorial firms because the alternatives are even worse: grinding rural poverty, horrors of unemployment, or even lower wages and worse working conditions in local firms producing for local markets. In the conference Miller remarked: "These are the hard facts of life." He writes: "Developing countries benefit globalizing firms because of their impact in bargaining power, through the desperation that makes Reebok's threat to move a factory out of Malaysia if wages get too high so much more frightening than a Malaysian worker's threat not to work for Reebok if wages stay low."

This, Miller adds, is straightforwardly exploitation. It is something that Miller takes to be "the old-fashioned name for a process in which some derive a benefit from the bargaining weaknesses of others, which leads them to accept arrangements that are incompatible with a life fully worthy of human

dignity." This feature of globalization is wrong, indeed very wrong, we both agree, and it should be rectified. He remarks: "If the impact of the sacrifice is not too great, beneficiaries of exploitation ought to be willing to give up their benefits in order to reduce the weak bargainers' burdens, and this duty exists even if the weak bargainers would be even worse off if they lacked the opportunity to engage in exploitive interaction." This is something they lack in the poorest African countries bypassed by capitalism.

Miller makes the apt analogy: "Lost in a desert I might be rational to agree to be someone's menial servant for life in exchange for his leading me to a water hole. This does not excuse his insistence on the deal." This seems to me to be plainly right morally speaking, but it also seems to me that there is too much freewheeling moralizing here.

Globalizing capitalists could respond that capitalization isn't the Salvation Army. The very rationale for capitalism leads them to go after the greatest profit, and acting in this way, if people do not stir up things by making a significant ruckus about it, is where the greatest profit is. That is how to accumulate capital. Most people, for example, buy the shoes that are the cheapest at the quality that they are satisfied with or have to be satisfied with. If the shoe seller gets moralizing, he will, given his competitors, put himself out of business. That's the way, as Adam Smith taught us, the capitalist game is played. All this ought-talk does not take fully into account the realities and necessities of capitalism. Remember G. W. F. Hegel, or later, Theodor Adorno, on the impotence of the ought.

Surely, Miller has it, the beneficiaries of such exploitation ought to be willing to give up some of their benefits in order to reduce the weak bargainers' burdens, and we should say it loudly and plainly. But unless such talk gets linked with a challenging political and social movement, it is just spitting into the wind. There is also so much room for rationalization here to keep one from thinking that that is what one ought to do, that, without others whom one can be in solidarity with or without concrete ideas about how one can create such solidarities, it is just again instances of what Hegel called the impotence of the ought. Miller mentions several things we ought to do, but they all suffer from the syndrome of the impotence of the ought. Miller seems to have forgotten not only his Hegel but his Marx here.

I turn now to arguments about the alleged—I believe to be true—democratic deficit of capitalist globalization. This is a central theme in the antiglobalization movement and it was a central theme in my *Globalization and Justice*. But Miller thinks that antiglobalizers have made things too easy for themselves here. His argument is complex and needs a complex statement. It is not worldwide control, he contends, that is essential or even always even desirable. What is crucial is not worldwide control but public control by the people directly affected. Only if we had something like a worldwide federation, which we are far from, could we have democratic worldwide control. We have, however, something like worldwide control now, though of a pernicious form (say I), with the joint working of capitalist globalizing operative structures in conjunc-

tion with the hegemonic American empire. But that is a worldwide control, again say I, and I expect Miller would agree, that we do not want and don't need. But can we have public democratic control in our conditions of interdependence without it being worldwide? (So here talk of a worldwide federation raises its difficult and problematic head.)

Miller stresses rightly that the large inequalities in power tend to undermine the deliberative integrity (if it ever had it) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and similar organizations. The power of the big capitalist nations—the United States, Japan, France, and Germany—to hold out on issues concerning their farm subsidies at the Cancun meetings well illustrates this. Subsidies to US and Canadian farmers with their mechanized methods of farming enable them to destroy large sections of Mexican agriculture by underselling them in local Mexican markets and to thereby increase their market share. Corn growers in Mexico completely lost out in that way.

We also need to alter and to critically appraise the tendency of capitalist globalization to make options affecting a national way of life nonviable through commercial or bureaucratic processes that bypass collective self-determination. All people, but most particularly people in developing countries, should be given greater influence over the way of life of which they are the appropriate trustees. This is fine moralizing, but the essential question is how is this to be accomplished? Just saying it is bad won't do it.

Finally, that globalization generates large gaps—inequality gaps and power gaps—between winners and losers, the powerful countries should not, and should not be able to, render other countries subservient. The powerful governments—the United States, for example—should not, as they do now, disregard the principled arguments of weaker countries that have views opposed to their own or threaten those countries with punishment or actually punish them if they do not move into line. These are things that ought to be so, but as Miller realizes, will not readily come to pass.

However, I think Miller has not faced the hardest problems about democratic deficit. Perhaps, the big and powerful states aside (the US being the most obvious one), states with the advent of globalization, particularly small ones and even quite wealthy small ones with long traditions of good democratic governance, are increasingly unable to control their own affairs in very crucial domains; they increasingly cannot control their health policies, safety standards policies, taxation policies, cultural policies, investment policies, trade policies, banking policies, industrial development policies, and the like. It isn't that decisions here pass to some world parliament where they are consistently outvoted. But power and control, more and more, pass into the hands of transterritorial, nongovernmental, nondemocratic agencies: the WTO, IMF, the World Bank, and to transterritorial, nongovernmental, non-democratically responsible corporations. The officers of these agencies and corporations are not elected. Sometimes the officials of agencies are appointed by heads of state, but these appointed offi-

cially are not elected officials and these appointments are not discussed, let alone voted on, in the parliament of any country or in the UN and discussed in the public domain. Often, such officials are not even appointed by heads of state.

It is also the case that the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Free Trade Agreement (FTA), and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) were brought into being in such a way that they have no genuine democratic basis. Neither their desirability nor even their programs, or for that matter their very coming into being, was ever debated and voted on in any parliament. Yet, while standing free of democratic processes, they crucially determine how many things crucial for the citizens of states go.¹

Capitalism is not eternal, but it is not unreasonable, though I hope I am mistaken, to believe that in some form or another it will be around for the next one hundred years or so. Perhaps Miller thinks something like that. And he also thinks, as I do, that barring some terrible worldwide catastrophe, globalization is just something that goes with scientifically and technologically developed contemporary life. Still it would be—particularly given those conditions—reasonable to try, as Miller proposes, to tame globalization and capitalism a little, to make it less lean and mean. That, I repeat, is an honorable undertaking. If I thought that capitalism was so with us, that there was, as Margaret Thatcher said, no alternative, I would perhaps do the thing that Miller does. I say “perhaps” for it seems to me just too dehumanizing to continue to accept it and not struggle against it. To get anything like decency—or so I think—we must get a democratic socialist globalization. But then I am perhaps wrong. Social democracy without replacing capitalism once tamed it a bit. A big difference in our situation now from that of the past is that in the past when social democracy arose there was a big organized and militant industrialized working class whom the capitalists (and not without reason) feared might become revolutionary and put them out of business; and there was also external to the capitalist countries “the Red Scare.” This gave capitalists cause to pay attention to the social democrats’ moral and political claims. But now the situation is significantly different. The large and growing anticapitalist and antiglobalization movement does not have the same economic leverage as the old industrial working class. Faced with that, Miller has not much more to go on than the soundness of his moral arguments, and we very well know what capitalism has done with such moral arguments, no matter how sound. I care about moral considerations as much as Miller does, but I also understand why Marx broke out into belly laughs when he heard moral philosophy being discussed. We can have sound moral arguments for the termination of capitalism or the taming of it until we are blue in the face and capitalism will go right on rolling along.

NOTE

1. Kai Nielsen, *Globalization and Justice* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2003), pp. 317–47.