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Decontextualizing Development: A Critical Examination of American Popular Discourse on Foreign Aid

Jeffrey Haines
Old Dominion University

DECONTEXTUALIZING DEVELOPMENT: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF AMERICAN POPULAR DISCOURSE ON FOREIGN AID

by

Jeffrey Haines
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Approved by:

Dale Miller (Director)

David Earnest (Member)

Imtiaz Habib (Member)

ABSTRACT

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Jeffrey Haines
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Director: Dr. Dale Miller

Humanitarian foreign aid is a controversial topic, subject to much popular debate. Although there is much available polling and survey evidence about public stances on the issue, there have been significantly fewer attempts at more in-depth analyses of the public discourse. This thesis is an attempt to explore the popular discourse on aid in more depth, including its rationales, assumptions, and values.

It concludes that both sides of the American public in the debate often make use of similar types of assumptions regarding international affairs, suggesting often deeper agreement than the debate may indicate. It is argued that the set of assumptions that both sides appeal to is problematic, and a more adequate understanding of global interactions is provided by examining first world actions and policies that harm developing countries. Acknowledging these harms helps to establish a critical view of the discourse and provides a justification for foreign aid as compensation, a view that is not traditionally dominant.

To my family.

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I would firstly like to thank my committee. This thesis would not have been possible without their tireless work. My thesis director deserves special thanks for the countless hours he sacrificed reading and commenting on my many drafts. I also thank my family, whose support made this all possible.

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INTRODUCTION

In the emergent field of development ethics, the question of what obligations wealthier "developed" countries have to materially poorer "underdeveloped" countries lies at the center of many moral debates. It is manifest perhaps most obviously in debates over the foreign aid given by the governments and individuals of the former to governments or organizations in the latter. Foreign aid happens to be one of the most publicly well-known and debated issues in the field, and the popular discourse surrounding this aid presumably influences policy decisions in the democracies which compose much of the "developed" world. The popular discourse, that is, the discourse not of academic journals or the internal debates among social scientists or development professionals, but of journalists, politicians, and the general public, is, considering its importance in shaping public perception and policy, a subject in need of further analysis. Considering this, I set out to analyze the dominant themes and arguments that emerge in American popular discourse on foreign aid.

While much has been written about the best economic policies for alleviating extreme poverty or about moral obligations, analyses of what is actually said about aid are much rarer. Those that do exist, such as Arturo Escobar's *Encountering Development*, often seek to analyze the language of the development profession. The statements and paradigms of the profession of course are an important object of analysis, as they shape what is said and can be said within the professional field. Popular discourse, however, also plays an important role, as public perceptions often determine the political feasibility of a course of action. In a democratic environment where public opinion is decidedly

against foreign aid, for example, politicians will stress increases or perhaps even maintenance of that aid at their own risk.

Although power is clearly present in the dominant political and professional discourses, it would be a mistake to suppose that this is the only source of power. Analyses, such as Escobar's, which only look at what is said and done in dominant professional and political circles, can too easily ignore the role that popular discourse and non-professionals play in shaping policy. While organizations can embark on public relations campaigns and politicians can attempt to sway public opinion, it is erroneous to see the public as a merely passive slate, waiting to be inscribed upon by the pen of those in power.

In the course of researching this, I found it necessary to draw on the few studies that have actually delved into the arguments and discourse of foreign aid. The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland is perhaps the most notable, but nonetheless suffers from problems related to the framing of its questions.[1] Especially problematic, for my purposes, is that the authors offered reasons, which respondents rated "convincing" or "unconvincing." While this certainly goes beyond the typical limits of merely measuring support or opposition, it may provide an inaccurate picture of how public discourse on foreign aid "naturally" works (i.e., what reasons people, in "ordinary" discussions with other non-experts give and find convincing, rather than what they choose from on a list of options prepared by researchers). In fact, in examining reasons given in online discussions about foreign aid, I find that some of the

[1] Tingley, Dustin and Helen Milner. "Foreign Aid in US Policy: Public Opinion and the Nature of Aid Policy."

most popular reasons (especially the most popular argument given against foreign aid) are not options for respondents to pick in PIPA's study.

There are some other notable studies and surveys on foreign aid and public opinion. Some of these include the Center for International Security Studies' "Public Opinion Poll: Views on Foreign Aid," Tingley and Milner's studies "Foreign Aid in US Policy: Public Opinion and the Nature of Aid Policy" and "Class, Ideology and National Identity: The Correlates of Public Opinion on Foreign Trade, Aid and Immigration." Such studies and surveys help to explore the stances the public takes and what demographic factors correlate with those stances, but this thesis attempts to explore the aid debate from the perspective of the reasons and arguments made within it.

As this indicates, I also found it necessary to sample reasons and arguments provided by the public and public figures (journalists and politicians) on the topic of foreign aid. This includes speeches and opinion pieces by politicians on both the American political left and right as well as opinion pieces and blogs by members of the general public. Of course, those who do take the time to write extensively on the issue of foreign aid have strong positions and may not be representative of broader segments of the population. To this end, a more systematic sampling, involving the sampling of hundred of online comments was also used. In addition to these primary sources, I also draw on a qualitative sociological study ("Resisting Obligation: How Privileged Adolescents Conceive of Their Responsibilities to Others") on how young American adults reason about the morality of foreign aid and domestic assistance to American poor. All of the above sources factor into my attempts to sketch out the form of the discourse.

Specifically, this thesis will attempt to answer the following questions: What, if any, consistent themes are displayed in American popular discourse about foreign aid? What, if anything, do these themes, or lack thereof, tell us about dominant American assumptions or perspectives? Are the arguments and claims popularly presented sound or do they suffer from biases or incorrect information? In other words, what do we say about aid, what does that say about us, and is what we are saying in fact true? Finally, I will argue that a fuller understanding of global interactions indicates that prevailing American perspectives further a status quo which perpetuates global inequalities and severe poverty by obscuring causes of and solutions to these problems.

I will argue that, in response to the first question, discursive themes do exist in popular discourse on aid. This discourse occurs in editorials in major newspapers, speeches by national politicians, and when the general public talks about foreign aid, and it is not a random collection of arguments or claims. In looking at the reasons given in favor of aid, one finds that the two most prevalent arguments made in favor of aid are arguments that aid is in American economic, political, or strategic interests (what I call the "national interest" argument) and arguments which try to establish a positive moral obligation, often by comparing the wealth or spending of the wealthy countries with poverty or suffering in the poor countries.

Arguments against foreign aid tend, on the other hand, to focus on either the wealthy or the poor countries, and interaction or comparisons between the two are much more limited. One type of argument (I call it the "our money" family of arguments) focuses only on the wealthy nations, pointing out social problems within them, how hard their citizens work for their income, or other reason for the money that would have gone to

foreign aid to be kept domestically. Another kind ("moral failings") focuses exclusively on the poor country, finding fault with its people or leaders. Concerns about corruption and out of control birth rates often belong here.

In terms of volume, these themes clearly outweigh all others. In one sense they show a pretty obvious pattern: when people talk favorably about aid, they see an interconnected world, one where American foreign assistance furthers the interests of the United States and its citizens, or one where the extreme poverty of the poorest countries coexists with the affluence of the richest countries. Unlike in the case of the national interest arguments, a causal connection is rarely hypothesized. Instead the rich and the poor worlds are discursively and logically connected in pro-aid moral language, co-existing in the same context. At the same time, arguments which assume a less interconnected world, one where rich and poor countries do not seem to share a common context, are almost always opposed to foreign aid.

I will argue that there are, however, deeper themes as well. Both dominant pro-aid and anti-aid themes demonstrate two problematic assumptions. Firstly, they decontextualize and atomize. The "our money" arguments which focus on the affluent countries fail to consider the extent to which American wealth (and that of other developed nations) is produced in a global-historical setting. The "moral failings" arguments which focus on the corruption and other failings of impoverished countries ignore the extent to which the developed countries and other first-world actors reward and promote corruption. In the case of out of control birth rates, the perceived problem is isolated and decontextualized in other ways: high birth rates get construed as necessarily irrational; a failure of those in underdeveloped countries to control their reproductive urges, and the problem of

overpopulation itself get divorced from a reality in which developed countries consume most of the world's resources.

The pro-aid moral arguments for aid as a positive obligation portray foreign aid as charity, even if an obligatory one. Implicit in many such arguments is the idea that foreign aid is a positive duty to help one whom you have not harmed. Yet many of the policies of developed countries can be shown to actively harm developing countries.

The second problematic assumption is a political realist one. In international relations, realism discounts concerns about morality or justice in favor of what is in a country's interests. In engaging with other nations, the realist would favor an adversarial model where her nation competes against other nations for position and power. Realism is often assumed in American discourse on aid. This is problematic for two reasons: 1) when realism is used to argue for foreign aid (as it is in the national interest arguments), it places American interests above effective aid, and "aid" can and has been used both ineffectively to help and effectively to oppress residents of recipient countries 2) it neutralizes moral objections to the most powerful country in the world using its clout to influence institutional rules and advance even relatively minor interests at the expense of the poorest countries. Many Americans take it for granted that the U.S. should aggressively assert its interests on the global stage by, for example, favoring subsidies supporting domestic farmers and barriers to imports from developing countries. Realism provides no space for moral objections if such policies cause severe harm to people in poor countries.

This thesis, then, is not merely a survey of stances. It makes an argument that the reasoning behind these stances often indicates a set of assumptions and perspectives that

justify or obscure the workings of global power and arrangements that suit the dominant countries. The ways in which developed, dominant countries harm developing, less powerful countries tend to be obscured or overtly justified.

Nearly every term in the phrase "American popular discourse on foreign aid" needs clarification. To begin with, I limit my research to American discourse, by which (with apologies to Mexican friends who have objected to the continental demonym being monopolized by a single country on the continent) I mean the discourse that typically occurs amongst citizens of the United States and is concerned about appropriate policy for the United States. A number of non-American authors, including Dambisa Moyo, Peter Singer, and Amartya Sen have significantly contributed to American foreign-aid discourse. When such authors do greatly influence American discourse, it would be arbitrary to exclude from consideration their impact. There is no clear, objective guideline here as to how influential such authors must be. I will include such authors when they clearly are recognized by the public (their work is relatively widely read by non-specialists) and, more importantly, when their arguments are clearly reflected in public discourse. In such cases I may use them to illustrate discursive themes present in American discourse. In terms of newspapers and other journalistic sources, I limit my sampling to those sources with American editorial offices (e.g., *The New York Times*). Obviously such sources may have world-wide influence and may reflect what could be considered cosmopolitan views. Cosmopolitan views are likely a part of nearly every culture in the world today,[2] and this should not be taken as in any way inauthentically American discourse.

[2] Appiah, Kwame. Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers.

Secondly, and equally ambiguous, is the term "popular." It is perhaps easiest to get an idea of what this includes by mentioning what it does not: the discourses of academic and professional journals on aid and development are not considered;[3] technical works from any discipline on development (including not only the humanities and social sciences, but also medicine, engineering, etc.); anything else that would not be accessible to lay readers. While specialists whose writings are publicly accessible are at times included, they are only mentioned if their writings are reflected in the many other, popular, sources. As with the event of input from other nations, individual writings by specialists making arguments not reflected in popular discourse will be unlikely to skew the data. I include both journalists and politicians as "popular" sources because, even when they have highly specialized knowledge, their published writings and speeches are for public consumption, often specifically designed to influence popular opinions and attitudes.

Thirdly, there can be disagreement about what constitutes "discourse." Does it include actions? Is it purely linguistic? Does it include the thoughts and habits it shapes? Here the evidence I draw upon is entirely linguistic – what is written and said. While I do consider actions (e.g., the evidence for American private giving; how foreign aid gets distributed), this is only to analyze the arguments found in the discourse (e.g., Americans give a lot privately; foreign aid helps the U.S. and recipient countries). My central focus in establishing my case is what Americans say, specifically what arguments we make.

Finally, "foreign aid" is also a very ambiguous term. While many people undoubtedly think of "foreign aid" as solely humanitarian and development assistance, military aid often gets included in official foreign aid totals. Both kinds of aid get lumped together

[3] For an analysis of professional development discourse, see Escobar, Arturo. Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World.

both in official tallies and in popular discourse. Many argue that foreign aid is in U.S. political/strategic interests without distinguishing between military and humanitarian assistance. Tracking these discursive tendencies, I will be considering discourse on both humanitarian/development and military assistance. It should be noted, however, that popular debates about foreign aid more often are clearly about development assistance than clearly about military aid, and accordingly development assistance will get more of my attention.

Additionally, another clarification about "foreign aid" is also needed. There is public aid which takes the form of official development assistance (ODA) and private aid which consists of individual donations, often to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). My focus is on ODA, and whenever I use the term "foreign aid" I refer to official assistance, rather than private giving. Since both official foreign aid and private giving involve similar topics – wealth comparisons between rich countries and recipient countries, whether such assistance helps recipient countries, etc. – there is some discursive overlap between the two. I try to focus only on debates about ODA with two exceptions: 1) moral arguments about whether wealthy people or nations have obligations to give assistance (as these debates greatly overlap with moral debates about foreign aid) and 2) data on levels of American private giving.

The thesis will be divided in to five chapters. Chapter I looks at the statistical data available about levels of support for foreign aid in the U.S. Such data is readily available, although depth is sometimes lacking. Even these polls, however, give hints of underlying distorting frameworks at play, as, throughout the years, people consistently overestimate the amounts the U.S. gives in foreign aid by very high factors, and there is evidence of

the resistance most have to information about actual levels – refusing to accept the new information or quickly forgetting it.

The second chapter begins the examination of the reasons that people give when talking about foreign aid. It looks at pro-aid themes, particularly the national interest argument and the positive moral argument. Chapter III in turn considers anti-aid discourse, the dominant themes of which are divided into the "our money" category of arguments and the "corruption" category.

Following this, chapter IV attempts to make the case that both pro- and anti-aid discourse are problematically realist and decontextual. This will involve arguing that the policies of developed countries harm developing countries. The last chapter, V, continues this argument and concludes that a fuller understanding of global relations entails seeing foreign aid as a negative, rather than a positive duty. Such a conception, while obviously controversial, may reduce various problems currently associated with American foreign aid.

CHAPTER I

SUPPORT AND OPPOSITION

Americans by and large tend to be suspicious or even hostile to foreign aid, although these views coexist with significant evidence of favorable attitudes towards hunger, disaster, and disease relief. Uncovering and examining the reasons proffered for various viewpoints both in favor of and opposed to aid will compose the bulk of this thesis. First, however, the analysis will examine debate in terms of numbers and demographics: what proportion of Americans favor or oppose aid, and who, demographically speaking, is likely to hold what stance.

There is, fortunately, an abundance of this sort of quantitative data. What are less common are analyses of the debate that consider reasons rather than merely tabulating stances. This will necessarily be qualitative. As surveys and polls rarely attempt to study such reasons, I will be relying more on documents and similar discursive evidence and less on statistical correlation uncovered by social science studies as I venture into my analysis of the debate about foreign aid. What follows is a mostly quantitative sketch about general American views on foreign aid.

In April 2010 *The Economist* published a poll that asked respondents what government programs they thought should receive lower funding in order to help balance the federal budget. The overwhelming "winner" was foreign aid, which 71% of respondents favored cutting. No other program received a response rate of even 30%. The next most unpopular expenditure was on "The Environment," for which 29% favored lower federal funding. *The Economist* stated that cutting spending is a more popular approach to

decreasing the deficit than raising taxes, "by a margin of 62% to 5%." Quite clearly, many people favor reducing government spending, and foreign aid is seen as far and away the prime choice for reductions. This despite, as *The Economist* noted, the fact that foreign aid constitutes less than 1% of the federal government's budget.[1]

Of course, even if a program composes a relatively small portion of the federal budget, it could still be an unwise use of money. Perhaps reducing foreign aid by itself is not enough to balance the budget, but maybe it is a step in the right direction. So far, no contradictions are evident in public desires, and similar findings have emerged in other polls on the issue.

There are inconsistencies to be found, however, when polls dig deep enough. The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland has published several studies, notably in 1995 and in 2001, on American attitudes towards foreign aid. In 1995, PIPA found that 75% of respondents believed that the US was spending too much on foreign aid, and respondents gave a median estimate of 15% of the federal budget going to foreign aid. The median preferred percentage was 5%, approximately five times the contemporary level of 1%. When presented with the actual amount, only 18% thought it was too much. In 2001, PIPA found 61% thought the US spent too much on aid.[2]

A 1995 Washington Post poll and a 1996 PIPA poll both found estimates and preferred levels of foreign aid expenditure to be significantly higher than actual levels. Even when

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[1] "This Week's Economist/YouGov Poll." The Economist. 7 Apr. 2010. 4 July 2010 <http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2010/04/economistyougov_polling>.

[2] "Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger." World Public Opinion: Global Public Opinion on International Affairs. Washington D.C., 2 Feb. 2001. Program on Intenrational Policy Attitudes. University of Maryland. 6 July 2010 <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/btdevelopmentaidra/135.php?lb=btda&pnt=135&nid=&id>. p.5-8

it was made explicit that estimates were not to include the cost of militarily defending other countries (a possible misunderstanding that could inflate the estimates), respondents in the 1996 PIPA poll gave 20% as a median estimate of foreign aid as a percentage of the federal budget and a mean estimate of 23%. The Washington Post also found a median estimate of 20% and a preferred level of 10%. PIPA's 2001 poll found a median estimate of 20%, a mean of 24%, and a median preferred level of 10%. This clearly was at odds with the widespread (61%) view that too much was being spent on aid. The inaccurate estimates appeared across all demographics.[3] A 1993 Harris Poll found that respondents thought 20% of the budget went to foreign aid.[4]

At the same time, these estimates exist side by side with high levels of support for reducing foreign aid spending. The poll published by *The Economist* is consistent with other polls on the issue. A 1995 Time and CNN poll found 73% wanted to decrease foreign aid spending. Another 1995 survey, this time by the University of Connecticut, put that number at 67%, and a 1994 Chicago Council on Foreign Relations poll found 58% wanted to cut foreign aid spending.[5]

One poll, published by the Center for International Security Studies (CISS) at the University of Maryland, College Park, found that respondents gave a median estimate of 15% and an average estimate of 18.1% when asked how much of the federal budget went to foreign aid. When asked how much *should* go to foreign aid, they gave a median of 5.4% and a mean of 8.4%.[6]

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[3] *Ibid.*, p. 3-8

[4] Crossette, Barbara. "Foreign Aid Budget: Quick, How Much? Wrong." New York Times. 27 Feb. 1995. 8 July 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/02/27/world/foreign-aid-budget-quick-how-much-wrong.html>.

[5] "Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger." p. 5

[6] Kull, Steven. "Public Opinion Poll: Views on Foreign Aid." The Americans and Foreign Aid: A Study of American Public Attitudes. Center for International Security Studies, University of Maryland, College

The CISS poll found, interestingly, that only 4.2% of respondents thought the US spent too little on foreign aid, even though the respondents believed, on average, that over eight percent of the budget should go to foreign aid.[7] This is understandable, given that 18.1% was the average estimate of how much actually went to foreign aid. When asked how they felt about 1% of the budget going to foreign aid, only 17.5% said it was "too much." When informed that actual levels were 1%, however, 35.4% favored cutting foreign aid further.[8] Although this is less than half of the 75% who originally favored cutting foreign aid spending, it is approximately double the 17.5% who, when presented with the hypothetical possibility of 1%, thought it too much.[9]

Although the authors of the 2001 PIPA study argued that support for public aid is increasing compared to the mid-1990's, the survey published by *The Economist* gives reason to be skeptical of this. Whatever the trends may have been moving from the middle to the late 1990's, opinions today, as indicated by *The Economist's* survey, are not noticeably more receptive to aid.

Park, MD, 1995. 2 Sep. 2010 <http://www.globallearningnj.org/global_ata/Public_Opinion_Poll_Views_on_Foreign_Aid.htm#Responses>.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] The large discrepancy in responses between a hypothetical scenario where 1% is given (17.5% thinking it "too much") and an actual scenario where 1% is given (35.4% implicitly saying it is too much) shows a possible problem with using thought experiments. If responses can differ so drastically between a hypothetical scenario and an identical actual scenario, how can hypothetical thought experiments be reliable guides to intuition or action in actual cases? Let's also not forget that even the "actual" case here is still somewhat removed from having concrete consequences for the respondent. If respondents were to be presented by the pollster with an option to sign on and raise their taxes then and there to increase funding for foreign aid, would more than 35% be moved to think that 1% was too much? The poll question indicates that while 1% remains the same figure whether it is hypothetical, actual, or concrete (having real implications for the respondent), those different degrees of reality have a large impact on how likely people are to view 1% as "too much." This is a difficulty for thought experiments which seek to move from intuitions in hypothetical cases to persuading individuals to undertake concrete action. Although philosophers may be good at capturing the logical connections between the two, many individuals may intuitively find the move unconvincing. For thought experiments that try capture people's intuitions on concrete scenarios, social science-like experiments, presenting subjects with choices that seem real and not merely hypothetical, may therefore be more reliable guides to human action and intuition.

Moreover, as I will discuss when talking about popular discourse on the issue, arguments and discursive practices from the middle 1990's fit right in with current popular discourse on foreign aid. There has been little change in rhetoric, indicating that there has not been an accompanying shift in mainstream opinion and thought.

There is evidence, then, that Americans, from all demographics, have major misperceptions about foreign aid spending levels, routinely estimating spending levels around 20 times higher than actual levels and believing that aid should be "reduced" to five to ten times its current level.

What is even more striking is the apparent resistance to correcting these misperceptions. According to a study by the Center on Policy Attitudes (cited in the PIPA study), respondents often refused to believe that 1% or less of the federal budget went to foreign aid when they were informed. Despite evidence that most believed *a priori* that 1% was too low, most did not, upon being presented with evidence of actual spending, want to increase spending. What is more, when the same respondents were contacted days later and again asked to estimate the percentage of the budget spent on aid and state what level would be preferred, "most did not take into account the information they received just several days earlier, and made estimates and proposed spending levels that were approximately the same as for those who had not been given such information."[10]

This informational discounting indicates that the contradictory statements that these surveys uncover are not merely caused by ignorance of actual spending levels. It is evidence that some views on foreign aid are not easily modified or abandoned. Since the object of the questioning is a fairly straightforward percentage, it is unlikely that this resistance is caused by the complexity of the ideas. In the absence of broader epistemic

[10] "Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger." p. 9

frameworks (such as Foucauldian *epistemes* or Kuhnian paradigms) which may make adopting or rejecting certain beliefs more or less difficult, it would be no more cognitively difficult to believe that foreign aid expenditure is 1% than to believe it is 20%. That there is some resistance to holding the former belief, even when it is presented with supporting evidence, is an indication that there is a distorting epistemic or discursive framework at work. What other indications are there that opinions on foreign aid do not merely stand as isolated beliefs, but are part of a broader epistemic and discursive framework?

Similar misperceptions exist about the amount the US gives relative to other countries. The 2001 PIPA poll found that respondents believed the US should give 20% (median response) of all the foreign aid given by wealthy countries; actual levels at the time of the question were 16%.[11] This despite a widespread view that Americans provide a disproportionate level of the foreign aid relative to other countries:

> At present the belief that the US spends too much on foreign aid relative to the federal budget and relative to other countries dampens enthusiasm. Changing this perception is not easy, as it is embedded in a broader perception that the US generally does more than its fair share in maintaining world order.[12]

Given the above, it would be too easy to draw a pessimistic conclusion about public generosity. The public opinion captured in these studies indicates low levels of public support towards foreign aid. But the picture is more nuanced than this. How questions are framed matters a great deal, and support for foreign aid is conflated with support for programs to help the hungry or to help children only at great risk.

The PIPA study found that 87% of respondents favored giving food and medical aid. A

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 8-9
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 32

1997 Pew survey found an 86% approval rate for such humanitarian aid.[13] These levels are drastically higher than support for foreign aid. Although a majority of respondents (61%) said in 2001 that the US spent too much on foreign aid, only 23% felt the same way about efforts to reduce global hunger.[14] The CISS study found 75.3% of respondents favored increasing or maintaining humanitarian aid related to food production, education, and health care. When asked about "child survival programs" the percentage favoring increasing or maintaining spending levels jumped to an extraordinary 90.9%.[15]

These CISS questions included how much average taxpayers paid in taxes for these projects. This may have had a framing effect in contrasting relatively small amounts of money with the implicit possibility of children starving to death. When the fact that the average US taxpayer pays 72 cents a year to "help feed poor children [and] combat childhood diseases" is included in the question,[16] it would likely be difficult for many to say the amount is too much.

Similarly, many more Americans seem open to aid if it is framed in such a way as to highlight American wealth. Approximately 80% of those polled in both 1995 and in 2001 believed "the United States should be willing to share at least a small portion of its wealth with those in the world who are in great need."[17] In the CISS poll, 65.55% agreed either strongly (25%) or somewhat (40.55%) that "As one of the world's rich nations, the US has a moral responsibility toward poor nations to help them develop their economy and improve their people's lives."[18]

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[13] *Ibid.*, p. 10
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 11
[15] "Public Opinion Poll: Views on Foreign Aid."
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] "Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger." p. 6
[18] "Public Opinion Poll: Views on Foreign Aid."

Of course, no neutral ways exist to ask these questions. The claim that including information about wealth or spending biases the question towards a generous response seems just as legitimate as the claim that not including relevant information when polling leads to uninformed answers which are possible distortions of the "true" preferences the poll is presumably trying to capture.

This is a salient polling ethics issue when polls merely capture the opposition to foreign aid resulting from extremely inaccurate assumptions about aid spending levels, rather than reporting the public's preferred level of aid spending or how they adjust their preferences in light of accurate information. When support or opposition measured by such polls leads politicians to adopt or reject policies, how the polling questions are framed can have very real, and possibly troubling, outcomes.

I do not want to take a side on the best way to frame these questions here. I bring up the issue of framing because of what it indicates about the underlying discourses. There are various themes that occur often in popular discourse about foreign aid. Some of these themes are captured in polls, but they are primarily evident in the popular literature and speech, the discursive practices that surround foreign aid. Some themes are hinted at by the importance of framing in the surveys mentioned.[19] Indeed there seems to be no discursively neutral framing possible, as even the very phrase "foreign aid" is a non-

[19] Another important example of the effect that framing can have also comes from the 2001 PIPA study. It found, in assessing American attitudes towards multilateral aid, that 57.3% of respondents preferred a multilateral statement over a bilateral statement. The study concluded from this that the US public is more multilaterally oriented on aid. But the wording of the question was such that the multilateral statement could be likely to appeal to bilaterally oriented respondents by implying a degree of mistrust towards other nations. (The statement was "*When giving foreign aid, it is best for the US to participate in international efforts, such as through the UN. This way it is more likely that other countries will do their fair share and that these efforts will be better coordinated.*") Indeed, Tingley and Milner (2010) received extremely different results by not framing the question in this manner and instead asking " *"Would you prefer that the U.S. give economic aid directly to a country or give aid to an international organization (such as the World Bank or International Monetary Fund) which then would give it to the country?"* Their survey, conducted three times, found support for the multilateral option at, variously, 20%, 34%, and 27%, significantly lower than PIPA's results.

neutral framing and often has significant negative connotations.[20]

One possible reason why people support or oppose foreign aid is self-interest, particularly economic self-interest. Reasons of self-interest could operate either explicitly within the discourse or behind the scenes, so to speak, providing a motivational reason which nonetheless is not used as an explicit argument and is not apparent in the discourse. There is, however, little indication that openly self-interested reasons are commonly given in debates about aid, although they are more often attributed to individuals holding an opposing view from oneself (hence it is sometimes argued that development workers are primarily motivated by their allegedly lucrative careers or that those who oppose aid do so out of greed and selfishness).

Arguing from self-interest, however, is obviously not an effective strategy. Egoistic arguments tend not to work in public moral/policy debates for the simple reason that they fail to provide publicly justifiable reasons. A publicly justifiable reason must appeal to others. Commonly, it should be objectively or even inter-subjectively defensible, or it at least must operate within the logic and rules of the discourse. In some situations, such as business negotiations, naked self-interest may be discursively acceptable, but those cases differ from policy debates in that they are accepted to be a matter of putting private interests above any interpersonal concept of morality or the common good. While not denying that self-interest often explains moral and policy positions, it must be acknowledged that there is often a limit to the power of open appeals to self-interest. Policy and moral debates by their very nature are concerned with interactions among multiple, often competing interests, meaning that a naked restatement of one interest or

[20] Jasper, William J. "Bush Pushes Foreign Aid, Despite Economic Woes." The New American. 23 Oct. 2008. 1 July 2010 <http://www.thenewamerican.com/usnews/foreign-policy/447>.

another will provide no solution and no reason to be swayed.

This is a potential problem for ethical egoists who hold that what is moral just is what is in one's own self-interest. Insofar as we think that morality is tasked with reconciling selfish interests with the interests of others, egoism fails to present itself as a moral theory. Even if egoism cannot be proved deficient on purely theoretical grounds by uncovering a fundamental incoherence, egoism does appear to be untenable at the applied level of policy, as the structure of policy or legal debates presupposes a concern with multiple interests. Legal and political systems which fail to take into account multiple interests are tyrannical oppressive systems, if they can even function.

The difficulty egoistic arguments face in providing objectively valid reasons implies that self-interest will not be obvious in the arguments about aid. There is evidence, however, that self-interest does correlate with aid positions.

Although we cannot expect admissions of self-interest to turn up within debates about aid, there are multiple ways of measuring such a correlation. Milner and Tingley (2009) present the interesting finding that the foreign-aid votes of legislators in the US House of Representatives correlate with whether or not their constituents tend to benefit from the U.S. provision of foreign aid.

As Milner and Tingley point out, "[l]ike other foreign policies tools, such as international trade or economic sanctions … aid creates winners and losers at home."[21] Constituencies with high levels of low-skilled labor were both more likely to be

[21] Milner, Helen V. and Dustin H. Tingley. "The Political Economy of U.S. Foreign Aid: American Legislators and the Domestic Politics of Aid." Princeton University, 28 Jan. 2009. 10 Sep. 2010 <http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:bX2auEhRkBAJ:www.princeton.edu/~hmilner/forthcoming%2520papers/Milner_Tingley_Foreign_Aid_EPfinal.pdf+view+on+foreign+aid+by+demographics&hl=en&gl=us&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEEShH2S1n6Gea0b2lKs6jwEGbfvx-Vdf6iFnxEDd5UbXVuDLMRJ89SVUeC-RzkKDCL1gyZRicyo-tFiAEwWZySCkNTAVvo5PNGCN16bQf8oHJuYlWfotCZ42mHp2rlBG4EbB3dqrZ&sig=AHIEtbRbPHKMOK5nXFgFJSvg-ddnbnG_gg>. p. 2

indirectly harmed by foreign aid and to elect legislators who opposed foreign aid in their votes.[22] All constituencies have their tax dollars finance foreign aid and may have to pay higher prices due to increased demand by aid agencies purchasing certain goods and services. Those with higher skill levels and capital owners, including notably the agriculture sector, whose goods and services are exported via foreign aid, however, benefit overall from aid and tend to elect legislators who vote in favor of foreign aid.[23] These findings hold true even when education and cosmopolitanism, factors which would tend to go along high skills levels and may cause higher support for foreign aid, are accounted for.[24]

In an earlier study, Tingley and Milner found evidence that economic interests may be more predictive of aid attitudes than political ideology. They found that a respondent's economic position influences his or her stance on international trade, immigration, and foreign aid.[25] In their cross-national study, socio-economic class was significant in seven out of eight countries (Spain being the exception) while political ideology was a significant factor in only three out of eight (Germany, Finland, and Sweden).[26] This is consistent with the hypothesis that "capital abundant individuals should be more favorable to active engagement with the international economy."[27]

Self-interest, of course, might not be the only possible reason why individuals with higher socio-economic status are more likely to support aid. Those with more money may

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[22] *Ibid.*, p. 26
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 4, 11, 13-14, 35
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 26-8
[25] Tingley, Dustin and Helen Milner. "Class, Ideology and National Identity: The Correlates of Public Opinion on Foreign Trade, Aid and Immigration." *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the ISA's 49th ANNUAL CONVENTION, BRIDGING MULTIPLE DIVIDES, Hilton San Francisco, SAN FRANCISCO, CA, USA*, Mar 26, 2008 p. 35
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 25
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 32-3

be more likely to support foreign aid, due to the declining marginal utility of their money.[28] But why would declining marginal utility make one more supportive of aid instead of, say, only privately given charity or only domestic charity? If one has no opposition to aid, then supporting aid can be a plausible alternative to her private luxury spending which brings her less and less happiness.

But this hardly is an explanation as to whether or not she opposes aid in the first place. If she happens to think that "charity begins at home" then she would be more likely to prioritize spending on domestic issues. If she believes that aid is hopelessly corrupt and a complete waste of resources, she can surely find more meaningful ways to give her money, or at least more entertaining ways of wasting it.

For reasons cited above, however, arguments from individual self-interest will be unlikely to occur explicitly in the discourse. While it will be important to keep individual self-interest in mind as a potential motive, it will not do as a cognitive reason or persuasive argument for or against aid. This does not apply to interest arguments made at a larger, group level, especially the national interest argument. Appeals to self-interest are accepted nationally even in debates that may reject arguments about individual self-interest.

Although there are indications that self-interest can play a role in determining individual aid preferences, it is not the sole factor. As Milner and Tingley put it "[i]nterests matter, but so does ideology. Legislators respond not just to the material interests of their constituents, but also their ideological predispositions."[29] Political

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[28] "The Political Economy of U.S. Foreign Aid: American Legislators and the Domestic Politics of Aid." p. 22

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 35-6

ideology is in fact found to have a large impact.[30]

Unlike self-interest, political ideology should have a much more explicit discursive presence, with arguments for or, especially, against aid sharing a common language with political arguments about related policies such as issues of domestic distributive justice and the role of government in the economy. In fact there is much common ground between aid arguments and ideological political discourse, with anti-aid arguments often speaking of the rights and freedom of tax payers and the inefficiency and unjustness of government redistribution.[31] Pro-aid arguments tend to speak of social justice, global interconnectedness, and highlight the suffering of the poor.[32] Politically right preferences for limited government involvement in redistribution are less compatible with support for foreign aid while politically left acceptance of government intervention and equality fit well with support for foreign aid.[33] The correlation is hardly perfect, but the former themes will more likely appeal to those on the American political right (conservatives) and the latter to those on the American political left (liberals). In fact evidence does indicate that liberals are more likely to support foreign aid than conservatives.

Milner and Tingley found that the ideological orientation of a district has a large impact on the foreign aid votes of its legislators, with more Republican-leaning districts having representatives more likely to oppose foreign aid in their voting than their counterparts from Democratic districts. When it came to military aid, however, representatives from Republican districts were more likely to give supporting votes and

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[30] *Ibid.*, p. 28-9

[31] "Government and Politics - Foreign Aid and the Destruction of America." Essay posted on 123HelpMe.com. <http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=19863>.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 9-10

[33] "The Political Economy of U.S. Foreign Aid: American Legislators and the Domestic Politics of Aid." p. 35-6

representatives from Democratic districts more likely to give opposing votes.[34]

Political ideology also influences the kind of aid that is supported. Bilateral aid, which involves only the donor government and the recipient country, is favored by Republicans while Democrats tend to favor multilateral aid, in which aid is channeled through an international organization.[35] Republicans and those on the political right are more likely to support military aid and oppose aid for development.[36] Finally, conservatives appear less likely to oppose commercially oriented aid to middle-income countries than development aid to low-income countries, possibly because the former is seen as assisting US trade interests.[37]

Aside from political leanings and socioeconomic status, what other demographic factors correlate with certain views on foreign aid? According to the data, both Americans who were born in foreign countries and African Americans are both more likely to support foreign aid,[38] and women generally tend to be more likely to support aid.[39] Religion does not correlate with any particular views on foreign aid, with the exception of Evangelical adherents, who were less likely to support foreign aid.[40]

Determining the social factors that correlate with aid support and opposition are important, but they also fail to get inside the discourse, so to speak, and consider what gets said. "Objective" explanations of self-interest, political leanings, and demographic

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[34] "The Political Economy of U.S. Foreign Aid: American Legislators and the Domestic Politics of Aid." p. 28-9
[35] "Foreign Aid in US Policy: Public Opinion and the Nature of Aid Policy." p. 27, 29
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 33
[37] "Foreign Aid in US Policy: Public Opinion and the Nature of Aid Policy." p. 21
[38] "The Political Economy of U.S. Foreign Aid: American Legislators and the Domestic Politics of Aid." p. 22-3
[39] "Class, Ideology and National Identity: The Correlates of Public Opinion on Foreign Trade, Aid and Immigration." p. 29
[40] "The Political Economy of U.S. Foreign Aid: American Legislators and the Domestic Politics of Aid." p. 32

predispositions can be useful, but ultimately do not tell us what arguments people use to justify their positions on an issue and whether they have good reason to hold those positions. A person may belong both to a demographic which tends to support aid and to an area which tends to benefit from US foreign aid policy, yet it would be a mistake to "explain away" her support for aid on these grounds. She is capable of having fully justified and objectively defensible reasons for her position, a fact not captured by the type of external, objective polling considered so far. Now that we have a general view of what people think, then, it is time to turn to what people actually say.

CHAPTER II

PRO-AID DISCOURSE

While statistics paint a picture of popular opinions about aid, what lies behind those opinions? The at times inconsistent responses and resistance to new information may be explained by looking at the discourse behind the data. What reasons, arguments, and themes lead the majority of people to want to cut aid spending, but unknowingly favor higher spending levels or to overwhelmingly support children, disaster relief, and hunger relief while retaining widespread hostility to the concept of foreign aid?

To begin with, what reasons in favor of supporting foreign aid or similar humanitarian programs do people often give or find convincing? If framing is as influential as it appears to be, how do pro-aid arguments tend to get framed? As the data in the previous section indicated, talking about children, hunger, or American wealth tend to elicit much higher levels of support than talking about official government aid. Why are programs to fight hunger so much more popular than "foreign aid"? I will begin my attempt at answering these questions by looking at what themes are dominant in popular pro-aid arguments.

American Self-Interest

> [W]e rarely give to a nation that we get nothing from...for example: often U.S. businesses are in these nations... Africa is rich in natural resources that US companies have a big hand in developing...[1]

As indicated in the first section, self-interest can be an influential motive for

[1] Anonymous post on Yahoo! Answers.

supporting or opposing aid. Even if individual self-interest does not explicitly occur often in aid discourse (few argue "You should support aid because it raises my profits or provides me with a career"), appeals to a national self-interest are regular. Typically this course of argument takes two nonexclusive tracks: arguing that foreign aid benefits the United States economically (by, for example, creating foreign markets for U.S. goods and services) and/or arguing that foreign aid helps protect U.S. security interests.

There is evidence, not the least of which is the political support foreign aid enjoys from certain business interests, for this view. While much of the public is skeptical about the U.S.'s capacity to "generously" give aid, in practice there is an overwhelming tendency for aid policies to be captured by domestic interests. We find, then, a paradoxical situation where popular discourse predominantly assumes American over-generosity with no hope of having its charity reciprocated, while official practice binds aid so tightly to domestic and political interests that non-governmental development organizations often criticize the effectiveness of official development assistance (ODA), even to the point of rejecting it.

That ODA should benefit Americans would likely strike many of us as entirely unproblematic. It might be argued that the effectiveness of foreign aid or ODA is entirely the prerogative of donor countries, and if recipient countries do not like how the U.S. or anybody else gives its money, they are free not to accept it.

This line of reasoning hinges largely on the assumption that foreign aid is supererogatory charity. If foreign aid is rather an obligatory positive charity or reparation for harms done, then a blithe dismissal of concerns about its effectiveness does not work. If we have some obligatory duty (be it negative or positive) to give foreign aid, we will

certainly have a correlating duty to ensure its effectiveness. If a moral concern, whether an obligation to prevent avoidable deaths from poverty or a duty to repair harms from pollution or unfair trade policies, justifies giving aid, that same moral concern will also dictate that we refrain from structuring the aid so that it benefits us at the expense of its effectiveness.[2]

As I will argue in later chapters, the view that foreign aid is a supererogatory positive charity is not supported by the available evidence about current international relationships and interactions (to say nothing, of course, about historical relationships). The proposed defense of current aid inefficiencies, then, cannot be accepted.

The idea that a system of aid should benefit donor countries regardless of the impact this has on recipient countries also implies a realist orientation. Many Americans likely find a realist view of international affairs to be intuitive: each country should pursue its own interests and compete against others. On an adversarial, realist view of international relations, there is nothing wrong with a country using foreign aid or any other program to benefit itself. That so many Americans (particularly politicians and journalists) are comfortable with defending foreign aid on the grounds that it will help enhance American military, political, or economic dominance of the world is evidence of the acceptance of some degree of the realist paradigm. Most would likely draw some moral boundaries, e.g., it is wrong to commit mass murder, but would not be inclined to think that current policies and actions transgress those boundaries.

Realism, however, is problematic because it rather straightforwardly serves to entrench

[2] An exception to this would be if the moral concern is a narrow deontic one – some sort of duty to give to charity regardless of the effects of one's giving. Few who argue for foreign aid do so on these grounds. And it appears somewhat arbitrary. Why have "give to charity" as foundational instead of "give to effective charities"?

the power of the status quo. If two countries, one strong and one weak, compete openly against each other, the stronger will typically dominate. Even if the stronger is weak in a particular area of competition, a realist arrangement where competition is not morally constrained leads to total competition – using strengths in one area to succeed in a weaker area. A weaker country may, for example, be more economically competitive in a certain industry due to lower labor costs, but a stronger country can more effectively bring political and economic pressure to bear to shape international trade agreements in its own favor.

If stronger countries are free to aggressively pursue their own interests at the expense of weaker countries and to bring power from others areas to bear on competition in an area where they are weaker, their power will tend to be reinforced and increased, while the weaker country will see its comparative advantages give it less leverage. The proclivity of industrialized countries to use their leverage to secure trade advantages over developing countries (e.g., subsidizing their own industries while opposing subsidies in developing countries, enforcing higher tariffs against goods from developing countries) is evidence that this power creep occurs. A realist paradigm sees this as unproblematic, even desirable from the standpoint of powerful countries, although, as Thomas Pogge points out, there is something fundamentally unfair about the rules of the game (in his words, the "coercive institutional order") being open to competition between the strong and weak.[3] Of course this requires the very kind of moral evaluation that realism declines to accept.

In later chapters I will get further into these issues, for now I seek only to establish that popular American pro-aid discourse often uses the argument that foreign aid furthers

[3] Pogge, Thomas. World Poverty and Human Rights. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002. p. 11-12

American interests, but in the course of making this argument, it rests on realist assumptions that effectively further dominant interests. In the following I will both try to make the case that the "national self-interest" argument is a major theme in popular discourse and give some examples of how the national interest gets used to justify actions and policies that would be worrying to anybody but a realist.

Helping the U.S. Economy

Just a little under two-thirds of Americans think that reducing world hunger helps to create stable markets for U.S. exports, and that this is a convincing reason for supporting foreign aid.[4] Nearly two-thirds (62.9%) of respondents agreed strongly (24%) or somewhat (38.9%) with the statement "Because the world is so interconnected economically and environmentally, we should help other countries to develop sustainably and become strong trading partners."[5] A similar number regard the potential of Africa to become a major market for U.S. trade to be a persuasive reason for giving aid to Africa.[6] This argument from economic self-interest was summed up by former President George W. Bush: "When America helps developing nations rise out of poverty, we create new markets for our goods and services, and better jobs for American workers."[7]

The practice of justifying foreign aid by appealing to American interests was reflected in the random samples I took of comments (questions and answers) on the website

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[4] "Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger." p. 17. 64% thought the argument "Because the world is so interconnected today, reducing hunger in the world ultimately serves US interests. It creates more political stability, and by promoting economic growth helps create more markets for US exports" was convincing.

[5] "Public Opinion Poll: Views on Foreign Aid."

[6] "Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger." p. 19. 65% rated as "convincing" the argument "Africa has the potential to become a significant market for US trade. Therefore the US should make an effort to help Africa get in its feet."

[7] Qtd. in "Bush Pushes Foreign Aid, Despite Economic Woes."

Yahoo! Answers. This site was chosen because it is free and publicly accessible, does not clearly reflect any political, ideological, or other biases, and is likely the most popular public American question and answer website.[8] A popular and easily accessible (the site is linked through Yahoo!'s homepage) question and answer site is preferable to message boards and specialized websites as it is more likely to attract general members of the public rather than members politically motivated enough to belong to political message boards. Obviously there is still a great deal of selection bias here, as those who post questions or answers must be motivated enough to do so voluntarily, and it is probable that those participating in political discussions even on this site are more politically motivated than the general population. Nonetheless, random sampling from this website closely conformed to the available data on American views on foreign aid. Two separate samplings were taken, and both reflected the same 2-to-1 ratio of opposition to aid versus support for foreign aid. The site is designed so that any user can ask questions, and any user is free to answer questions. Naturally, answers will tend to outnumber questions:

[8] In December 2006, it was estimated that Yahoo! Answers accounted for over 96% of American visits to question and answer websites. Prescott, LeeAnn. "Yahoo! Answers Captures 96% of Q and A Market Share." Hitwise Intelligence. 28 Dec. 2006. <http://weblogs.hitwise.com/leeann-prescott/2006/12/yahoo_answers_captures_96_of_q.html>.

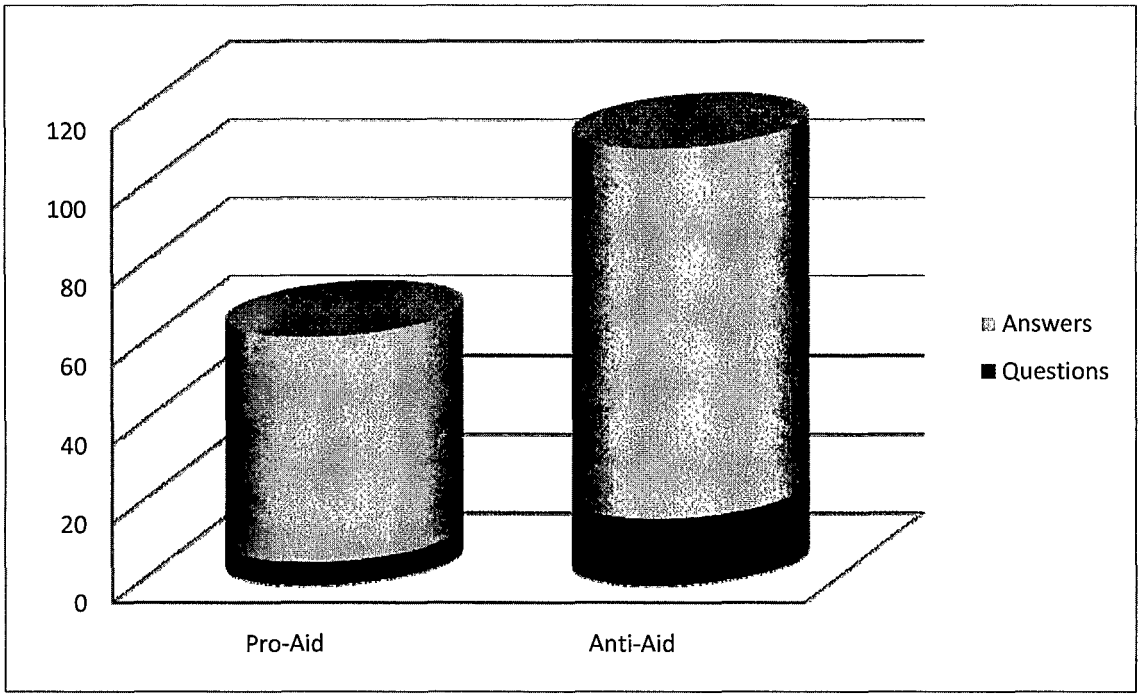

Figure 2.1: Random Sampling 1: Public Postings Relating to Foreign Aid on Yahoo! Answers

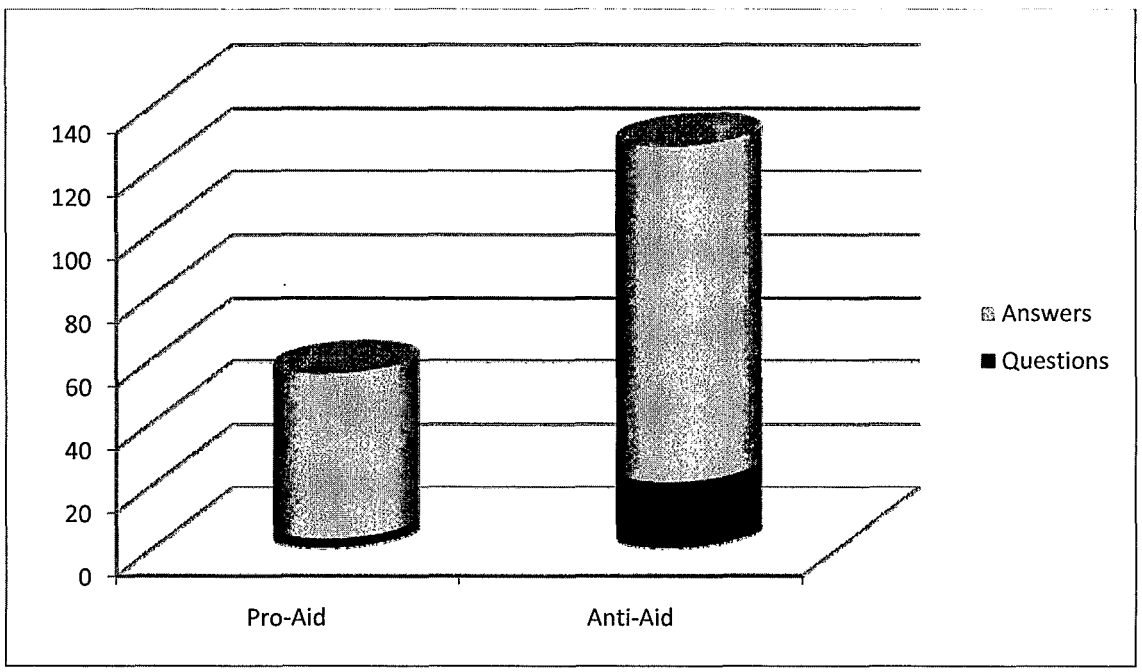

Figure 2.2: Random Sampling 2: Public Postings Relating to Foreign Aid on Yahoo! Answers

The overall levels of support for or opposition to foreign aid conformed quite closely to available survey and poll data (see chapter I), which tends to find that opposition to foreign aid or support for cutting foreign at 60-70%. This at least gives reason for thinking that Answers data is not distorted by levels of support or opposition to aid that deviate notably from average national sentiments.

In considering reasons given for supporting foreign aid, I found the following:

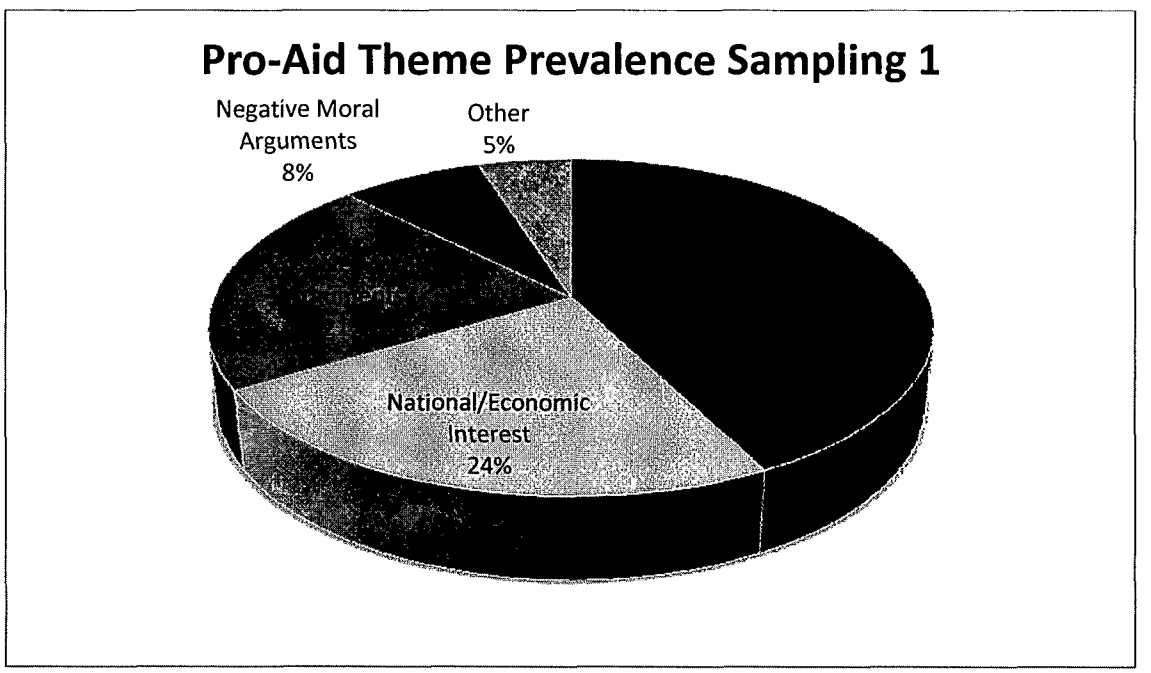

Figure 2.3 Sampling 1: Prevalence of Reasons for Supporting Foreign Aid

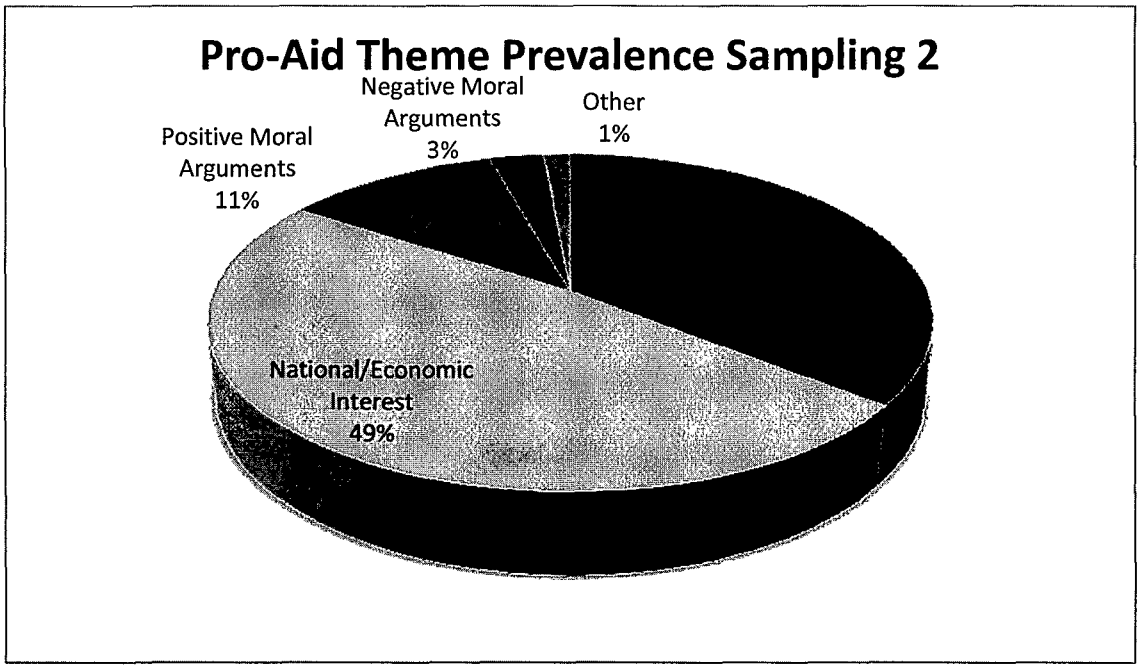

Figure 2.4 Sampling 2: Prevalence of Reasons for Supporting Foreign Aid

These graphs are the product of random samples taken using the website's search functions. Searching a keyword match for "'foreign aid'" in questions asked on the site yielded 1899 questions at the time of the search. The order of the questions were ranked according to "relevance;" the dates of the samples spanned approximately three years, with the most recent being in late 2010. Arbitrarily, I sampled questions and answers from the 1st, 3rd, 5th, and 7th questions on the first ten pages of results for the first sample, and then from the 2nd, 4th, 6th, and 8th questions on pages 28-37 for the second. Although percentage of pro-aid posters who make the national interest arguments varied widely in the two samples, there is no doubt, from this data, that it composes one of the major pro-aid themes.

"Theme prevalence" refers to the number of times a given theme occurred. A single

posting (question or answer) could contain multiple themes, and so would be categorized multiple times. Postings stating only opposition to foreign aid but containing no form of reasoning (e.g., "I don't like foreign aid." "The government needs to stop giving out aid.") are not represented in the pro-aid theme graphs but were nonetheless tallied for the sake of determining overall support or opposition to aid in the samples. "Other" consists of any reasons given which do not fit in the categories I developed. I will talk more about economic comparisons and positive moral arguments in the next section.

Arguments that aid will ultimately benefit the U.S. economy often speak of the interconnected nature of the world. "Interconnected" means a situation where, to borrow a phrase from the political scientist James Rosenau, "distant proximities"[9] - causes which are geographically distant have local, proximate effects - are common.

In speaking often of interconnectedness, economic self-interest arguments are much like arguments that aid is in the national security interest of the U.S. As we shall see, some version of the interconnectedness theme runs through many pro-aid arguments.

The appeal to economic national interest may be useful for politicians, journalists, and aid organizations who are trying to convince a skeptical public that widely sees foreign aid as an economic sacrifice and whose most prominent arguments reflect this concern. I will delve into anti-aid arguments later, but economic and moral-economic concerns, involving issues relating to government spending priorities, individual American economic freedom, and (re)distributive policies, form a major part of anti-aid discourse. The economic interest argument in a sense engages the economic concerns head-on, attempting to reassure Americans that American taxpayers, businesses, and employees

[9] Rosenau, James. Distant Proximities: Dynamics Beyond Globalization. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

benefit from foreign aid.

There is evidence that foreign aid, as it is currently conducted, does aid U.S. economic interests. American foreign aid often contains stipulations specifically designed to advance U.S. economic or business interests. These requirements may domestically be politically pragmatic in getting support from business and other key constituencies for a policy which polls regularly show is among the least popular government programs: "The fact that U.S. food aid helps support American farmers and agribusiness interests has been crucial in Congress's support for these programs over the years" reports a writer for America.gov. The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), a major agriculture lobbying organization, opposes using local, rather than American, food aid to fight hunger.[10]

A 2005 poll found that the American public largely supported the principle of farm subsidies, and most (71%) respondents thought farm subsidies "have no significant effect on farmers in poor countries."[11] (As we will see, this assumption is not accurate.) Farm subsidies enjoy enough widespread support that Democrats apparently felt safe using his opposition to farm subsidies as evidence that Rand Paul was an "extreme candidate," following his victory in the 2010 Kentucky Republican primary.[12]

The political support for using subsidized farm products for food aid comes at a price,

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[10] Odessey, Bruce. "The American Farmer and U.S. Food Aid." America.Gov. 7 Sept. 2007. <http://www.america.gov/st/health-english/2008/June/20080616002357xjyrrep0.9688227.html>.

[11] Although public support was for subsidies for small (<500 acres) American farmers (74% favoring) rather than large farms (70% *opposing*), and even for small farmers, only 28% of respondents favored regular subsidies instead of subsidies only in bad years. "Americans on Addressing World Poverty." World Public Opinion: Global Public Opinion on International Affairs. Washington D.C., 30 June 2005. Program on International Policy Attitudes. University of Maryland. <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/btdevelopmentaidra/76.php?lb=btda&pnt=76&nid=&id> . p. 3-4. Needless to say, subsidies for small farmers only in bad years are not the kind of subsidies that the AFBF and the agricultural industry lobby for.

[12] Watson, Steve. "DNC Chairman: Rand Paul Is A Far Right 'Extreme Candidate.'" Infowars.com. 19 May 2010. 14 Oct. 2010 <http://www.infowars.com/dnc-chairman-rand-paul-is-a-far-right-extreme-candidate/>.

however. At least, that is, if one thinks foreign aid's primary goal should be helping the poor in other countries. American food aid has received great support from organizations like the AFBF, which calls itself "The Voice of Agriculture," despite widespread recognition that sending highly subsidized American food aid to developing countries can diminish their food security and help make them dependent on American food aid.

In fact in 2007 CARE, a major aid organization, rejected U.S. government financing worth $45 million a year because it required the charity to sell subsidized American food, a practice the Government Accountability Office concluded was ineffective and which many charities have argued undercuts local markets.[13] Selling subsidized food at prices below what local producers can offer puts those producers at risk of losing their customer base and being driven out of business, and, needless to say, if local producers are driven out of business, not only do they and their families suffer, but the country becomes less-self-sufficient and more reliant on food aid.

Restrictions on foreign aid which have been passed with the backing of the agriculture industry have left aid organizations unable to adapt or change approaches when direct American food aid does not work or is not possible. In one case in Kenya, local people suffered malnutrition and five died when American aid officials, forbidden by U.S. law from purchasing local corn, were unable to deliver the food they had promised to families participating in a local development program.[14]

In a more recent example, Oxfam has criticized food aid for undercutting Haitian

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[13] Dugger, Celia W. "CARE Turns Down Federal Funds for Food Aid." 16 Aug. 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/16/world/africa/16food.html>.

[14] Dugger, Celia W. "Kenyan Farmers' Fate Caught Up in U.S. Aid Rules." 31 July 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/31/world/africa/31food.html>.

farmers.[15] Farm subsidies to American farmers have been blamed for depressing global prices on certain agricultural products, resulting in less money for poor countries whose export markets rely largely on agriculture. While there is a clear need for food aid in some circumstances, and 24% of Haitians cannot afford enough food to satisfy World Health Organization minimum calorie requirements, it must be done so as not to undermine local agriculture and long-term food security, a caveat which has not been observed in many locations, particularly not in Haiti.[16]

The agriculture industry, driven by the financial benefits it receives from foreign aid, exerts significant influence on legislators. As mentioned in the section on self-interest, data indicates that legislators whose constituents largely benefit from foreign aid tend to vote in favor of foreign aid proposals. The industry, and politicians influenced by the industry, has played a major role in shaping American's conception of hunger.

The focus on sending American food aid to alleviate hunger is likely popular for many reasons: it benefits U.S. farmers, who receive U.S. federal subsidies and guaranteed export markets; aid workers handing out American food to hungry people is a powerful and moving media image which will likely not only be popular in the U.S. but also may favor perceptions of the U.S. abroad; hunger is discursively powerful - it is not only a common theme in pro-aid discourse, even opponents of foreign usually hold much more favorable views of hunger and disaster relief programs.

A further illustration of the tension between development goals and American economic interests is the recent controversy over USAID funding a program to train Sri

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[15] Hennessey, Selah. "Oxfam Says Haitian Farmers Suffering from Food Aid." Voice of America News. 5 Oct. 2010. <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/americas/Oxfam-Says-Haitian-Farmers-Suffering-from-Food-Aid-104343378.html>.

[16] Dodds, Paisley. "US Rice Doesn't Help Struggling Haitian Farmers." 26 Feb. 2010. <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/wirestory?id=9957925&page=1>.

Lankan information technology (IT) workers. These workers would, after training, work for American companies seeking to outsource or offshore IT jobs.[17] Although outsourcing and offshoring jobs to certain developing countries is widely credited with rapidly growing their economies and helping to lift people out of poverty,[18] and so is an understandable method for a development agency, its tension with American economic interests, as they are commonly perceived, is obvious. While the question of whether outsourcing harms or benefits the American economy overall is a controversial one, there is a widely-held popular perception that it does harm the U.S. economy, particularly U.S. employment.[19] USAID was criticized for the program and eventually suspended it.

Concern that developing countries may be *too* successful and will out compete U.S. businesses has led to efforts that effectively reduce the efficiency of foreign aid in other areas as well. The Bumpers Amendment, passed by Congress in 1986, prohibits foreign aid which may benefit any foreign industries if their "export would compete in world markets with a *similar* commodity grown or produced in the United States (emphasis added)."[20] It is not clear what is to count as a "similar" commodity, but even if this is to be given an extremely conservative interpretation, it is clear that it would result in the U.S. refusing to give assistance to a large number of industries which developing economies rely on to fuel development. Rice, corn, and palm oil, for example, are both exported by the U.S. and are key industries in poor countries.

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[17] McDougall, Paul. "U.S. to Train 3,000 Offshore IT Workers." InformationWeek. 3 Aug. 2010. <http://www.informationweek.com/news/software/integration/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=226500202>.

[18] See Friedman, Thomas L. The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century. New York: Picador, 2007 for a particularly enthusiastic defender of this view.

[19] A 2004 poll by Zogby International found 71% thought outsourcing was bad for the U.S. economy, and 62% thought legislative action should be taken against it. Zogby International. 22 Sept. 2004. http://www.zogby.com/news/readnews.cfm?ID=870

[20] Manicad, Gigi. "Agricultural Biotechnology Projects Within USAID." *Biotechnology and Development Monitor*. No. 24, Sep. 1995. p. 810 <http://www.biotech-monitor.nl/2404.htm>.

The very origins of this amendment lie in the American Soybeans Association protesting a USAID research project which sought to develop soya beans which could be cultivated in Latin America. The lobby, with the amendment, succeeded in getting the development funding redirected to researching ways to increase American farm productivity thereby enhancing the competitiveness of U.S. agricultural products (against agricultural products from other countries - including developing countries) on the global market.[21]

Cotton is an infamous example of American economic concerns overriding any genuine interest in development. American cotton receives substantial government subsidies, making it very cheap on the world market. At the same time, cotton is a major industry in West Africa, and the source of livelihood for millions there. Oxfam estimates that the price increase resulting from reforming U.S. cotton subsidies "could substantially improve the welfare of" 10 million West Africans, many in the extremely poor countries, such as Burkina Faso.[22]

And Oxfam is not alone in criticizing these subsidies. Removing industrialized country agricultural subsidies and reducing trade barriers against developing countries is a rare proposal which sees broad support from different political orientations, from left-leaning organizations like Oxfam that are critical of free trade to pure free market, libertarian groups, such as the Foundation for Economic Education, which argue that American and European cotton subsidies have led to

> historically low cotton prices [that] are wreaking havoc for domestic producers in poor countries. Cotton subsidies in Mississippi drive cotton farmers in West Africa out of business.

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[21] *Ibid.*

[22] "Burkina Faso: Cotton Story." Oxfam. 7 Oct. 2010 <http://www.oxfam.org/en/campaigns/trade/real_lives/burkina_faso>.

> African countries pleaded unsuccessfully with the WTO to end all cotton subsidies, but they are only the tip of the agricultural-subsidy iceberg.
>
> U.S. farmers annually receive more than $20 billion from the government, and EU subsidies are even larger—45 billion euros a year. These payments for beef, cotton, wheat, and other products spur production, depress product prices on world markets, and make it more difficult for farmers in developing countries to compete. American farmers produce twice as much wheat as the country uses, but federal subsidies help protect them from world market-price signals. Washington then uses food aid and other export programs as a safety valve to cope with overproduction.[23]

Protectionist measures like the Bumpers Amendment not only have consequences in the agriculture sector, they also help to limit the ability of developing countries to move into manufacturing industries. Many poor countries see moving their economies into manufacturing as their best chance at economic development,[24] yet manufacturing is dominated by industrialized countries (and now the newly industrializing countries). Measures like the Bumpers Amendment prevent these countries from receiving U.S. official assistance for developing any industry whose exports are similar to those of American companies. Given the wide variety of goods that America exports, this will greatly limit the developmental effectiveness of American aid.

All of this is evidence that foreign aid may benefit the U.S. economically, or at least create certain winners in the U.S., but often does so at the cost of providing truly effective assistance. Much official American foreign aid, particularly the bilateral

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[23] Pasour, E.C. Jr. "Ending Farm Subsidies Wouldn't Help the Third World?" *The Freeman: Ideas on Liberty*, Apr. 2004, Vol. 54, Issue 3. <http://www.thefreemanonline.org/departments/it-just-aint-so/ending-farm-subsidies-wouldnt-help-the-third-world-it-just-aint-so/#>. This publication of the Foundation for Economic Education, which, according to its website is "one of the oldest free-market organizations in the United States," likely is in accord with Oxfam about few other issues.

[24] Since chiefly producing primary commodities, such as agricultural goods, yields lower profits and makes a country's economy dependent upon notoriously unreliable global commodity prices - more than one developing country has suffered by relying on exporting a primary commodity whose price suddenly collapses. There are often other reasons for trying to moving into manufacturing, not the least of which is national pride.

assistance that USAID oversees appears to be beholden to U.S. domestic political and economic interests. This lends support to the critique that foreign aid is essentially designed to keep developing countries at the periphery, not to make them into truly independent, developed economies.

Some foreign aid can benefit both the U.S. and the recipient country. But the above examples serve to show both that this is not always the case, and that when U.S. economic interests do clash with development interests, it is the latter which are likely to suffer. While foreign countries can serve as markets for U.S. goods, those countries are also competitors with actors in the American economy. So long as foreign competition with American workers for jobs or with American industries is perceived as harmful to the American economy, foreign aid will be perceived as economically threatening.

Protecting American Interests

The argument that foreign aid is essential to protecting U.S. interests is expressed bluntly in this 2009 *Los Angeles Times* editorial:

> Poverty, famine and disease overseas lead to lawlessness, instability, revolution and terrorism that threaten American interests, and Americans, at home and abroad. That's why our second most important means of self-defense after the military is foreign aid.[25]

In practice, foreign aid has often been used to advance U.S. interests. This was perhaps most infamously the case during the Cold War, when the U.S. rather freely dispensed aid to anti-communist allies in poor countries, often with little oversight or accountability.[26]

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[25] "Fixing foreign aid." The Los Angeles Times. 12 Nov 2009. <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/nov/12/opinion/ed-usaid12>.

[26] "A Need for Foreign Aid." The New York Times. 11 July 1999. <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/07/11/opinion/a-need-for-foreign-aid.html>.

One particular, but by no means only, notorious recipient of Cold War foreign "aid" was the African dictator Mobutu Sese Seko who directed the aid directly into his bank accounts.[27] Aid was handed out indiscriminately and without accountability to support many other dictators in Africa, such as Idi Amin in Uganda and Mengistu in Ethiopia.[28]

While the Cold War is two decades past now, it has a current counterpart, at least in respect to aid: the War on Terrorism. Pro-aid discourses which argue that aid is in American security interests almost always have terrorism, rather than communism, in mind these days. (Although using aid to counter Chinese global influence is not an unheard of recommendation.)

Former president George W. Bush stated that "development is in America's security interests. We face an enemy that can't stand freedom. And the only way they can recruit to their hateful ideology is by exploiting despair – and the best way to respond is to spread hope."[29] And even more explicit links between aid and the war on terror contribute to the talk on the issue:

> Having Pakistani media televise the arrival of U.S. aid packages at the scene would leave a lasting impression on Pakistani citizens.... In the 'war of ideas' between Islamic extremism and American democracy, a generous aid package would be a victory we so badly need.[30]

Prior to the September 11, 2001 attacks, one-third of U.S. aid went to Israel and Egypt, and "US aid [was] vastly concentrated in the Middle East."[31] This was done despite

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[27] Singer, Peter. The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty. New York: Random House, 2009. p. 106

[28] Moyo, Dambisa. Dead Aid: Why Aid is Not Working and How There is a Better Way for Africa. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009. p. 23

[29] "Bush Pushes Foreign Aid, Despite Economic Woes."

[30] Adams, Megan. "Adams: Foreign Aid Vital to U.S. Interests." The University Daily Kansan. 25 Aug 2010. < http://www.kansan.com/news/2010/aug/25/adams-foreign-aid-vital-us-interests/?opinion>.

[31] Alesina, Alberto and David Dollar. "Who Gives Foreign Aid to Whom and Why?" Journal of Economic Growth. Vol. 5, No. 1, Mar. 2000. < http://pirate.shu.edu/~gokcekom/Dollar_and_Alesina.pdf>. p. 38

Israel's classification as an advanced economy,[32] a high-income economy[33], and as a country with "very high human development."[34] In 2004, the countries receiving the most U.S. foreign aid (the top five, in order: Iraq, Israel, Egypt, Afghanistan, and Colombia) tended to have connections with U.S. interests, while only one of the top seven, Afghanistan, was ranked a "low human development" country.[35]

While Egypt is not a rich country, the amount of aid it receives is vastly out of proportion to countries with lower human development rankings than itself. While Egypt has a medium human development ranking, it received the third largest amount of U.S. foreign aid in 2004, receiving 1.87 billion dollars, more than any country with a low human development categorization. This is especially noticeable if one excludes Afghanistan, which, due to its role in the "War on Terror," received 1.77 billion dollars in aid in 2004.[36] Being perceived as central to U.S. security interests makes it far more likely that a country will receive aid than being extremely poor does. As of 2008, approximately one-fifth of American foreign aid went to the poorest, "least developed" countries, while half went to "lower-middle-income" countries.[37]

The use of foreign aid to advance U.S. interests either overtly or subtly has a history as long as that of American foreign aid itself. It is perhaps no surprise then that pro-aid arguments, such as those made in the *Los Angeles Times* portray aid as a tool to help

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[32] "World Economic Outlook Database October 2009 -- WEO Groups and Aggregates Information." International Monetary Fund. Oct. 2009. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2009/02/weodata/groups.htm#ae>.
[33] "Country and Lending Groups." The World Bank. Accessed 9 Oct. 2010 <http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications/country-and-lending-groups#OECD_members>.
[34] "Statistics | Human Development Reports (HDR) | United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)" UNDP. 2009. Accessed 7 Oct. 2010 <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>.
[35] Tarnoff, Curt and Larry Nowels. "Foreign Aid: An Introductory Overview of U.S. Programs and Policy." Congressional Research Service, 15 Apr. 2004. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/31987.pdf>. p. 13
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty. p. 107

America, even an accompaniment to the military in its task of protecting Americans. A *New York Times* editorial arguing in support of foreign aid mixes altruistic appeals (more on this shortly) with the self-interested argument, "But foreign aid is also important to protect Americans interests."[38] Another editorial quotes the Administrator of the Agency for International Development: "'It's not charity. It's not a gift. It's something we do in our own interests.'"[39]

And the argument by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that foreign aid is in U.S. "national interest" is not limited to editorials. "When development and governance fail in a country, the consequences engulf entire regions and leap around the world," USAID warns in an overview of a report entitled "Foreign Aid in the National Interest: Promoting Freedom, Security, and Opportunity."[40] Even staunch critics of aid implicitly acknowledge the importance of this argument in their efforts to refute it.[41]

Although a 2001 poll showed Americans prefer aid to go to the poor countries rather than to political allies,[42] aid as part of the War on Terror is today a popular idea. Even prior to the 2001 attacks, many thought aid should be used to advance U.S. strategic interests.[43] As suggested earlier, the idea that economic underdevelopment provides a

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[38] "A Need for Foreign Aid."
[39] "Foreign Aid Budget: Quick, How Much? Wrong."
[40] "Foreign Aid in the National Interest: Promoting Freedom, Security, and Opportunity." USAID. 7 Oct. 2009. 5 Oct. 2010 <http://www.usaid.gov/fani/>. p. 2
[41] Buchanan, Patrick J. "Foreign Aid: Ever With Us." Cited in Frank Trzaska. US Military Knives. 21 Dec. 1994. <http://www.usmilitaryknives.com/foreign_aid.htm>.
[42] "Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger." p. 13-15. Only 23% thought "increase[ing] US influence over other countries" was a convincing reasons to support foreign aid (contrast that with the 77% who thought alleviating hunger was a convincing reason). Military aid to political allies as a form of aid was supported by only 25% of respondents. Only 34% favored the view "We should only send aid to parts of the world where the US has security interests," while 63% favored "When hunger is a major problem in some part of the world we should send aid whether or not the US has a security interest in that region."
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 15. 48% were convinced by the argument that aid should be given "[t]o get countries to give US access to regions where we have strategic interests."

location where terrorists can recruit impoverished, desperate people is a popular one which has made the argument from strategic or security interests more, rather than less acceptable.

This theme's iterations continue to be influential, with President Obama recently declaring "In our global economy, progress in even the poorest countries can advance the prosperity and security of people far beyond their borders, including my fellow Americans."[44]

As with the argument that aid is in American economic interest, however, this view is problematic. Even if we assume that aid given to countries like Colombia and Egypt is going to be used efficiently and not follow the corrupt precedent of its Cold War predecessors, there is little ground for believing that this is the most effective means of fostering development. The countries suffering the worst from poverty, disease, and malnutrition are the countries where aid money presumably could do the most good, and incidentally are the countries that, aggregately, receive only about one-fifth of American foreign aid. As with the concern about economic interests, using aid to advance U.S. security or strategic interests tends to result in American interests supplanting concerns with effectively fighting poverty, malnutrition, and disease (if those concerns were ever priorities to supplant).

As I argued was the case with other self-interest arguments, people seem uncomfortable with naked appeals to self-interest. An aid proponent is unlikely to argue for foreign aid on the grounds that she works in the industry and receives an income from it, and an aid opponent is going to at least dress up any self-interested arguments (e.g., "I

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[44] Qtd. in Wilson, Scott. "Obama makes case for foreign aid to poor nations." The Washington Post. 22 Sep. 2010. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/22/AR2010092204402.html>.

don't want to pay taxes to support aid") in moral language involving rights and freedom (more on this in the section on anti-aid arguments). Likewise, while there is much talk about how aid benefits American interests, when a really explicit tension between furthering American interests and helping poor or starving people is drawn, the vast majority prefer to help rather than further American interests.[45] The argument that aid is in U.S. interests tends to be common because, as with the economic self-interest argument, it paints a very optimistic scenario, one where the U.S. can help itself by helping others. So long as the poorest countries remain largely unimportant to U.S. global strategic interests and foreign aid is applied as an accessory to wars against drugs or terror, however, there is little ground for this optimism.

Perhaps the argument does the least to challenge dominant realist assumptions about the acceptability of the predominance of U.S. interests. Many anti-aid arguments, as we shall see, portray foreign aid as a kind of forced charity, managed by ineffective government bureaucracies, which send American money overseas to the detriment of Americans, our economy, and the federal deficit. If, however, foreign aid ends up benefiting Americans, the difference between those making the national interest pro-aid argument and most aid opponents is merely (!) empirical, not a difference of fundamental values. The thorny question of whether rich countries (and, via taxation, the citizens of those countries) have positive obligations to make sacrifices to help poor people in other countries is sidestepped. Deep and controversial moral questions about global distributive justice can be put to the side if it turns out that giving aid not only helps developing

[45] "Public Opinion Poll: Views on Foreign Aid." Statement 11 – "We should send aid to starving people irrespective of whether it will promote the national interest." – had 76.3% either strongly agreeing (40.4%) or agreeing (35.9%). "Strongly agree" was the most popular choice, receiving nearly twice as many supporters as both "disagree" (10.6%) and "strongly disagree" (10.6%) combined.

countries, but also is in the best interest of the rich countries. If the arguments from national self-interest are correct, then everybody wins and practically nobody has to abandon deeply held moral positions.

Although skirting tough debates in favor of popular solutions has an understandable appeal, and certainly carries (mainly political) benefits, avoiding difficult and controversial arguments by pretending they are not there can be problematic. Paving over the tension between self-interest and altruism by insisting that providing foreign aid ultimately is in our national best interest leaves us unequipped to deal with situations where the course of action which best helps development is not the course of action which is also in America's best economic interests. The information presented above about the inefficiencies of American foreign aid shows us that all too often the two are not identical.

Failing to address the real moral theoretical tension between self-interest and altruism in foreign aid arguments has concrete consequences. Many of the failures of American foreign aid can be traced to its use advancing American interests, and the assumption that there is no tension here serves to obscure or even justify the worst misuses and inefficiencies of foreign aid.

Aside from glossing over the many ways in which American interests are in real tension with developing country interests, the arguments that aid is in our economic or security interests share an interconnected view of the world. Poverty in a foreign country is seen as potentially an American problem, and not necessarily for any altruistic reasons. Likewise, prosperity in another country can benefit the American economy. Whether a foreigner is a potential threat or a potential customer or both, this discursive theme

emphasizes some interaction with him or her. The interaction, however, is one guided by realist interests.

Linking Famine and Affluence (and Morality)[46]

> Each year millions of children die from easy to beat disease, from malnutrition, and from bad drinking water. Among these children, about 3 million die from dehydrating diarrhea. As UNICEF has made clear to millions of us well-off American adults at one time or another, with a packet of oral rehydration salts that cost about 15 cents, a child can be saved from dying soon.[47]
>
> I would like to see the US government, instead of sending all the money over in foreign aid to countries [where] a lot of the money gets wasted and involved in corruption, I think that some of that money should be used to feed the hungry in the world.[48]
>
> If you have enough money to spend $1,000, you would also be able to afford to give up to $500.[49]

One alternative to arguments that naively assert that altruistic and self-interested motives will coincide is to focus on altruistic arguments. This is essentially what the other major theme of popular pro-aid arguments does. These arguments do not rely on any factual assumptions about effective foreign aid also bolstering national interests. Instead, they try to convince us that even if it does not benefit us materially or politically, we should aid those in need out of some moral duty.

In order to establish a moral obligation, these arguments often contrast the material wealth of the industrialized nations generally or the United States specifically with

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[46] The title of this section comes from the philosopher Peter Singer's famous essay, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," on the obligation that people in wealthy countries have to help people suffering from famine and poverty in poor countries. In it, he emphasizes the wealth of developed countries.

[47] Unger, Peter. Living High & Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. p. 3

[48] Respondent to the survey "Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger" p.14

[49] "Annie," high school senior and participant in Scott Seider's study, "Resisting Obligation: How Privileged Adolescents Conceive of Their Responsibilities to Others." Boston University, 2008. <http://people.bu.edu/seider/Consolidated%20papers/Resisting%20Obligation%20Final%20Copy%20Scanned.pdf>

problems that Western aid presumably can address, such as hunger, poverty, or disease. These arguments seek to establish a *positive* moral obligation, that is an obligation to provide assistance, not just a negative obligation to refrain from causing harm.

Unlike the realist interests represented in the former section, this section is, of course, more idealist. The central concern is a moral one. It does share with the previous section, however, a view of foreign aid as a positive charity (or, more accurately for this section, a positive duty). While the argument for aid as a fulfillment of a negative duty (e.g., a recompensation for harm done) does get made at times, it is far less common in American discourse than the views considered in the following.

Juxtaposing Famine and Affluence

As mentioned previously, questions about hunger and children tend to get more supportive responses. So do questions which highlight the affluence of Americans or developed countries. In the 2001 PIPA poll, the most popular reason given for supporting foreign aid was "To alleviate hunger and disease in poor countries," and the most popular aid programs were those that targeted children, including immunization and nutrition programs.[50]

When given reasons for or against reducing efforts to fight hunger, Americans overwhelmingly found reasons for hunger-fighting program more convincing than reasons against those programs. Reasons which emphasize developed country wealth are especially convincing. "The industrialized countries have huge economies and tremendous resources. If they would all chip in, hunger could be cut in half at an affordable cost," was convincing to 75% of respondents, and "Given the high level of

[50] "Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger." p. 14

wealth in the industrialized countries, we have a moral responsibility to share some of this wealth to reduce hunger in the world" was convincing to 69%. The next most convincing reason (to 64% of respondents) emphasized the interconnected nature of the world and how fighting hunger was beneficial to American interests.[51]

Arguments against hunger programs were not considered nearly as convincing. The most persuasive one was "It is not the responsibility of countries like the US to take care of the hungry in other parts of the world; that is the responsibility of their governments," and it was convincing to only 45%, while unconvincing to 52%.[52] Even the most convincing argument against hunger programs, then, was rejected more than it was accepted. Interestingly, 45% thought it "convincing" that the U.S. had no responsibility "to take care of the hungry," while 69% were convinced by the argument that the U.S. had a moral responsibility "to reduce hunger in the world." Some respondents, then, had to think both were convincing.[53] The fact that the argument against hunger aid does not include a reference to the "high level of wealth" in developed countries may account for some of the difference (17%) between the 52% who opposed it and the 69% who supported the similarly worded hunger aid argument which included the language about wealth.

Despite widespread skepticism about the efficiency of governmental foreign aid (this theme will be addressed shortly), respondents were overwhelmingly supportive of paying

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[51] "Because the world is so interconnected today, reducing hunger in the world ultimately serves US interests. It creates more political stability, and by promoting economic growth helps create more markets for US exports." *Ibid.*, p. 17

[52] *Ibid.*

[53] This may also be partially explained by the wording of the first statement which may make it appear that the U.S. has a sole responsibility, while the wording of the latter ("reducing" rather than "taking care of") implies the U.S. has a role, but is not solely responsible.

taxes to support hunger-fighting programs.[54]

When offering their own reasons for supporting the idea of an obligation to aid the poor (rather than given a list of reasons to evaluate), people often turn to talking about the wealth of the rich. Scott Seider of Boston University produced a study based on interviews with and the writings of high school seniors in a wealthy Boston suburb who wrote essays about obligation for a course on literature and justice. Those students who wrote essays arguing that there is an obligation to help the poor talked significantly about wealth: "The only people who are obligated to help others in need are those who can easily afford to help. What this means is that if someone is a multi-millionaire, then that person should have no problem with giving away some of his or her money to charity."[55] Although this argument does not justify foreign aid which taxes people with far less money that multi-millionaires, it does show the influence that wealth comparisons have in discourse about distributive justice.

The most altruistic student in the class in the above study was "Annie," whose quote helps to introduce this section. In both her essay and interview, she referred to luxury purchases like plasma screen televisions. Another student spoke of the "extravagant" lives of the rich compared to the "terrible" lives of the poor. The only other student to defend an obligation to the poor in his interview was "Richie" who expressed skepticism about the rich caring for anything other than making more money.[56]

Talk about wealth and affluence also appears in public arguments in favor of foreign

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[54] When asked whether they would favor increasing, keeping the same, or decreasing "assistance to poor countries to help them improve their food production, their basic health care, and their schools, [for which] the average taxpayer pays about $8.70 per year ($4.6 billion)," 75.3% favored increasing or maintaining. "Public Opinion Poll: Views on Foreign Aid."

[55] The words of "Jordan," participant in Scott Seider's study, "Resisting Obligation: How Privileged Adolescents Conceive of Their Responsibilities to Others."

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 9

aid. "For a nation of America's wealth, providing aid to alleviate misery in the poorest countries is a worthy cause" starts a New York Times editorial defending foreign aid.[57] Former president George W. Bush argued for foreign aid in part on the grounds that

> we're committed to development because it's in our moral interests. I strongly believe in the timeless truth: To whom much is given, much is required. We are a blessed nation and I believe we have a duty to help those less fortunate around the world.[58]

In the total for the two samplings of pro-aid arguments found on Yahoo! Answers, the proportion of economic comparisons in total pro-aid argument stands out:

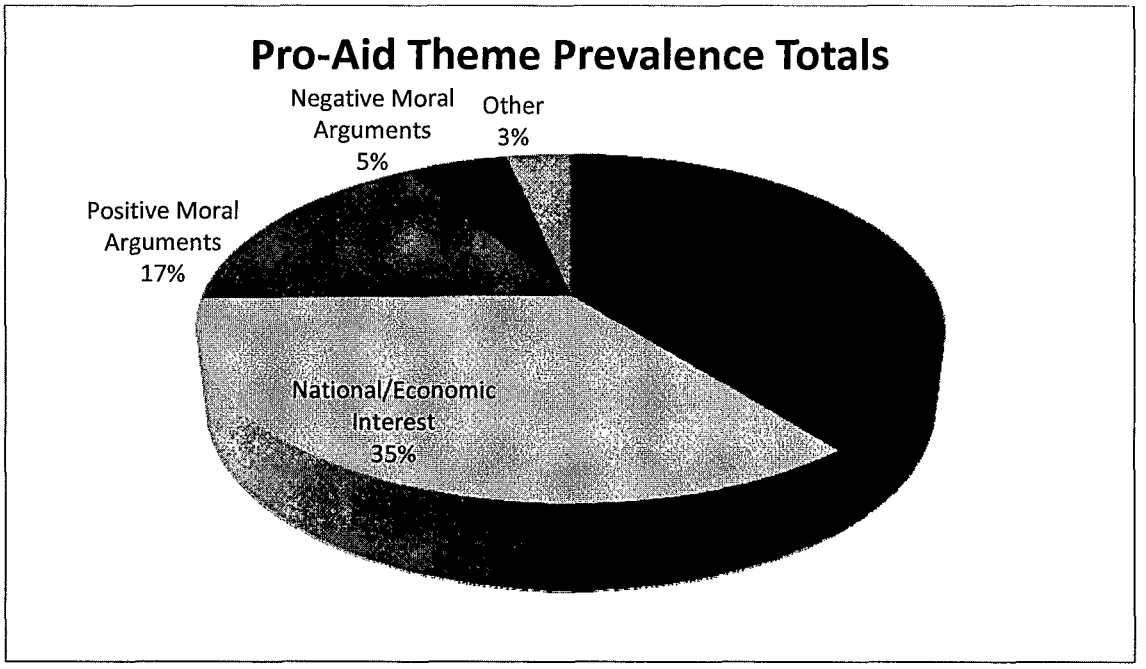

Figure 2.5: Sampling Totals: Prevalence of Reasons for Supporting Foreign Aid

[57] "A Need for Foreign Aid." As mentioned above, the argument that aid benefits America also was a main theme of this editorial.
[58] Qtd. in "Bush Pushes Foreign Aid, Despite Economic Woes."

A posting was tallied as an "economic comparison" if it compared spending, income, or economic opportunities by or in developed countries to any aspect of the economic situation in developing countries. People who said that the U.S. gave little to foreign aid, spent (too) much on the military (in relation to foreign aid), emphasized how a small amount of money could accomplish a lot (in terms of aid), or argued that foreign aid should be used to reduce wealth disparities were all included with those who made even more straightforward economic contrasts. All invariably gave the impression of supporting, or explicitly argued for, foreign aid.

Although this data does not clearly establish that economic comparisons in fact are the most popular line of reasoning for those arguing for foreign aid, it does indicate that comparing U.S. affluence or spending on non-aid issues is a major pro-aid theme.

While those making economic comparisons typically made an argument implicitly for the existence of a positive obligation, many did not do so explicitly. Explicit arguments for positive obligations composed only 17% of pro-aid theme. Surprisingly rarely (only once in fact) were these arguments religious in nature (reflecting the findings mentioned in the first chapter that religion had little correlation with views on foreign aid). Despite the presence of many religious aid organizations, it seems that Americans tend to talk about foreign aid as if it were a political or economic issue rather than a religious one. Arguments for positive obligations were scattered and involved many rationales, including emphasizing a common humanity or a global community, arguing that there was something wrong about allowing starvation or the suffering of children, or even simply asserting a moral claim (e.g., "It is the right thing to do") without providing further reasons.

This section considers both the arguments for positive moral obligations and the economic comparisons, since the latter tends to be used as a launching pad for the former, and the two are commonly enough connected.

Given the moral importance of the existence of obligations to help the extreme poor, it has become an issue that many moral philosophers have written about. Although the more technical writings presumably have had little influence outside of academic discourses, many philosophers have written specifically for a public audience. Peter Singer, notably, has written extensively on the moral obligations that extreme poverty place on those with disposable incomes, i.e., most residents of industrialized countries. In *The Life You Can Save* Singer devotes a whole book to convincing readers that this obligation exists. Peter Unger's *Living High and Letting Die* also seeks to establish the moral obligation to give money to aid-related charities like Oxfam and UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund). These two are not making arguments for foreign aid - their position is that official foreign aid currently does not do enough to help, and individuals have the moral responsibility to give privately to charity. Nonetheless, the arguments that they believe will be the most persuasive to readers share characteristics with pro-foreign aid discourse and other arguments about positive obligations to help the poor.

Singer and Unger rest much of their respective arguments on the intuitions that are elicited by the thought experiments they construct. Singer sets up a scenario where one is walking by a shallow pond and can easily save a child drowning in it at a small cost (damaging one's clothing or shoes) to oneself.[59] Unger gives, among many scenarios, a situation where one is faced with a decision between helping a bleeding and injured

[59] Singer, Peter. The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty. New York: Random House, 2009. p. 3-4

stranger or protecting one's newly and expensively upholstered luxury car interior.[60] Another Unger scenario involves a man who must choose between redirecting a runaway trolley to destroy his prized Bugatti, which he has used as a retirement investment, or allowing the trolley to run over and kill a small child trapped on the tracks.[61]

These thought experiments, which both philosophers use precisely because they think that the majority of people will, in these situations, intuitively believe there to be an obligation to help, noticeably place the moral agent - the person who is faced with the choice - in the same context with the moral patient - the person who needs help and is affected by the choice of the agent. It is telling that philosophers seeking to establish a positive moral obligation to strangers far away so often begin by using thought experiments which place the agent and the patient in the same situation. Without placing two individuals within the same context, it is difficult to elicit intuitions favoring positive obligations.

Although these philosophers go on to make the case that the differences (such as proximity or nationality) between their thought experiments and the real life cases of need are morally irrelevant, they start where they plausibly think that intuitions are strongest, and these are cases where the agent and the patient share a context. Obligations not to harm may not require using such thought experiments - most would consider it wrong to harm anybody, even someone far away, for personal gain, but distance (geographical or social) may also reduce inhibitions against actively harming.

Viewing the world as interconnected seems to be a common perspective of famine and affluence arguments, just as it underpins the arguments from national self-interest. An

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[60] Unger, Peter. Living High & Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence. p. 24-5
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 136

emphasis on the wealth of developed nations serves to put individual fortune or misfortune into a global context. This in effect is also what the thought experiments of Singer and Unger try to accomplish: place the agent and the patient in the same context, and then rely on common intuitions to establish moral obligation. If their audience did not have the intuition that helping was obligatory in the thought experiments, their arguments could go nowhere.

Talking about the affluence in developed nations in a discussion of global poverty links the two, albeit not necessarily causally. One does not have to believe that the rich in a neighborhood have actively caused the situation of the poor in that same neighborhood to be disturbed by flagrant inequality. A person "sunning on the beach, playing in the water, eating a barbecue, and enjoying a cocktail" while people are suffering and dying nearby is not something that many presumably would be comfortable with.[62] A separation (geographical or otherwise) of rich and poor help to make inequalities and suffering more tolerable, while a clear juxtaposition can have the opposite effect, leading to feelings of discomfort.

Arguments in favor of aid which talk about the wealth of developed countries or of individuals in developed countries while talking about poverty or hunger can accomplish this juxtaposition, linguistically or logically putting side by side situations which are separated by thousands of miles. Conceptualizing starving children or extreme poverty as co-existing in the same (global) context as wealth (instead of seeing the two situations as entirely disconnected) may help to bridge the social distance between the two, and lead

[62] Quoted words come from a "queasy" luxury cruise ship passenger talking about Royal Caribbean International docking in earthquake-ravaged Haiti. Berreby, David. "The Beaches of Labadee." BigThink.com. 22 Jan. 2010. <http://bigthink.com/ideas/18368>. Berreby astutely asks of us, "At what distance from misery can you see yourself having a good time? Is it 100 miles? Or 250, or 1,000?"

individuals to be more supportive of obligations towards the poor. Talk about suffering or hunger may also serve to demonstrate a common humanity, and this too is a form of interconnectedness.

The conclusion that juxtaposition and interconnectedness are important characteristics of moral pro-aid arguments is supported not only by the emphasis that pro-aid arguments tend to place on comparative affluence and suffering, but also by the lack of such emphasis in anti-aid arguments and their tendency to focus solely on the situation of the affluent. When one focuses solely on, for example, the domestic American economy or an individual American, this unit is implicitly atomic, isolated from the rest of the world. Even if this is not explicitly claimed, the focus of attention helps to isolate the unit from a broader context. American fortunes, then, are internally explainable, while misfortunes in other countries are not related to Americans. If one takes this separated view, then one will presumably be less likely to support aid, especially an obligatory concept of aid. And foreign aid is inherently obligatory at the individual level, as it is paid for by mandatory taxation.

Perhaps not surprisingly, those who argue against any obligation do not mention wealth disparities between rich and poor countries. They are, in fact, much more likely to disconnect the two and talk only about economic situations in developed countries. Whether the argument is that people in wealthy countries have worked hard for their money or that the focus of helping should be on the disadvantaged in developed countries, two popular themes, the focus is on developed countries, a significantly different focus from the comparative approach that people arguing for aid tend to make. I will examine how prevalent this is in the next chapter on anti-aid discourse.

Positive Obligation

Positive obligations tend to be more controversial than negative obligations. While practically nobody openly makes the case that it is acceptable to actively harm others for personal gain, the claim that people have a right to have certain of their needs met is openly rejected by libertarians, and, moreover, the nature of those positive rights (do they include the right to food? education? employment?) tend to be more contentious than the nature of negative obligations (murdering, assaulting, raping, and unjustified theft are rarely defended).

Despite this, positive obligations are what arguments in favor of foreign aid typically try to establish. The intuition-capturing thought experiments mentioned above all seek to establish the existence of some positive moral obligation which, once established in a localized situation, can be logically extended to strangers who are both geographically and socially far away. Although Singer does make an argument that rich nations harm poor nations, and forms of humanitarian assistance to rectify those harms are demanded by even negative, libertarian forms of justice, his primary focus is on establishing a positive obligation. He offers this argument in passing to those libertarian "[f]ew people [who] really support such extreme views."[63]

Although, as Thomas Pogge notes, "[d]uties…to avert harms that one's past conduct may cause in the future … do not fit well into the conventional dichotomy of positive and negative duties."[64] Pogge calls these duties "intermediate duties" and while they are not strictly negative, it is usually accepted that they accompany negative duties - holding that a person has a right not to have their property damaged typically also involves a right to

[63] Singer, Peter. The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty. p. 29-33.
[64] Pogge, Thomas. "Real World Justice." The Journal of Ethics. 2005, Vol. 9, No. 1/2, Current Debates in Global Justice. p. 34

restitution. Otherwise, after the right is initially violated, no restorative obligations are owed to the victim. Any given right then would exist only until it was violated. The government may have a duty to refrain from taking citizens' property, but once that property has been confiscated, no obligation would exist to re-compensate them for their loss. Without any restorative duty, rights become much weaker than they are usually held to be. I do not mean this to be a conclusive argument for restorative or intermediate rights, nor does such an argument appear necessary here, as those who embrace the concept of negative rights tend also to embrace "intermediate" obligations to rectify harms.

Arguing that foreign aid or other assistance is a type of intermediary duty required to rectify harms against developing countries, however, is not particularly common within popular American pro-aid discourse. Although talk about "aid as justice" does occur, it tends to take a positive rights view of justice, one where children dying of preventable diseases or extreme poverty coexisting in a world with wealth are inherently injustices.[65] Needless to say, those who do not accept the existence of positive rights will not be inclined to think that failing to provide medicine or other failures of positive duties will be an injustice.[66]

If using the language of positive rights to establish obligations to provide aid will not be convincing to those who do not accept positive obligations in the first place, what use is there in couching aid in these terms? A simple answer is that most people accept

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[65] For an example, see Bono's 2006 speech at the National Prayer Breakfast: "Sixty-five hundred Africans are still dying every day of a preventable, treatable disease, for lack of drugs we can buy at any drug store. This is not about charity, this is about justice and equality." Bono. Qtd. in "Bono's best sermon yet: Remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast." Sojourners.net. 3 Feb. 2006. <http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=sojomail.display&issue=060203>.

[66] For an example, to be discussed later, see Tupy, Marian. "Is Aid a Matter of Justice?" The Cato Institute. 22 Apr. 2010. <http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=11712>.

Singer's assumption that it is wrong to allow a child, whom one could easily save, to drown. Establishing a somewhat more demanding positive obligation to people who are willing to accept positive obligations in some circumstances (where the agent and the recipient share a context) is presumably a winnable battle. Despite what some libertarians may claim,[67] many people, when faced with situations like the drowning child, do intuitively "see" a positive obligation.

But why, if negative and intermediary duties are even more broadly accepted, not argue for aid on the ground of these duties? While it may be uncontroversial to assert that one has an obligation to refrain from harming or to rectify past harms, the same cannot be said for factual claims that a given harm has occurred. Even though most would presumably accept that, if a developed country actively wronged a developing country in some way, the former would morally owe recompensation to the latter, assertions that a wrong occurred would likely be highly politically controversial. Using the term "justice" when speaking about positive assistance may raise objections from some libertarians, but it is likely easier for most others to accept than an argument that they, or their countries, have harmed people in the developing world.

Casting foreign aid and other developmental assistance as a positive, charitable obligation does the least to challenge common assumptions; it is far less radical to argue for saving a drowning child than it is to argue that developed countries exploit, or even foster underdevelopment and dependence in, developing countries.

If developing countries are wronged by developed countries, however, then portraying aid as essentially a positive duty may obscure some causes of the very poverty that aid

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[67] *Ibid.* "To most people, 'justice' is about determination of harm, identification of the guilty and compensation of the injured."

attempts to address. If some of the problems facing developing countries are caused by the actions or more powerful countries or by the arrangement of the international order, then foreign aid, especially aid which is largely captured by donor interests, may be unable to effect change.

Discursively, arguments that cast foreign aid (privately given or ODA) as a positive charity do little to challenge current international arrangements. Even arguments which take aid to be a very demanding positive obligation imply that the behaviors and policies of developed countries are worrying because they are not generous enough. While Singer, Unger and others who make the case for demanding positive aid obligations may see they failure to fulfill such positive obligations as extremely troubling, even as troubling as failures to refrain from actively harming, there is little reason to think that this level of concern will resonate with a broader public. Failing to be generous enough or failing to help someone in need of help is not widely considered to be as wrong as actively harming.

Some attempts to argue for aid as a positive duty, I will argue in later chapters, can paradoxically help to preserve the global status quo and power imbalances. Developed country policies and actions which harm developing countries are ignored by a purely positive case for aid. When such policies are the cause of underdevelopment, it is questionable whether "charity" can effect change.

Furthermore, if aid is argued for on positive grounds, it may be more easily captured by other interests. Many Americans would likely find it intuitive that if an agent gives charitably, she is free to give as she pleases, while if she is providing recompensation to another for a wrong she committed, she has much less latitude. In the latter case,

tweaking the recompensation to benefit oneself is much less morally acceptable to many.

Both from a practical and a moral standpoint, then, purely positive moral arguments may be problematic. I will explore the case for aid as required by "negative" or "intermediate" obligations in chapters IV and V.

This should not be taken as criticism of those who argue that aid is a positive duty. Those who make such arguments rarely, if ever, have the intention of providing intellectual support for global inequities. Some, notably Peter Singer, have done tremendous work in getting extreme poverty and global inequalities recognized as moral issues in the West. It may be an unintended consequence, however, that, in the context of American popular discourse, such arguments might obscure global injustices.

CHAPTER III

ANTI-AID DISCOURSE

In the popular discourse on foreign aid, arguments against foreign aid are varied, which is unsurprising, given widespread opposition to aid mentioned earlier. Given that some 70% or so of the American population supports reducing or eliminating foreign aid, there understandably is a wide range of opinions and themes against foreign aid.

In some regards this might have made discerning overall themes more difficult. Similar arguments often emerged time and again, however, indicating the operation of a coherent discourse. Two themes most commonly emerged: 1) the "our money" theme: that wealth or income is strictly American and the money used for foreign aid should be either reimbursed to American taxpayers or should be directed to addressing domestic problems 2) the arguments about corruption – involves both concerns that developing country governments are too corrupt to make aid effective, that the temptation of aid money may make these countries corrupt if they are not already.

"It's Our Money"

> People work to earn money, and it should be up to their discretion how they wish to spend it.... If that means not giving any money to foreign aid, then so be it.[1]

> I truely believe charity begins at home we have poor americans who need help, who need food, who need health care, who needs a safe place to live. I think before we send millions of dollars over to foreign countries we should take care of our own children first, why should education only be for the people who can pay 40 thousand dollars a year? why isnt education free to anyone who

[1] "Lauren" in "Resisting Obligation: How Privileged Adolescents Conceive of Their Responsibilities to Others." p. 10

> wants to get one? why do we have a problem with homelessness in the richest country in the world?.... We have our own problems lets take care of our own then if there is any left help those poor nations. [*sic*][2]

This section explores one of the most common popular objections to foreign aid: the idea that the money given to foreign aid is the sole property of Americans either individually or collectively. From this, it is argued that the tax revenue that would have gone to foreign aid either should be used to address American problems or that it should be returned to the taxpayers in the form of lower taxes (although, as the poll evidence in the first section indicates, this savings may be lower than what proponents of this option assume). I will start with the latter manifestation of the theme and the idea that foreign aid wrongly denies individuals the right and the freedom to do with their money as they see fit.

The assumption of what, following Scott Seider, I will call moral freedom is, for quite understandable reasons, widely compelling. This is not to say that whenever a constituency corners the market on the language of moral freedom, they win the argument (the continued debate on abortion even after abortion rights supporters won widespread recognition as "pro-choice" is enough to show that). It is to say that the moral freedom argument is accepted enough that their opponents, if they want popular support, must try to reframe the debate and deny the application of the moral freedom assumption rather than deny the assumption itself. Pro-life activists (who notably do not call themselves anti-choice activists) will speak about the right to life and deny that moral freedom permits abortion, just as it does not permit murder. Animal rights activists will

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[2] Reply to online question "Why are some people against foreign aid?" http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index;_ylt=Ar7EjvDd_rsQP3ImWYnCxM8jzKIX;_ylv=3?qid=20080305173246AAuJ4Nj

do better to focus on animal suffering than argue that people do not have a right to eat animals. Those who want to ban transfats would not be making a publicly compelling argument if they confront the moral freedom assumption head-on and claim that people cannot be counted on to look after themselves and government regulation must perform that task.

The moral freedom assumption[3] lends itself as easily to economic as to social issues. This application of the moral freedom assumption seems to find popular support among Americans.

In the study conducted by Scott Seider, mentioned previously, of the ten students interviewed, seven "rejected the idea that affluent individuals bear and obligation or responsibility for those who are less fortunate."[4] In the essays on obligations to the poor, 66% of the class argued against any obligation.[5]

Seider called the most common argument the "Keep What You Earn" argument, which was argued by about a third of the students opposing obligation. "People work to earn money, and it should be up to their discretion how they wish to spend it.... If that means not giving any money to foreign aid, then so be it." Another argued, "you can't really say what people are supposed to do with their own money because it's their money they worked hard for."[6]

Sentiments similar to those Seider reported in his study do appear in popular opposition to foreign aid: "People should have the choice of whether or not they want to

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[3] I persist in calling this an assumption because it is assumed in arguments, not argued for, let alone proven. To the best of my knowledge no one has ever proven that each of us is morally entitled to do whatever we want, or even, less strongly, to do whatever we want without actively harming others.

[4] "Resisting Obligation: How Privileged Adolescents Conceive of Their Responsibilities to Others.", p. 8

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 9

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 8

give money to others, and the amount which they want to give."[7]

Yet, this argument (classified as "personal freedom") composed only 3% of the anti-aid reasons found in a random sampling of public online postings about foreign aid on the website Yahoo! Answers. Compare that with a 29% prevalence rate for the argument that domestic priorities take precedent and should be resolved before any foreign aid is given, and an 18% prevalence rate for citing corruption in recipient countries as a reason to oppose aid. "Personal freedom" here included any postings which argued or claimed that individuals should be able to give if they want or that foreign aid infringed on freedom.

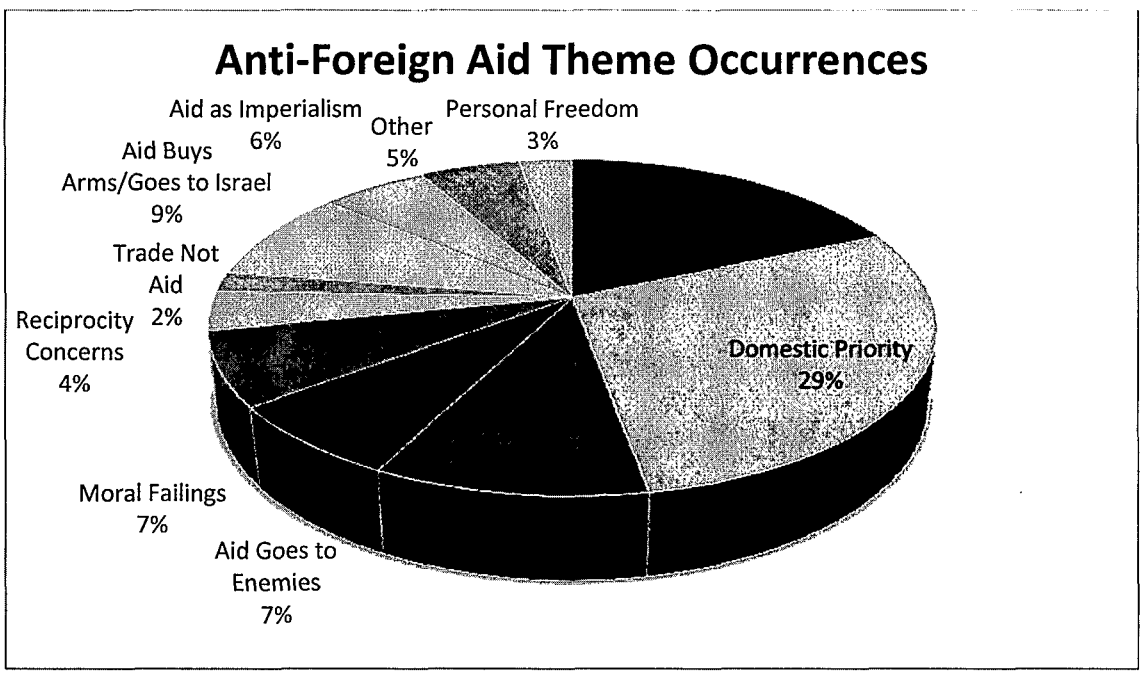

Figure 3.1: Sampling Totals: Prevalence of Reasons for Opposing Foreign Aid

Why, if Americans both widely accept the personal freedom assumption generally (as

[7] "Government and Politics - Foreign Aid and the Destruction of America."

seems to be the case) and oppose foreign aid (as surveys indicate), is opposition to foreign aid not more often couched in the language of personal freedom? My suggestion here is that the foreign aid debate differs from most other moral debates where the language of personal freedom is used. Perhaps unlike debates over homosexual rights or abortion, arguments against foreign aid position can easily seem callous.

Opponents of foreign aid may also be at a greater disadvantage than opponents of welfare or of taxation. In the latter case it is relatively easy to contrast personal freedom against the perceived incompetence and theft of the government. In the former, it is easier to make the case that poor people in America have sufficient access to opportunity to make welfare unnecessary than it is to make a similar argument globally. Opponents of foreign aid who make the personal freedom appeal are arguing personal freedom in the face of severe poverty, or even death. Appealing to personal freedom can too easily seem selfish, even callous.

In other words, arguments for foreign aid, I suggest here, are viewed, even by many of aid's opponents, as important moral arguments. The anti-aid discourse considered most often challenges foreign aid on the grounds of moral priority. Foreign aid is opposed because it is the wrong priority; the right priority for American concern and donations are Americans. It is one thing to oppose foreign aid if equally bad (or worse) harms can be averted with the money in other ways; it is something else entirely to oppose foreign aid on the grounds that one should be able to dine out rather than feeding starving children.

The personal freedom argument in the context of foreign aid may, by itself, be felt to be insufficient. If the thought experiments made by Singer and Unger that contrast self-interest with saving the lives of others so easily capture popular intuition, those making

the personal freedom arguments might find it necessary, both for themselves and to convince others, to link the argument from personal freedom with another compelling moral argument.

Generosity

A subset of the arguments making the case that the money going to foreign aid would be better directed (back) to Americans is the claim that reimbursing tax money and thereby encouraging private giving not only is better from the perspective of personal freedom; it also leads to better results for people in underdeveloped countries. This is so, the argument goes, because foreign aid discourages individuals from giving privately, and private giving is more effective than official governmental foreign aid.

Foreign aid, it is argued, takes the money that would be given privately and channels it through grossly inefficient government programs, ultimately undermining the express purpose of aid. The author quoted above arguing for personal freedom continues: "Those Americans wishing to contribute to the economic welfare of foreign countries will be free and have money to do so, once the government is barred from such practices."[8]

Yet it is not clear why the government ending foreign aid is a necessary requirement for Americans to privately contribute to helping other countries, since less than one percent of the federal budget goes to foreign aid. The median taxpayer in America in 2008 earned $34,140, of $5,400 went to federal taxes, with $46.08 of that going to foreign aid.[9] Needless to say, $46 annually does not constitute such a burden that individuals wanting to contribute to charity are unable to do so.

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[8] "Government and Politics - Foreign Aid and the Destruction of America."
[9] Kendall, David and Jim Kessler. "A Taxpayer Receipt." Thirdway.org. Sept. 2010. <http://content.thirdway.org/publications/335/Third_Way_Idea_Brief_-_A_Taxpayer_Receipt.pdf>. p. 2-3

Of course, not all of this money goes to help the poorest. The approximately 1% of the federal budget that goes to foreign aid includes military aid and aid to relatively well-off countries like Colombia and Israel. The development economist Jeffrey Sachs estimates that .05% of national income goes to aid Africa, the continent home to the poorest countries.[10] Given that official foreign aid so often is subject to the inefficiencies caused by catering to domestic and strategic interests discussed in preceding sections, perhaps it would be preferable, for the sake of efficiency, to promote private giving. But the question remains: does the current level of foreign aid actually discourage private giving?

The idea that the foreign aid tax burden is so high that it amounts to a disincentive for private giving is common in the arguments that emphasize personal freedom:

> Americans are some of the most generous people on earth. Before our government took our money in the form of income tax revenues and dispersed it as they saw fit around the globe the citizens of this country gave to charities in unprecedented amounts. As our taxes increased our charitable contributions deceased.[11]

By emphasizing the global dispersal of tax revenues, the author singles out foreign aid as the cause of a dramatic downturn in private charitable giving. But again, why would distributing $46 (about 0.13% of the pre-tax income of $34,140, or 0.16% of post-tax income of $28,740) account for a dramatic swing away from "unprecedented amounts" of private giving? According to the Charities Aid Foundation's 2010 report on charitable giving around the world, 60% of Americans donated some amount of money, but 67% of Danes, who pay much more in taxes to foreign aid, give charitably.[12] Global

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[10] Sachs, Jeffrey. "Aid Ironies." The Huffington Post. 24 May 2009. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeffrey-sachs/aid-ironies_b_207181.html>.

[11] Cane-Larsen, Regina. "Foreign Aid is Adding to Our National Deficit While Wielding Power and Control for Our Government."

[12] "The World Giving Index 2010." Charities Aid Foundation. Mar. 2010. <http://www.deborahswallow.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/CAF-World-Giving-Index.pdf>.

Humanitarian Assistance, an organization devoted to tracking humanitarian assistance, reported that in 2008 the United States gave a total of $14.40 dollars per person in both private and official humanitarian aid. Luxembourg gave $114.40, Ireland $55.90, and Norway $95.60.[13] Directing tax revenue to foreign aid, then, would not seem to make people less likely to give privately, and American private giving would not appear to quantitatively offset lower official assistance.

Another article, published by a wholly owned subsidiary of the conservative John Birch Society, argues that:

> Americans have proven to be very generous in supporting numerous private and religious charitable programs providing assistance to the developing countries and to those ravaged by wars, turmoil,, and natural disasters. However, in the end, we want to be able to choose how much of our own resources to give, and to whom, rather than have it taken from us by government force and doled out by our politicians and bureaucrats to the politicians and bureaucrats in foreign countries.[14]

These arguments often cite the generosity of Americans, and there is ample evidence that Americans give large amounts of money charitably - $307 billion in 2008, or about $1,000 for each American.[15] Yet, since the generosity argument is used specifically against official foreign aid, it would be fair to look at the levels of charitable giving that go to developing countries.

According to the Hudson Institute's 2006 report on global philanthropy, $71.2 billion in private assistance went to developing countries. Still an impressive amount, and certainly more than the $19.7 billion in official development assistance. Yet, two-thirds

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[13] "GHA Report 2010." Global Humanitarian Assistance. Somerset, UK, 2010. <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/GHA_Report8.pdf>. p. 152

[14] Jasper, William J. "Bush Pushes Foreign Aid, Despite Economic Woes."

[15] "Frequently Asked Questions: How Much Do Americans Give to Charity." The Foundation Center. <http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/faqs/html/givingstats.html>. In their own words, the Foundation Center is "is a national nonprofit service organization recognized as the nation's leading authority on organized philanthropy".

($47 billion) of that "U.S. private assistance" was individual remittances by immigrants![16]

There seem to be some problems with considering this to be "U.S. private assistance." For one thing, one could quibble with whether green card holders sending remittances to family members abroad are to count as Americans. Moreover, one could ask whether it is appropriate to categorize giving money to family members as a form of private charity. If so, then charity takes on a greatly expanded definition so that giving one's child an allowance or food would presumably be donations (and why not tax deductible?) and spending time with relatives volunteer work.

Aside from relying on a greatly inflated definition of American charity, the report also overlooks the fact that remittances help to mitigate the damage done to developing countries when highly talented and/or trained individuals leave to pursue lucrative careers in developed countries. This brain drain can have significant effects on developing countries who not only need the skills of those emigrating professionals, but also have invested significant costs into training them. Aside from these often considerable costs, brain drain can also lead the professionals remaining in developing countries to focus on problems and ideas that concern developed countries - such as a medical focus on diseases afflicting Western populations rather than tropical diseases or a scientific concern with advanced technological solutions rather than low-tech but practical solutions. This "intellectual migration" leads to the neglect of problems and solutions specific to developing countries, a problem at least as serious as actual migration.[17]

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[16] "The Index of Global Philanthropy: 2006." Ed. Karina Rollins. The Hudson Institutue. <http://gpr.hudson.org/files/publications/GlobalPhilanthropy.pdf>. p. 15

[17] Todaro, Michael P. and Stephen C. Smith. Economic Development. 10th ed. Boston: Pearson Addison-Wesley, 2009. p. 396-7

Focusing on the amount of remittances obscures other costs which cannot be quantified. UNICEF, for example, cautions that the emigration of parents can harm their children by fragmenting families and leading to increased vulnerability, lower self-esteem, and a lack of role-models. Children also can suffer from doctors emigrating in search of better paying jobs in developed countries.[18] Although remittances do provide assistance, then, they come at a not inconsiderable cost to developing countries.

In a report which sets out to show how generous Americans are - the editor concludes her introduction with "Is American stingy? No one associated with this project thinks so. But don't take our word for it. Look at the numbers, read the success stories, and judge for yourself."[19] - we find that what gets counted as American generosity is inflated and presents a one-sided picture, one where remittances are counted, but the costs of the emigration which make remittances possible are not. In the five pages the report devotes to analyzing remittances, one finds only talk of the benefits of remittances, and no mention of any negative impacts of emigration, such as brain drain. This report appears to be often cited by people arguing that private aid should replace official aid.

Using the numbers of the Hudson Institute, of what can reasonably be called private charity, $24.2 billion goes to developing countries. That amounts to about $80 for each of 300 million Americans. More than the $46 from the median taxpayer that goes to foreign aid, but far below the 1995 Danish average amount of $900, an amount that does not include private giving. According to the Center for Global Development, Americans gave $0.13/day per person in official aid and $0.05/day per person in private giving. Norway, on the other hand, gave $1.02/day per person in public aid and $0.24/day per person in

[18] Pierri, Raúl. "Remittances Do Not Fill Gap for Children Left Behind." Inter Press Service. 6 Oct. 2006. <http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=35029>.
[19] "The Index of Global Philanthropy: 2006." p. 4

private aid.[20]

This is not to discount the positive effects that American aid can have (the above site noted that the U.S. gave 40% of relief aid) nor to argue whether national generosity is better calculated on an absolute or a per capita basis. It does however, indicate that higher levels of public assistance do not necessarily lead to lower levels of private giving, casting doubt on the premise that personal freedom (from foreign aid taxation) leads to greater private generosity.

Distancing

The students mentioned at the beginning of this section who two to one argued against obligations to aid the poor were far more likely to focus solely on the affluent in their reasoning. Unlike the pro-aid students mentioned in the previous section who spoke about the poor at least enough to contrast them with the rich, students arguing against obligations to help the poor did not mention the poor in any of the arguments Seider reports.

Not only is the presence of this contrast one of the major discursive themes in pro-aid arguments, its noticeable omission from anti-aid arguments indicates its relevance. In the course of conducting research for this thesis, the anti-aid examples I found that came closest to mentioning poverty abroad did not actually function as a contrast. Some might acknowledge underdevelopment by saying something like "People in Africa are poor, but we have poor people in this country too, and we need to look after them." Yet functionally, this is not a contrast at all, as it effectively equates rather than contrasts the

[20] Roodman, David. "U.S. aid, global poverty, and the earthquake/tsunami death toll." Center for Global Development. 29 Dec. 2004. <http://blogs.cgdev.org/globaldevelopment/2004/12/u-s-aid-global-poverty-and-the-earthquaketsunami-death-toll.php>.

two situations.

Kwame Appiah argues in his book *Cosmopolitanism* that changes in accepted morality (such as the shifts regarding racism and homosexual and women's rights) occurred not because the respective arguments were felt to be more convincing, but Americans overall got more used to seeing gay people or women working outside the home. This would appear to bridge the in-group/out-group divide: those minority groups whose ways are not understood or are perceived to be threatening tend to become more accepted, the more contact the majority has with them. In the case of women's rights, acceptance might not have come from men having more contact with women (although arguably a greater female presence in workplaces helped to convince many men), but from beginning to see women in a different light, as having projects and ambitions of their own beyond (or even instead of) domestic duties.

Of course, contact alone may not be sufficient and may often leave in place oppressive discourses and assumptions. Assuming that greater contact alone is enough to resolve injustice may help to obscure how oppression operates. Different groups living together may have greater tensions with each other than with outsiders if they compete economically, are perceived to enjoy unequal privileges, or for whatever reason have hostile relationships. Martha Nussbaum speculates in *Women and Human Development* that lower-caste Indian women likely opened up to her, an outsider, more than they would have a higher caste Indian woman, and they probably were more likely to trust her, a white American, economically advantaged professor, than were lower class African-American women in Chicago, where she taught. Many of the most heated conflicts in the world today are a product of localized animosities and grievances: the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict, the genocide in Rwanda, ethnic tensions in north-eastern Ghana. Even more globally, hostile contact does more damage than no contact.

So the contact that Appiah urges leads to greater acceptance and moral recognition is a kind of "getting used to;" seeing those who had formerly been "others" as human beings with respectable projects and interests similar to one's own. In the context of debates about foreign aid, contrasting the advantages and wealth of life in one country with the obstacles faced by life in another country may work to expand our moral horizons by drawing attention to the other and needs she may have.

This is not to say that the contrasts made by those arguing pro-aid positions are not without problems, however. Many who make the pro-aid arguments have as little an understanding about life in developing countries as do those who make anti-aid arguments, and sophisticated and unsophisticated arguments are to be found on both sides. Furthermore, it is all too easy for the contrasts to be demeaning, portraying recipients of assistance as ignorant or lacking in agency. Americans (and quite likely Westerners more generally), not uncommonly take patronizing stances toward the poor in developing countries, and in the course of this research I found a not uncommon pro-aid sentiment to be that fixing global poverty and malnutrition were easy, simply requiring knowledgeable Westerners to come into villages to show the people how to farm, or use medicine. One woman writes on Yahoo! Answers about her experience volunteering abroad:

> Many times the mother did not lack the appropriate foods at home she just did not know how to use them properly. I am sure that her new knowledge went back to her community and others were able to prevent the malnutrition because they learned too. [*sic*]

Even without knowing more about this case, it seems most unlikely that a woman in

Africa, who likely has lived in the immediate area for some time, or if a new arrival, would almost certainly be living around many who were native to the area, whose ancestors would have lived there, would be unaware of how to use an available food source in her own house. It is possible that the food was some kind of newly arrived foreign food requiring novel forms of preparation. It is also possible, however, that what was perceived by the foreigner to be "food" was in fact to be used, more sustainably, in a different capacity, seeds to plant for the coming season or an animal needed for breeding or plowing, for example.

Whatever the case may be, the track record of foreigners with little local experience being more knowledgeable about local farming or gathering than local people with generations of intimate experience is quite poor, as has been amply documented.[21] James Ferguson devotes an entire book to analyzing the failure of a Canadian aid agency to comprehend the local grazing arrangements in the Thaba-Tseka district of Lesotho and the overall economy of Lesotho (relying on migrant labor to South Africa rather than farming to generate income).[22] Another anthropologist, Marvin Harris, convincingly argues that the apparently irrational refusal of Hindus to eat cows, even in times of hunger, actually is a wise course of action, given the usefulness of cows for pulling plows. The "failure" of Indians to respond to this potential shortage of bovine labor by intensively farming cows also was rational, since the crops necessary to feed the cows (or the land necessary for grazing) would have generated more calories for human

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[21] Easterly, William. The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good. New York: Penguin Books, 2007.
[22] Ferguson, James. The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

consumption if used directly to feed humans (or grow food for human consumption).[23] If a local solution is feasible, it is more likely to be discovered by people with local experience and knowledge rather than a foreign expert (to say nothing of well-intentioned but non-expert, foreign volunteers).

Returning to the issue of contact and "getting used to," acknowledging inequalities between developed and developing countries is arguably a first, but not fully sufficient, step in expanding our moral horizon to include issues facing people in developing countries. Among humans, at least, this possibly might be the most radical expansion of moral consideration yet, given that it would encompass people much further socially and geographically removed from white Americans than any domestic minority group.[24]

At least in foreign aid discourse, talking about the situation of an out-group appears to make one more sympathetic to them, while focusing on the in-group (talking about taxpayers, for example) turns one's sympathies inward. It would be surprising if it were otherwise in other realms of discourse.

Charity Begins at Home

"The American population should not have to live without privileges just to help others."[25]

Milner and Tingley (2009), in their effort to tease out factors that cause elected representatives to support or oppose aid, considered the presence of this discursive

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[23] Harris, Marvin. Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches: The Riddles of Culture. New York: Vintage, 1989.

[24] Extending moral consideration to animals, at least those who do not share homes with us, would likely be a more far-reaching expansion of moral consideration, and a type of "deep ecological" environmental ethic (like that of Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss) would be more sweeping still.

[25] "Resisting Obligation: How Privileged Adolescents Conceive of Their Responsibilities to Others.", p. 10

theme:

> A factor repeatedly cited by representatives and scholars discussing aid is that foreign aid takes away money from domestic programs designed to help those suffering during difficult economic times. Meernik and Oldmixon (2004) show that congressional support for internationalism falls when domestic economic conditions deteriorate.[26]

The "inward focus" with which I ended the last subsection is a regular occurrence in anti-aid arguments. Given the difficulty that I argued a purely self-centered theme faces in a moral debate about foreign aid, the internal focus manifests most often as a prioritization of domestic American problems. In fact, the argument that "American wealth" should be focused on solving American problems rather than being directed to other countries is a dominant anti-aid theme which emerges in the discourse.

In one form or another, it regularly turns up when people voice their concerns about foreign aid: "We should focus on our more prevalent domestic problems.... Our priority should be to help our homeless, instead of other countries' poor."[27] "In America millions of our neighbors go to bed hungry.... People are dying everyday right here from illnesses and disease."[28]

Examples abound in comments collected on Yahoo! Answers as well:

> What about education funds, the VA funds, food stamps, and Social Security? Those are the reasons we need to stop funding other countries. America needs to focus on America!

> We need to take care of our own first. It's a shame to have anyone going to bed hungry or without adequate shelter in this country when we spend billions on foreign aid.

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[26] Milner, Helen V. and Dustin H. Tingley. "The Political Economy of U.S. Foreign Aid: American Legislators and the Domestic Politics of Aid." Princeton University, 28 Jan. 2009. 10 Sep. 2010

[27] "Government and Politics - Foreign Aid and the Destruction of America."

[28] "Foreign Aid is Adding to Our National Deficit While Wielding Power and Control for Our Government."

> I truely believe charity begins at home we have poor americans who need help, who need food, who need health care, who needs a safe place to live. I think before we send millions of dollars over to foreign countries we should take care of our own children first, why should education only be for the people who can pay 40 thousand dollars a year? why isnt education free to anyone who wants to get one? why do we have a problem with homelessness in the richest country in the world? [sic]
>
> I think if we have the resources to help those in need, then by all means of course we should, they are our brothers and sisters. That being said, I think there is alot of suffering here in America that needs dealt with first. If we are going to be a nation that helps the world, we need to be strong and well nourished to best do that!! [sic]

Returning to the pie chart on page 68, the "domestic priority" category composed the largest share of reasons people gave opposing foreign aid. The specific problems varied, but domestic poverty and problems facing American children were extremely common, likely to show that such problems are not unique to countries receiving aid. Also popular was the claim that foreign aid money would be better dedicated towards helping fix the U.S. economy and pay down the deficit (the postings sampled spanned a time period of three years, preceding late 2010). This did not include arguments about reimbursing the tax money so Americans could do with it as they pleased; these were categorized in the "Personal Freedom" category and were more rarely made.

The "domestic priority" category composes almost a third of total anti-aid reasons given. It may, however, be even more prevalent, as the claim that the U.S. is too generous easily implies the domestic priority argument (or, looking at it another way, the domestic priority argument implies the U.S. is too generous claim). Obviously this does not imply that only 10% of Americans think that the U.S. gives too much (polls cited earlier showed that number is much higher). Quite likely most of the people making anti-aid

postings felt the U.S. gave too much, but in giving reasons for their opposition to aid only occasionally claimed that the U.S. was too generous. Some "reciprocity concerns" may also cover for the domestic priority rationale. Reciprocity concerns focused on the "one-way" nature of foreign aid and the perceived lack of benefits foreign aid has for the U.S.

In the "charity begins at home" theme, talk about taxation regularly occurs, presumably because talking about taxation is a straightforward way to contrast desert with non-desert. Because tax dollars are paid by Americans, Americans deserve to benefit from tax dollars, while foreigners do not. The notion of reciprocity is a common one in moral thinking, as is the idea that obligations are owed among people who are socially closer. I suggest that talk about taxation can serve as a convenient shorthand for capturing these two features. It implies an action (paying taxes) on the part of an agent which is not properly reciprocated (by the recipient of aid), and it implies in-group (taxpayers) vs. out-group (foreign beneficiaries of aid) dynamics. In so far as foreign aid is conceived to be an unreciprocated benefit to an out-group, it will be criticized in terms, such as taxation, that proxy for the moral language of reciprocity and social distance.

"The idea that we should send endless streams of tax dollars all over the world, while our own country sinks slowly in an ocean of debt is, well, ludicrous."[29] "Where is the accountability for the billions of tax dollars given in Foreign Aid? There is none."[30] "The government takes our tax dollars to pay off other countries' debt and to solve their problems, not ours."[31]

Nor are concerns about priorities and addressing problems at home limited to a small

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[29] "Foreign Aid: Ever With Us."
[30] "Foreign Aid is Adding to Our National Deficit While Wielding Power and Control for Our Government."
[31] "Government and Politics - Foreign Aid and the Destruction of America."

fringe of those participating in the discourse. The polling data reflects this concern. The 2001 PIPA survey found that 84% of respondents agreed that "taking care of domestic problems at home is more important than giving aid to foreign countries." A nearly identical 86% agreed with that in 1995.[32] This is not to say, however, that these people favored all spending on the poor to be domestic. People, on average, favored 16% of government spending on the poor going to help the poor in other countries. (The actual amount in 1999 was 4%.)[33]

Nonetheless, the "charity begins at home" argument is a common theme in arguments for reducing or eliminating foreign aid. "We should focus on our more prevalent domestic problems.... Our priority should be to help our homeless, instead of other countries' poor."[34]

The "charity begins at home" theme takes a view of global political economy and international relations which may seem commonsensical. Countries are independent sovereign entities, with independent economies, and while they certainly interact, they are, barring overt infringements by other countries or natural disasters, independent and solely responsible for whatever befalls them. If the argument that "it is my money to do with as I please" tends to take the view that every man is an island, the domestic priority theme might take the view that every country is an island.

Certainly there is much that recommends this theme. It seems obvious to most that people owe greater duties to those closer to them. The ideas that we get what we deserve, and we deserve what we get, has a powerful cultural background in American thought and discourse. Ideals of individualism, self-reliance, and the value of and rewards for

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[32] "Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger." p. 9
[33] *Ibid.*
[34] "Government and Politics - Foreign Aid and the Destruction of America."

hard-work resonate powerfully in American culture, and tend to make more sense if the world is arranged in an atomized, island-like fashion. On this view, charity might be a good thing, but it is charity, and if others on our island are having problems, we owe it to them to look after them before we work on saving another island.

It is also certainly true that problems exist in American society. While claims of the decline of American society may often be hyperbole, life is, in fact, far from perfect, and concerns about the economy, terrorism, and crime keep many Americans worried. Considering that the U.S. does devote billions of dollars each year to foreign aid, it is understandable that, given these problems, many cannot help but feel that this is "charity" which we cannot afford right now.

As it turns out, this argument that we cannot afford to give foreign aid "right now," actually tends to become the argument that we can never afford to give to foreign aid. Lest one think that this particular theme reflects contemporary economic difficulties, very similar reasons and numbers can be found even during economic boom times. During the good economic times of the late 1990's, 64% of respondents to a Washington Post poll believed that foreign aid was the most expensive government program. One respondent quoted said, "Why don't they collect the money that other countries owe us, so that we can take care of our own?"[35] It is unlikely that this view was due to economic concerns about the future.[36]

But there are reasons to think that this view, no matter how commonsensical, is incorrect. To begin with, it is not clear that foreign aid does constitute a one-way

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[35] Pianin, Eric and Mario Prossard. "Americans Oppose Cutting Entitlements to Fix Budget." The Washington Post. 29 Mar. 1997. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/vault/stories/poll032997.htm>.

[36] Morin, Richard. "Few Expect a Crash Course for Stock Market." The Washington Post. 17 Oct. 1997. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/vault/stories/poll101797.htm>.

charitable giveaway. The arguments that foreign aid is in our national interest provide one of the most compelling pro-aid arguments to Americans if discursive presence can be taken to measure persuasiveness. Although many do not believe that aid is beneficial to U.S. interests (the argument that aid goes to enemies of the U.S. was one of the more common minor themes in my samples, with a 7% prevalence rate), many, particularly elites in positions of power, think that it is. Certainly, much of U.S. aid has had restrictions and requirements placed on it for the purpose of benefitting American business interests. That lobbyists for the respective industries continue to campaign hard for these perks gives us a picture of the extent of their profitability.

Whether these requirements actually benefit Americans overall or whether American taxpayers are only footing the bill for subsidies to businesses with powerful lobbies is another question. Within popular discourse, however, foreign aid is not perceived as a subsidy to American business, but rather as (an altruistic) subsidy to foreign nationals.

Whether or not aid has actually benefitted American strategic interests, it has been largely directed to that end throughout its history, and American political leaders continue to extol it as a tool for influencing other nations. What is perceived to be an act of charity is not uncommonly described by aid proponents as an investment (albeit one whose payouts have rarely been scrutinized). The charitable giveaway that many imagine is often anything but.

The second problematic aspect of the "charity begins at home" argument is the assumption that American problems should be the first priority of Americans or the American government. The argument usually takes the position that so long as problems exist in America, no money should be sent through foreign aid. Of course, few would

deny that governments have a special obligation to their own citizens; even if we take this relationship to be arbitrary, the current sovereign state system that prevails globally has, at least for now, locked this arrangement into place.

It does not follow, however, that this arrangement means that foreign aid must be a secondary priority. Those who argue that problems like poverty and hunger exist in America and should be addressed first overstate their case. While social and economic problems like poverty and unemployment certainly exist in developed countries, they exist in far greater degrees in developing countries. Not only are there more cases (both per capita and, if we are talking about absolute rather than relative poverty, in absolute numbers) of poverty and malnutrition, the depth of the cases are much more severe than what is found in developed countries.

No country will ever be without any social problems whatsoever. Even the most economically advantaged countries with generous safety nets, arguably the Scandinavian nations, still have cases of homelessness, unemployment, drug abuse, and crime. If foreign aid, properly utilized, can save lives and promote "sustainable development" relatively cheaply, it is far from clear that this should be sacrificed for the sake of redirecting 1% or less of the federal budget. Holding off on providing foreign assistance until one's society has reached the impossible point of social utopia is effectively to never provide it at all. This logical implication is borne out in practice since, see above, opposition to aid on the grounds of domestic priorities occurs during both good and bad economic times.

While the history of foreign aid contains many failures and self-serving activities by "donors," a number of projects have been demonstrated to work well. Abhijit Banerjee

and Ruimin He of MIT analyzed the effectiveness of various development interventions using randomized evaluations and found that, among others, vaccination programs, AIDS prevention programs, and nutritional supplements are often highly effective.[37]

Vaccinations and oral rehydration therapy (ORT) salts are particularly cheap, often costing a few cents for a potentially life-saving treatment. Even if this cost rises substantially once transportation and administration costs are factored in, and we discount the benefits since not every treatment, or even most treatments, in fact save lives, the benefits would far outweigh any good that could be provided domestically with a similar amount of money. To use an example, if we assume that administration costs, and any money lost through inefficiencies, raise the real price of an ORT treatment 50 times, from $.15 to $7.50, and we assume that only 1 in 50 children receiving the treatment would have died without it (and no other children are benefitted in any way), it would cost $375 to save one life. It is unlikely that any similar amount of money directed to domestic programs in the U.S. would be anywhere near enough to save a life. This is due not only to the higher costs of treatment and material in the U.S., but also to the fact that problems facing Americans tend to require more expensive solutions. Some problems may be structural and unresponsive to monetary solutions.

Whereas at least some problems associated with underdevelopment may be responsive to relatively small amounts of money, there seem to be few such problems in the U.S. If we want to argue that foreign aid must be secondary so long as problems exist in American society, we accept a valuation where not only do American lives matter more than the lives of a similar numbers of foreigners, but what, if any, incremental and minor

[37] Banerjee, Abhijit and Ruimin He. "Making Aid Work." Reinventing Foreign Aid. Ed. William Easterly. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008. 47-92.

improvements that increasing the federal budget by 1% accomplishes are worth more than some large number of lives in developing countries.

Finally, even if we do accept this valuation, it is rarely, if ever, true that reducing foreign aid is necessary for freeing up funds for domestic assistance. Foreign aid composes a smaller portion of the budget than many think, while military spending is notoriously high. If domestic problems are so pressing, arguably many more programs should be cut, or taxes increased, as the money allotted to foreign aid is insufficient to make much difference in solving American domestic problems.

Defunding effective foreign assistance would also almost certainly increase global inequalities. Few would countenance the wealthiest Americans arguing that none of their money should go to help poorer Americans until all of the problems of the wealthy are solved. Global inequalities are, if anything, much sharper than what is found within developed countries, while their arbitrariness is more difficult to deny. Many Americans believe that most rich Americans deserve their wealth. But even for those who believe that perfect equality of opportunity exists in the U.S., it is hard to argue that a similar equality of opportunity exists globally. The country one is born in to will determine one's opportunities, and at the same time one's birth location and situation is an arbitrary factor, beyond one's power to control.

The present global situation, then, is one of great inequalities, largely arbitrary wealth distributions (from the standpoint of any given individual, who just as easily could have been born in Somalia as in Sweden), and poverty extreme enough to be life-threatening for many.

The defender of the domestic priority argument here might assert some form of the

island metaphor and claim that wealthy members of one nation have a stronger obligation to the poorer members of that nation than a wealthy nation has to poorer countries. This move, however, essentially decontextualizes from the realities of the global political economy. Wealthy individuals in the U.S. may have more connections to poorer countries. In an increasingly globalized world economy, this is true now more than ever. A businesswoman in New York may have more economic connections with Thailand than with West Virginia. An oilman in Texas might be more a part of Equatorial Guinea's economy than Alaska's.

I will talk more about decontextualization in chapter V. The arguments for domestic priority often display it, resting as they do on a view of the world neatly carved at the nation-state joints, rather than as the interconnected tangle it often is.

Related to the "charity begins at home" argument is the contention that individuals owe obligations only to family and friends. Obviously this is an objection not just to foreign aid, but to any sort of broad, impersonal sorts of obligations, including at least state and federal level taxation, if not also local taxes. One student in Seider's study said, "It's not their [wealthy people's] responsibility to help anyone else but themselves, their family, and their friends."[38] Others: "There is no reason to be giving away money that I have worked hard for to people I don't know." "To say one is obligated to help strangers is nonsensical because they never owed the person anything to begin with."[39]

This idea of reciprocity probably helps to underpin the arguments considered in this section: that one has no obligation at all to help others; that the U.S. should address its own problems before helping people in other countries (which inevitably becomes: the

[38] "Resisting Obligation: How Privileged Adolescents Conceive of Their Responsibilities to Others." p. 8
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 10

U.S. should address its own problems *instead of* those in other countries); that we each owe obligation only to people we know. There undoubtedly are quite solid adaptive reasons for reciprocity to be a core component of any moral sense with a biological basis. Social interactions, which are important today, and were even more a matter of life or death in the environments in which early humans lived. Reciprocal relationships arguably conferred advantages, and a case could be made that such advantages led to the importance of reciprocity being biologically "hard-wired" into human morality.

Culture matters too, here, though, as some cultural norms - one may think of the overused example of Japanese *kamikaze* pilots – emphasize unreciprocated sacrifice. These cultural values may counteract a "natural" tendency to reciprocity. One need not go to the extreme of *kamikazes* to find positive evaluations of unreciprocated sacrifice. While the West, perhaps particularly American culture, values reciprocity, we hold some unreciprocated moral relations in high regards, parental sacrifice, for example, is deemed noble even if, or perhaps especially if, the child never returns the favor.

Nonetheless, Western emphasis on reciprocity likely heightens whatever "innate" value humans place on it. The concept of "freeloader" is a weighted one, morally repugnant to many Americans, while begging is more socially acceptable in India. Ghanaians, on the other hand, see asking for unreciprocated favors to be a compliment to the person being petitioned,[40] a practice rude in American culture.

Whatever the explanation, biological or cultural or both, for the importance we place on reciprocity, we do tend to place importance on it, so that what are perceived to be unreciprocated relationships with others, particularly unrelated others, and perhaps most

[40] Appiah, Kwame. Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers. Ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007. p. 91-2

strongly, foreigners tend to be challenged and rejected. Foreign aid quite obviously tends to be perceived in this manner, and Americans on average overestimate the amount of aid given by factor of 20. Given the prevalence of the arguments considered in this section, particularly the domestic priority argument, it seems safe to say that Americans also tend to overestimate the degree to which foreign aid is altruistic.

Corruption

The other major theme commonly found in popular arguments against foreign aid is the prevalence of corruption in recipient countries. This popular concern, unlike the arguments about domestic priority, overlaps with professional discourse as well. Indeed there is evidence that corruption increases with increasing aid, corruption positively correlates with aid from the U.S., and that corruption generally does not impact to whom donors give foreign aid.[41]

If anything, popular discourse tends to assume even stronger and more pernicious effects of corruption on aid. The PIPA poll found that, when asked how much aid money went to those who actually needed it, the respondents gave a median estimate of 10%, while the median estimate for how much ended up going to corrupt officials in developing countries was 50%.[42] PIPA does not offer an explanation of where the other 40% is thought to go. Presumably this money is thought to be lost through operating costs, donor government inefficiencies, or aid money going to the "wrong" kind of interventions that do not actually help.

The PIPA poll also found that corruption, of the reasons offered by the pollsters, was

[41] Alesina, Alberto and Beatrice Weder. "Do Corrupt Governments Receive Less Foreign Aid?" *American Economic Review.* 92, Sept. 2002. p. 1126

[42] "Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger." p. 30-31

the most convincing reason not to send aid to Africa. It was the only Africa-related anti-aid rationale that was found "convincing" by a majority (53%). It is interesting to note that aid to Africa received greater support than foreign aid generally or aid generically designated for reducing hunger.[43] This is presumably due to media-inspired perceptions of greater hunger, poverty, and disease on that continent.

There are two routes that the popular corruption argument can take. One is that aid itself tends to cause corruption. The other is that corruption exists prior to aid, rendering aid pointless. There can be a bit of overlap between the two as well, as it can be argued that corruption already exists but is exacerbated by aid.

There are numerous examples of the first argument, although the two are not always distinguished. Patrick Buchanan, a notable opponent of foreign aid writes "[Aid] creates dependency, breeds corruption, corrodes honest relations, and bloats government at the expense of the private sector."[44] Similar arguments are readily found elsewhere in popular sentiment: "Pure loans or gifts invite theft and corruption, and cost more both for the giver and the intended receiver who doesn't receive."[45]

There is some tension between the argument that aid leads to greater corruption and narratives which portray aid as overly generous charity (as the "our money" and "charity begins at home" themes often imply.) If aid is a corrupting influence, of course, then it is questionable whether it can be deemed generous.

The second perspective implies that corruption is endemic:

> You see these commercials that say your $1.00 a day will feed a family of five (or whatever the amount) and yet there is hunger in Africa. They are always fighting hunger, disease and each other.

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[43] *Ibid.* p. 19
[44] Buchanan, Patrick. "Foreign Aid: Ever With Us."
[45] Online statement. Yahoo! Answers.

> They have corrupt governments and that is where our aid is going. George Bush has given more money to Africa than any other human being ever and they are still dirt poor. We need our money here and now, for our people.[46]

Themes, obviously, are often combined, and the logic of one often coherently can imply another. With this in mind, teasing out separate themes is logically possible, even desirable, but it should be kept in mind that, aside from the obvious pro-aid/anti-aid divide, they often form an organic whole. Corruption abroad, in the governments of the others, ties in easily with the idea of overwhelming charity by donors to explain why, despite heroic efforts on the part of the West, progress has apparently not been made. The narrative often sets up a dichotomy between the generous, hard-working in-group and the corrupt, undeserving out-group. That is explains why "George Bush has given more money to Africa than any other human being ever and they are still dirt poor."

An online questioner on the same site asked:

> Why is Foreign Aid a given to countries whos leaders are corrupt? [*sic*] ....When the crisis in Haiti hit the people demanded assistance in Foreign Aid. Americans gave unconditionally to the cause. Why were Americans committed to help despite the already depressed economic situation faced at home? America receives little to no aid in assistance when disasters strike. Should we expect Foreign Aid?

This example helps to wrap together the most prominent themes against aid. Like the pro-aid arguments, they tend to assume that aid is noble in practice. ("When the crisis in Haiti hit the people demanded assistance in Foreign Aid. Americans gave unconditionally to the cause.") The generosity of aid is perceived, however, as too much. Concerns about a lack of reciprocity and domestic problems imply a need to redirect foreign aid funds.

There is a lot here that is questionable. Foreign aid is not given unconditionally (in

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[46] *Ibid.*

fact, as touched upon in chapter II, some of the conditions on aid have helped help to exacerbate food insecurity in Haiti and elsewhere). It is questionable whether Haitians were given the assistance that they requested. Instead "[t]he international community and aid organizations are increasingly seen by Haitians as not representing their best interests.[47]

Finally, two false equivalences are drawn. One is between the American "depressed economic situation" and post-quake Haiti. While not argued for in detail, the situation of the former is implied to be as dire as the situation of the latter. The other equivalence is between strong countries helping weak countries and weak countries helping strong countries. Framing the issue in this way ("America receives little to no aid in assistance when disasters strike. Should we expect Foreign Aid?") has an understandable intuitive appeal to reciprocity - one state helps another and receives help in turn.

But even a cursory knowledge of the actual situations of each state indicates that the equality implied by such reciprocity does not exist. Strong states rarely have any need for assistance from other strong states, and even less commonly from weaker states. Moreover, due to concerns about how receiving assistance would be perceived, strong states not uncommonly turn down such assistance when it is offered. Offering and receiving assistance are often loaded with meaning, even if the amount of the assistance is small.[48] Weaker states are not only often less able to provide assistance to other nations, they will often have more need for it.

Using the language of reciprocity here to suggest that countries are roughly equally positioned to assist each other implies that the failure of other countries to aid the U.S. is

[47] O'Connor, Maura R. "Does International Aid Keep Haiti Poor." Slate. 4 Jan. 2011. <http://www.slate.com/id/2279858/entry/2279854/>.

due to a choice of theirs, and thus the U.S. would be equally justified in refusing to assist them. It is absurd to make American assistance to Haiti dependent upon Haiti's ability to assist the U.S.[49] Those countries best able to provide disaster assistance are precisely those countries which are the least likely to need disaster assistance themselves, and those countries most in need of assistance will be the ones not in a position to provide assistance to other.

This particular quotation is a microcosm of popular anti-aid themes. While the way in which the argument was framed is highly problematic, what of the corruption theme itself?

The negative effect that corruption has on aid effectiveness and economic growth is well-supported by evidence, if somewhat overstated by public opinion as captured in the PIPA poll. While corruption is far from an artificial concern, the probable exaggeration of the extent of corruption[50] and the regularity with which it is cited indicates that the public perception appears to go beyond the available evidence. Popular corruption discourse often also fails to account for the role that outside interests, including donor interests, play in waste and corruption.

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[49] It could be argued that the U.S. should not assist Haiti not because Haiti fails to provide assistance to the U.S. but because other countries fail to do so. In that case, however, there seems to be no reason why Haiti should be punished for the failure of other countries.

[50] Aid Watch, a project of the aid critic William Easterly, cites a World Health Organization estimate that 20-40% of funds for health care was wasted or lost to corruption, what Aid Watch calls one "of the biggest inefficiencies in global health spending." Contrast that with the 90% estimated for humanitarian aid estimated in the PIPA poll. Freschi, Laura. "WHO: 20 to 40 percent of money spent on health wasted, more funds needed to be wasted." Aid Watch. 26 Nov. 2010. <http://aidwatchers.com/2010/11/who-20-to-40-percent-of-money-spent-on-health-wasted-more-funds-needed-to-be-wasted/ >.

CHAPTER IV

REALISM

The themes and arguments considered in the preceding chapters are the most common in American public discourse on aid. Here I will argue that many of these major themes problematically display realist assumptions. Despite the evidence indicating that realist positions are widely popular,[1] Americans arguably are not often consistently committed realists. Many subscribe to fundamentally moral narratives and ideals about relations between America and the rest of the world. This emerges especially in the case of foreign aid, where many see food aid as a positive example of American generosity. While realist views are persuasive in American public discourse, it cannot be argued that Americans are entirely and consistently realists.

This chapter is not a critique of specific realist theorists who may hold nuanced positions. It is debatable whether academic realism of the late 20th century and early 21st century can be reduced to the moral skepticism and basic principles I lay out below. The political scientist Stefano Recchia argues that cosmopolitans have unfairly accused contemporary realists of moral skepticism when many realists, such as Hans Morgenthau, have argued for "universal moral duties."[2]

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to comment on those debates or on whether an ethical form of realism is possible. Since it is specifically the rejection of any moral duties that I challenge here, theories which do not entail such a rejection are not the

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[1] Drezner, Daniel W. "The Realist Tradition in American Public Opinion." *Perspectives on Politics*. Vol. 6 No. 1, March 2008. <http://www.danieldrezner.com/research/realist_tradition.pdf>.

[2] Recchia, Stefano. "Restraining Imperial Hubris: The Ethical Bases of Realist International Relations Theory." Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory. Vol. 14, No. 4. 1 Dec. 2007. p 531-556.

focus.

What this chapter will argue is that this rejection of international moral duties and other assumptions, which most commonly are characteristic of realist theories, often underlie arguments made about foreign aid. Arguing that these assumptions are problematic serves a dual purpose: it straightforwardly critiques certain assumptions of the discourse, and, by arguing against these assumptions, it attempts to defuse a realist moral skepticism. Such a moral skepticism can function as a defense of otherwise morally questionable behaviors by nations.

Discursive Realism

The argument that foreign aid actually helps the U.S. in one form or another is, as I have argued, a prominent theme in favor of maintaining, or sometimes increasing, foreign aid. This argument seems to be used especially by politicians and journalists. A Democratic politician from New York, for example, was making a fairly conventional argument when he approvingly wrote in the *Christian Science Monitor*:

> ...70 percent of the money appropriated for foreign aid is actually spent on goods and services in the US, which are then shipped overseas, often on American ships. Our World Bank contributions, moreover, are more than matched by the procurement contracts US companies obtain from that organization.[3]

The fact that the above was cited *in favor* of foreign aid rather than as a critique of its effectiveness indicates the priorities of the author. Enough was written about this in chapter II that I should not need to give more examples. This kind of prioritization of national interests indicates a realist orientation, especially if this prioritization comes at

[3] Solarz, Stephen J. "Foreign Aid Serves US Interests – Keep it Flowing." The Christian Science Monitor. 31 Dec. 1991. p. 19.

significant cost to effective humanitarian aid.

What is needed is a more detailed account of what is to count as "realism." The term includes a broad range of theories. The political scientist Jack Donnelly compiled a list of the core principles of realism from the works of 11 influential authors on the topic. What follows are some representative examples:

> 1. The international system is anarchic.
> 2. States inherently possess some offensive military capability, which gives them the wherewithal to hurt and possibly destroy each other.
> 3. No state can ever be certain another state will not use its offense military capability.
> 4. The most basic motive driving states is survival.
> 5. States are instrumentally rational. (Mearsheimer 1994/95: 9–10)

> 1. Realists assume an ineradicable tendency to evil.
> 2. Realists assume that the important unit of social life is the collectivity and that in international politics the only really important collective actor is the state, which recognizes no authority above it.
> 3. Realists hold power and its pursuit by individuals and states as ubiquitous and inescapable.
> 4. Realists assume that the real issues of international politics can be understood by the rational analysis of competing interests defined in terms of power. (Smith 1986: 219–221)

> 1. The international system is anarchic.
> 2. Nation-states pursue their own national interests defined primarily in terms of power.
> 3. Skepticism toward international laws, institutions, and ideals that attempt to transcend or replace nationalism.
> 4. Primacy of balance of power politics. (Wayman and Diehl 1994: 5)[4]

A number of recurring features can be found in these and the other sets of principles: *A*) states exist in a type of anarchy or unregulated competition, *B*) there are no universal moral principles which constrain state actions, and *C*) each country should (and does)

[4] Donnelly, Jack. Realism and International Relations. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000. <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/samples/cam032/99053676.pdf>. p. 7-8 In text citations are his.

work to advance its own interests (specifically power and security). The last feature is both descriptive and normative.

The national interest justifications for aid clearly display *C*. Foreign aid is justified on the grounds that it furthers donor power and/or security. This is not to say that those who make the national interest argument are realists – often it is combined with a kind of moral argument that realists would reject – only that the national interest argument itself, however, is a realist argument for aid.

Rarely explicit in the national interest arguments, *A* and *B* are often implied. It is taken for granted that American global military or economic power should be extended or reinforced. The national interest argument effectively (although not explicitly) de-problematizes this, implying both a competitive world where each country focuses on advancing its own interests and one where moral claims which transcend national interests are not considered. When national interest is the justification, the effectiveness of aid in reducing poverty or empowering the local people is secondary, if even a consideration.

Objective universal moral principles, after all, likely would provide a reason to be concerned about aid being used to support the interests of powerful countries at the expense of effectively improving the lives of the poorest. As the examples in chapter II indicated, if this is the primary justification for aid, it will hardly be surprising when aid policies result in supporting "friendly" dictators, lack the oversight that a concern with efficient aid would dictate,[5] and shape developing countries to complement (either as a

[5] The lack of oversight of aid in Afghanistan, for example, is documented in Linda Polman. The Crisis Caravan: What's Wrong with Humanitarian Aid? New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010. Ch. 9. She describes a $150 million house-building project in which 20% of the money was siphoned off at each level

market or a supplier), rather than compete with, American business.

Aid is justified on the grounds that it will further American interests, typically by expanding economic and political power, and in its practice is often explicitly crafted to that end. To use an example, it seems fair to say that the backing of friendly dictators who assist either in obtaining oil or other material or in furthering U.S. foreign policy is largely a realist policy. It also seems fair to label as "realist" the practice of making aid less effective (e.g., the Bumpers Amendment) in order to advance domestic American economic interests. If these practices, both of which demonstrably occur with official assistance, are realist, it seems unproblematic to say that the national interest argument demonstrates essentially realist assumptions about the justifiable priority of U.S. interests.

Aid critics like William Easterly and Dambisa Moyo point out the terrible track record of much official aid. Lack of accountability for failures, little or no idea about which aid investments are effective, and aid money going into the pockets of leaders figure prominently in the history of American official assistance. The lack of efficiency and oversight, or even outright corruption would be intolerable if aid were intended to effectively develop and empower recipient countries. That apparently little political will has existed to address these issues indicates that the inefficiency and lack of oversight might be acceptable, if not desirable, from the standpoint of the donors. If the point of giving aid to an undemocratic government not held accountable to its people is to gain a political or military ally or access to natural resources, questions about whether the aid is best helping the people, rigorous randomized testing of projects, as Easterly urges, and

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describes a $150 million house-building project in which 20% of the money was siphoned off at each level of contracting and subcontracting, and the materials which were finally delivered were unable to be used by the Afghans and were chopped up and used for firewood.

adequate oversight of and accountability for the money may well be disadvantageous from both the donor and recipient governments' perspectives.

Not all who make the argument likely believe it to be the most important justification for aid. It is quite probable that a number of people who believe some sort of altruistic argument to be most important make the national interest argument because they perceive it to be the most effective in persuading their fellow citizens. At times the national interest argument appears to be intended specifically to counter various anti-aid arguments that portray foreign aid as an unfair burden on Americans. The regularity of the national interest argument, regardless of the moral beliefs of those who make it, indicates the pervasiveness of realist discourse and assumptions.

Returning to the context of American political speeches and opinion pieces, it hardly seems odd that national interest is a primary justification. It is understandable that politicians and journalists often make the national interest argument, since American politicians and journalists are primarily accountable to Americans. Recipients of foreign aid do not vote and exercise little or no leverage in the American domestic media market or the international media market.

These institutional incentives reinforce the intuitiveness of the national interest appeal. In both theory and practice, however, this amounts to tying assistance to developing countries with the interests of the strong donor countries. Chapter II provided examples of how, when assistance is tied to donor interests, those interests will take precedence.

Realist assumptions emerge in prominent anti-aid themes as well. Arguments that foreign aid money should be best directed at domestic problems are the counterpart to the national interest arguments. The two share the same assumptions about American priority,

but differ on the factual question of whether foreign aid best serves American interests. Whereas the national interest argument concludes that it does, the arguments for directing that money to domestic uses reject that contention.

Of the arguments for and against aid discussed in earlier chapters, two themes do not clearly demonstrate realist assumptions. One, unsurprisingly, is the set of moral arguments for aid as a positive obligation. The other, the argument about corruption, locates the problems of underdevelopment exclusively within developing countries, and in doing so does not consider the kind of international interactions that realism posits. Since the corruption argument implies that aid would be justified if recipient countries did not experience one sort of failing or another, it may even be at odds with realist assumptions. A realist would be unconcerned about corruption in and of itself, and indeed corruption in another country may even be desirable; certainly realists have rationally advocated supporting a number of corrupt and undemocratic leaders.

Before we begin with the objections, it is worth first considering two initial reasons why realism is attractive. One is the closer ties that we have with people in our own country. We accept that family, religious, community, and other group ties produce in-group preferences - it is entirely understandable that a parent would favor her child over others or that one works work to help a friend in need before a stranger. These ties can be at least as strong as national ties (thus some family members cannot be required to testify against others accused of criminal wrongdoing), but even here there are limits - parents cannot kill rivals of their children, communities cannot violate the civil rights of their members, and, to use an example of Thomas Pogge's, nepotism is not allowed in public

office, even when it is of little cost to the state.[6] Familial ties are, if anything, even more fundamental and emotional than national ties, and yet we readily accept moral constraints on behavior flowing from them.

Another possible explanation is that these areas of life - community, family, and such - exist within a network of institutions which regulate behavior. One's community is not located in an anarchic sea of communities, but within a state or provincial government, itself located within a national government. It could be argued that broader network of institutions is what produces the constraints on behavior that could benefit one's in-group.

But the fact that such means of regulating behavior do not exist, or exist but are weaker, in international affairs does not justify advocating realist policies which serve to further weaken those international institutions. As I will argue in the following objections, this is precisely what realist prescriptions often entail.

How Realism is Problematic

Realism faces at least three problems. These problems occur both for realism generally and concretely in the case of realist approaches to foreign aid. Firstly realism tends to support the interests of those countries which already possess abundant power, as it justifies a "no holds barred" approach in competing with poor countries. This is essentially a moral objection, and a committed realist would not see this as problematic.

This amoral approach towards other countries, however, is the grounds for the second objection. Many who urge a morally skeptically realism internationally reject moral

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[6] Pogge, Thomas. World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitani Responsibilities and Reforms. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002. p. 121

skepticism at more local levels – within states or among individuals, for example. Rejecting moral prescriptions altogether is one thing, but restricting moral skepticism to one set of interactions requires a specific argument.

The third objection is that realism creates the international order rather than simply describing it. If realist prescriptions construct a realist world, rather than just reacting to the unchanging nature of the world, we have to ask, whether a realist order is preferable to other possibilities. Many realist theorists do not see an anarchic and amoral world as desirable, just as inevitable. "Realists assume an ineradicable tendency to evil."[7] To the extent that realist projects serve to increase that "evil," a world shaped by realism is undesirable.

Ideology of Power

The intuitiveness of the realist assumptions that underlay the national interest and domestic priorities arguments begin to look questionable when we realize that they amount to justifying (or denying) even basic aid to the poorest countries on the grounds that it will (or fails to) advance the interests of the wealthiest and strongest countries.

Like other realist prescriptions, the argument that foreign aid is justified only insofar as it advances a donor state's interests effectively results in strengthening the international status quo. Powerful countries benefit from a realist paradigm, as they can use their power and advantages to secure yet further advantages. In the practice of foreign aid, there is nothing perceived to be problematic about giving symbolic but ineffective aid, aid tied to stipulations like the Bumpers Amendment, or even aid to support corrupt dictators, provided that doing so effectively advances donor interests.

[7] Michael Joseph Smith, cited in Donnelly, Jack. p. 7.

Realism makes it impossible to critique any such practice from the standpoint of justice or morality. Moreover, if it turns out that some countries actively harm others, or that global institutions or arrangements disadvantage weak countries, this is not grounds for moral concern. This is not an inconsistency within realism, but rather the logical implication of a "[s]kepticism toward international laws, institutions, and ideals that attempt to transcend or replace nationalism."[8]

By rejecting limitations on the capacity of states to advance their own interests and compete with other states, realism leaves open the option of states shaping international laws and institutions to benefit themselves over competitors. In a world with countries that have levels of power and leverage as vastly different as the United States and Burkina Faso or China and Madagascar, open competition for trade and resources could already be morally questionable. The impacts of American cotton subsidies on West African cotton farmers and the vastly superior ability of industrialized countries to access and deplete resources in the global commons, via, for example seabed mining, are two examples.

When competition also involves shaping the laws and institutions that govern international relations, there is even greater cause for concern. Thomas Pogge argues that coercive international institutions (such as the WTO and IMF) must meet certain basic standards of fairness, and that we distinguish between competition that occurs within a fair set of guidelines (whatever we take those to be) and competition to shape what fairness itself is.[9] In other words, it is one thing to win by playing by the rules of the

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[8] Donnelly, Jack. Realism and International Relations. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000. p.8

[9] Pogge, Thomas. World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitani Responsibilities and Reforms. p. 11-12

game, it is quite another to win by getting the rules changed to one's advantage.

Pogge argues that the rich countries do not merely gain advantage by playing by a set of neutral rules, they use their greater power in the WTO and other organizations push for rules and agreements that benefit themselves. An effect of this was that under the Uruguay Round of WTO trade agreements, poor countries ended up cutting their tariffs on imports more than did rich countries, who maintain tariffs on cheap imports from developing countries, often on items for which the developing countries have a comparative advantage and which present their best chances for development.[10]

In these and other trade agreements, developing countries are not simply passive, but must agree to the terms. Indeed Pogge admits that the Uruguay Round did do more to reduce poverty than the previously established agreements.

Even if it was an improvement from previous agreements, however, it does not follow that it was a justifiable choice, as even more just agreements (such as those cutting American and European farm subsidies or tariffs) were possible and would have saved more people from death by reducing severe poverty. Adopting a somewhat morally better agreement is not defensible if more just options exist. Pogge makes the point that if you can gain $5,000 by saving three and killing no innocent persons, than a choice to gain $10,000 by saving three and killing two innocent persons is unjustified. The willingness to justify WTO analogues of the second option is a result, Pogge thinks, of seeing the global poor as a homogeneous mass.[11]

There is evidence for this and similar group psychological biases. Psychological studies turn up homogeneity biases even when the out-group shares ethnic, national, and

[10] *Ibid.* p. 17
[11] *Ibid.* p. 18-19

religious characteristics.[12] It seems fair to assume that when the out-groups differ significantly in these characteristics and, moreover, is far removed from the lives and experience of the in-group, the tendency to homogenize them conceptually is greater.

Realism dismisses critiques of rich countries using the WTO and other organizations, or for that matter any other practice or policy, to advance or maintain their power. In the practice of foreign aid, realist assumptions can arguably be charged with both undermining truly effective aid and with supporting some of the worst abuses of aid. In so far as such charges are essentially moral arguments, they are only the obvious logical implications of realism and not seen by realists as a refutation of the doctrine.

Realism as Unjustifiably Exclusionary

The above arguments should, however, give pause to those who do not completely subscribe to moral skepticism or a Thrasymachian idea of justice. Few who make the realist argument on the international level would likely subscribe to it in other areas of life, such as in domestic policy or in daily interactions with other people.

It would be one thing if the moral skepticism were applied universally - to all interactions and areas of life. But very few, even among realists, take this stance. Instead talk of morality and justice is thought to make sense within nations, but not among nations. This boundary cannot be assumed, since it would appear that even if we reject the idea of positive obligations being owed to strangers far removed from us, we do not often think it acceptable to unduly and actively harm those strangers for our own benefit.

The claim, for which the philosophers Singer and Unger argue, that we have positive

[12] Park, Bernadette and Rothbart, Myron. "Perception of out-group homogeneity and levels of social categorization: Memory for the subordinate attributes of in-group and out-group members." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. Vol. 42, No. 6, Jun 1982. p. 1051-1068.

obligations to save the lives of strangers in faraway countries is admittedly counter-intuitive to many. Expanding our positive obligations, that is, obligations to help, to include people we do not know needs arguing for, and is often controversial even within domestic American politics.[13] On the other hand the concept of negative obligations, obligations to refrain from harming, seems to intuitively apply even to those in foreign countries whom we never meet. Thus countries typically are thought to need good justifications for invading or bombing other countries. While what counts as a "good justification" is debatable, it seems safe to think that most people think some justifications are clearly not good - thus it is thought to be wrong for a nuclear power to destroy a foreign city simply to demonstrate its capacity to rivals or for a country to train its military by using live munitions against villagers in a neighboring country. Of course these policies would often be detrimental to the interests of the state that implemented them. But our condemnation of such a state would be on the grounds that they were wrong, or evil, not that they had miscalculated. When other states miscalculate in other areas, such as trade or economic policy, and harm their own interests, there is not international condemnation, or if there is, it is significantly less mild than for the above, violent "miscalculations."

When countries do go to war, no matter how unjust their cause may be, they try to give good justifications while attributing bad motives to their enemy. Such propaganda and public relations efforts would be pointless unless many people believed that some sort of *prima facie* negative obligations to foreigners existed. If a state were to train its military using live ammunition against civilians from a militarily weaker country, it would likely harm that state's reputation internationally. But that would be so because other states

[13] Hence the perennial political debates about taxation, social services, and redistribution policies.

and/or their populations believe that it has committed a significant moral transgression. While state and military propaganda has a morally troubling history, its very existence indicates the importance of moral beliefs on the international level.

There is a stronger reason to be skeptical of this sort of moral exclusionism. Throughout human history groups have excluded individuals or other groups from moral consideration for inappropriate reasons. There appear to be strong cognitive group biases that lead to the moral exclusion and mistreatment of those classified as part of an out-group. This behavior was explicitly justified by appealing to certain characteristics, such as skin color, gender, religion, or nationality. Today, only moral exclusion based on the last characteristic is explicitly given justifications by respected scholars and policy-makers.

There is a good reason why racism and sexism should be disreputable. James Rachels cites the relevant principle: "We can justify treating people differently only if we can show that there is some factual difference between them that is relevant to justifying the difference in treatment."[14] The differences used to justify different moral treatment of white and black or male and female have largely come to be rejected as factual inaccuracies, social constructs which are actually the products of discrimination, or simply morally irrelevant (e.g., the tendency toward greater physical strength in males). Meanwhile members of all of these groups are recognized to share equally valid interests and aspirations, and, even if one refrains from any talk of positive obligations, it is acknowledged that strong negative obligations exist not to unduly harm those interests or restrict those aspirations.

When it comes to moral exclusion at the national level, similar arguments can be

[14] Rachels, James. The Elements of Moral Philosophy. 3rd ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill College, 1999. p. 94.

advanced. Nobody would deny that people of all countries have interests and aspirations, and few would argue that these interests and aspirations objectively deserve unequal treatment. There are two caveats to this. Firstly it is not to say that all interests and goals are equal, only that the nationality and geographical location of the person who holds those interests and goals is not a factor which allows for them to be disregarded.

While cultural differences do lead to different valuations of goals, the interest of a Ghanaian in finding meaningful and rewarding employment is not objectively of more or less value than a similar interest in a Canadian. There may be situational factors that make one more or less important (perhaps the Canadian has access to a more generous social safety net which makes unemployment less dire for her), but the fact of the nationality itself does not make one's interests less important.

Secondly, nationality will admittedly play a role when it comes to positive obligations. The Canadian and Ghanaian governments will understandably have special obligations to reduce unemployment domestically. The Canadian government can justifiably give greater weight to the interests and goals of its citizens. But this allowable subjective exclusionism in regards to positive obligations cannot be assumed to allow a stronger realist moral skepticism.

Special positive obligations to citizens and residents could pass the test proposed by the principle of equal treatment that Rachels articulates. There are differences, such as proximity and paying taxes, which allow for one country to have special obligations to its citizens and residents, just as there are differences which allow for family members to have special responsibilities to one another. But applying this to negative principles, essentially excluding foreigners from any moral consideration, requires a further

argument.

There are many such possible arguments. One is a version of the special obligation argument mentioned above. It could be argued that leaders have duties only to their own constituents, and that these duties involve maximizing the goods and opportunities available to those constituents, even if such maximization harms non-constituents.

As noted previously, there exist many examples of special obligations which certain persons owe to one group but not another. Some such obligations (including duties that parents have to children and that CEO's have to shareholders) may even justify actions which deny opportunities to others. The nature of business competition is not uncommonly hostile, and the success of one company may necessarily mean the decline of another. Yet even a highly competitive business environment has strong universal norms in place - it may be acceptable to drive a competing business owner into bankruptcy but not to murder or threaten their family. And while many parents would go to great lengths to procure advantages for their children, this could not justifiably include kidnapping their children's academic or athletic rivals. In no other areas of life are special obligations to some allowed to justify the complete moral exclusion of others. If we want to use some special obligations to justify moral exclusionism, there needs to be some explanation of what it is about these obligations that justifies excluding others from moral consideration.

It might be argued that countries in the international arena are competing for their very existence and the lives and safety of their people. To use an example from above, while most obligations of a parent to her child will not allow her to attack someone else, she is justified in using violence to defend the child against serious threats. Somewhat similarly,

companies can be justified in using security guards and force to protect their property.

Certainly actions which would otherwise be morally questionable can be justified in cases of serious or existential threats. It is doubtful, however, that such a justification works with the vast majority of international interactions. There is no evidence that the success of former U.S. President Clinton in re-negotiating the *UN Convention on the Law of the Sea* so as to advantage the technologically advanced countries best able to mine the seabed[15] was in any way necessary for the economic or physical survival, in any sense, of the U.S. It is similarly difficult to argue that support for Equatorial Guinea's president is necessary for the continued existence of the U.S.

A less extreme version of this argument is what Thomas Pogge terms the "sucker exemption."[16] This informal principle holds that "an agent is not morally required to comply with rules when doing so would lead to his being victimized by non-compliers." There are two forms this victimization could take. One is merely that the agent forgoes some advantage which she could have obtained, and thereby which another is likely to obtain, through unjust actions. The other is that the agent, by abstaining from the action, opens herself up to or experiences some violation of her rights, albeit not threats to her existence.

The first form is the stronger one. It could argue that perhaps buying oil from and selling luxury items to the president of Equatorial Guinea is a necessary evil because another country, namely China or Russia, will have less moral restraint, leading to a decline in oil available to the U.S. Similarly it could argue that if richer countries do not

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[15] Part XI of the 1982 convention originally established that the seabed resources were a "common heritage" whose economic exploitation should "tak[e] into particular consideration the interests and needs of developing States." Qtd. in Pogge, Thomas. World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitani Responsibilities and Reforms. p. 125

[16] *Ibid.* p. 127

aggressively push for every advantage in international trade agreements, they will soon lose their competitive edge as other countries do not hedge their aggressiveness. Neither are existential threats, but nonetheless do lead to fewer advantages for countries complying with moral norms.

One way to reply to this argument is to deny that this exemption is justified. The appropriate response to potential Chinese support for a dictator arguably may not be to make a more generous offer of U.S. support, especially if, as often seems to be the case, such support serves to entrench the leader rather than pressuring him to reform. Generally the wrongness of an action is not usually thought to change upon the inclusion of less scrupulous agents who may possibly perform that very action and benefit from it. Missing out on an advantage that another may illicitly obtain is not thought to be a justification for stealing an unlocked car in an area with high rates of auto theft or knowingly taking part in an illegal pyramid scheme.

Perhaps it could be argued that the fact that these actions occur within a society which has an established rule of law renders the analogy irrelevant. But while shifting these examples from a society with rule of law to an anarchic one may change the *legal* status of these actions, it would not seem to change their moral status, which is essentially what is being discussed here.

The weaker form of the sucker exemption holds that one need not obey rules if doing so causes, or could reasonably be expected to cause, the agent to have her own rights violated. This type of argument has been used, for example, to justify American support for undemocratic governments in areas where a democratic government is thought to be hostile to the U.S. The two most prominent examples are American support for friendly

autocratic governments in the largely Muslim regions of North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia and support for anti-Communist dictators during the Cold War.

This argument, however, like the argument previously mentioned, can sometimes be objected to on empirical grounds. There is often scant evidence that many of the morally questionable aspects of U.S. foreign policy are strictly necessary to safeguard the negative rights of the U.S. or its allies. It is doubtful, for example, that the support for Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia was necessary to safeguard American rights.

There is another consideration for the sucker exemption, which is that presumably the rights of others deserve at least some weight in any calculation. In order to justify support for a dictator who kills thousands of his people (in the case of Mobutu) or whose corruption mires the country in life-threatening poverty (in the case of Teodoro Obiang) there need be a serious threat to American rights that no better option can avert. Even if a plausible violation of some accepted right exists, it does not seem to justify significantly greater violations of the rights of innocent others. Some roughly comparable harm must be prevented in order to justify supporting serious violations of human rights. While not getting into further detail here, this is at least an initial criterion which the exemption must either meet or satisfactorily refute. We cannot assume that the potential violation of a right justifies any response whatsoever. Being faced with the possible violation of some right, does not then give one moral license to commit any act which may prevent that violation, especially if the threat is not existential and the act will involve harming innocent others.

Finally the strongest response to the sucker exemption, in both of its forms, is that it promotes the very actions which may make it necessary. This will be covered more fully

in the section on the next objection to realism. The sucker exemption is necessary only as long as there are no international institutions capable of preventing behavior which harms others. Thomas Pogge notes that if the sucker exemption is broadly used by multiple societies to justify otherwise morally questionable behavior, "the reasonable response would surely be to ask them all to work out a multilateral reform that affects all of them equally."[17]

Attempts to use the sucker exemption to justify questionable policies are undercut if the countries that enact those policies have actively tried to thwart the development of an international rule of law which would help to make the sucker exemption and the existential threat justifications unnecessary. If some more powerful countries have tried to stymie the development of international institutions that can check the power and ability of individual countries to harm others, their appeal to the necessity of the sucker exemption to justify their own actions is disingenuous.

Realism as Constructive

This third objection is that we can question the international anarchy justification for the initial move by the realist to moral skepticism. Most people are not likely through and through moral skeptics. Yet many Americans are probably to some extent "intuitive realists,"[18] and opinions about foreign aid, not to mention other foreign policy issues[19] are often based on realist assumptions about the U.S. needing to safeguard its own interests. One prominent reason for justifying these assumptions is the anarchic nature of international affairs.

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[17] Pogge, Thomas. World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitani Responsibilities and Reforms. p. 128
[18] Drezner, Daniel W. "The Realist Tradition in American Public Opinion." p. 61
[19] Drezner, Daniel W. p. 59, Figure 1.

Realism is in part a descriptive theory about the world. Going back to the three recurring elements found in summaries of realism:

A) states exist in a type of anarchy or unregulated competition
B) there are no universal moral principles which constrain state actions
C) each country should (and does) work to advance its own interests (specifically power and security).

It is from the descriptions of the international system as anarchic and lacking moral principles, as well as the descriptive version of *C*, that it is composed of self-serving states who "rationally" seek to maximize their "expected utility,"[20] that realist prescriptions follow. Realism, however, does not simply describe the world, it helps to shape and influence it. This is perhaps not adequately captured by the normative/descriptive dichotomy I earlier attributed to *C*. Realism is both normative and descriptive, but it also demonstrates the reflexivity that Anthony Giddens attributes to the social sciences in modernity: "Knowledge claimed by expert observers... rejoins its subject matter, thus (in principle, but also normally in practice) altering it."[21]

Realist prescriptions (that a country pursue its own interests without regard for universal moral values, for example) help to construct a realist world. If realism constructs international relations instead of simply describing them, realism is a project

[20] The concept of "rationality" here seems to indicate the primacy of one type of value and the exclusion of all others. As sometimes happens in economics, it is considered "rational" to try to maximize one's own utility, the implication being that allowing moral concerns or other values to weigh against one's own is irrational. "Rational" appears in four of the 11 definitions of realism compiled in Donnelly, Jack. Realism and International Relations. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000. p. 7-8
[21] Giddens, Anthony. The Consequences of Modernity. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990. p. 45

that can be questioned.

There is a large difference between a world where the assumptions of realism are inherently true and a world where realism is a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, creating the anarchic system it describes. In the former, as much as we may bemoan the situation, there is little that can be done (the unchangeability of human nature is not an uncommon realist theme), and realism is perhaps a necessity. In the latter, which more closely resembles our world, it is possible to ask whether it is a good thing that international relations be constructed in such a way. In this case, the realist needs to provide reasons why a realist system of international relations and moral skepticism is preferable to other alternatives.

I argued above that most would not accept that obligations to community, family, or religion resulted in no moral restrictions on behavior, so we should question why national obligations are subject to no moral restrictions. An objection to the comparison between restraints on family-promoting actions and nation-promoting actions was that families live in a broader context of agreements, institutions, and regulations that make it impermissible for their members to do whatever it takes to benefit the family. Indeed, realists take the anarchy of the international system (*A*) as justification for the permissibility of any nation-promoting action. But the existence of a broader anarchy is only a defense of realism if realism does not help to create that anarchy.

To give a thought example at a more local level:

In town T there live a 10,000 people, divided roughly into three districts (with some small degree of overlap), each of which is further divided into neighborhoods. In District 1 live about 2,000 (20%) of the town's population. The people here have income levels

many times higher than their fellow residents and enjoy a standard of living far above the other districts, consuming more than the other 80% of the town. A small portion of them even have much higher incomes and standards of living. District 2 is where most (6,000, or 60%) live. Incomes here are on average significantly lower than the first district, opportunities are far fewer, and the infrastructure leaves much to be desired. In District 3 live the 20% who have the lowest incomes, are the most plagued by health problems, have the most malnutrition, and fewest opportunities. Deaths in infancy here might be dozens of times higher than in District 1.

There is no city government in the town; instead, various neighborhoods within each district have a representative who, when the time comes, negotiates with representatives from other neighborhoods. The lack of a city government means that representatives can, and do, push for what best benefits their own constituencies and are often elected specifically because they promise to do so. In T, District 1 has significant advantages over 2 and especially 3: its greater wealth allows for better neighborhood and block militias, it also means that the bulk of the industries and media in the town cater to 1's consumers. Its greater market and military power give it greater leverage in advancing its interests.

Finally, let us imagine that representatives from District 1, with backing from the majority of their people, use their leverage not only in competition with Districts 2 and 3, but to prevent the formation of town-wide organizations that would effectively regulate inter-neighborhood interactions and agreements. An unregulated town is in the interests of 1, given their market and military advantages. What regulatory organizations that do exist either are heavily influenced by 1 or lack the power to effectively sanction 1 for

transgressions.

One day, Jane, from District 1,[22] upon reflecting about the overall situation of the town, asks her representative why he does not adopt a more benevolent approach toward the other neighborhoods or districts. Her representative, amazed at the naiveté of someone who did not have to deal with inter-neighborhood negotiations, says to her, "There is nobody who else who is going to look after our interests. I understand you are concerned about the others, and that is nice, but you have to realize it is anarchy out there! Given that there is no town government, it is rational and right for us to do whatever it takes to stay ahead."

This is a very rough caricature of our own world. The point, however, is that the reasoning of Jane's representative clearly seems to be mistaken - he justifies the realist actions of the representatives by the lack of neutral and effective regulations in the town, yet those actions undermine the possibility of neutral and effective regulations.

Whatever the differences between this hypothetical scenario and our own world, it is incorrect in both cases to use an outcome of realism to justify realism. The anarchy or unregulated competition among states figured prominently in the compiled assumptions of realism at the beginning of this chapter, and it is a primary justification for normative realism. But the anarchy is constructed, or at least maintained, when the strongest countries follow realist prescriptions and prevent the development of institutional checks to their power.

It could be objected that states today did not create the world in which they exist, but rather have inherited it from the past. That is true, but hardly a solid defense of realism.

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[22] Given the restrictions on moving from neighborhoods 2 and 3 to neighborhood 1 and the fact that the media in 1 focus primarily on lifestyles, culture, and issues in 1, residents of 1 probably mostly talk only to themselves.

States, particularly the strongest, help to maintain the system they inherited rather than challenging it. It would hardly be defensible in town T, after all, if the representative pointed out that his fellow representatives from District 1 were simply doing what had always been done, and were operating with a system their forebears had left them. Their actions are not passive, but rather actively maintain the anarchic arrangement that suited them. Secondly, it is widely held now that some traditional arrangements, like slavery, have been grotesquely unjust. The justness of an arrangement is not decided by how traditional it is, and inheriting, rather than creating, an unjust system still places a burden on one, at the least, not to actively maintain it. Are the realist actions of powerful countries such an inherited but unjust arrangement? I will argue that in the final chapter.

The first argument against realism was that realism would tend to increase injustice. Even if realism is unlikely (due to the likelihood of negative outcomes) to recommend actions like invading weaker countries or overt colonialism, it arguably still results in actions that are far from clearly just - urging that strong nations reject limits on their power and shape international organizations and agreements to maximize their advantages, compete openly with poorer countries over trade, and do little about extreme poverty and underdevelopment other than enact aid policies which further donor economic and military expansion.

Countries which benefit from such policies may not find them to be worrisome. Can they be justified on anything other than the self-interest of the powerful? The common realist justification for these policies - that they were necessary in an anarchic world - was argued to be circular. If we reject the idea that the interests of the most powerful should override moral considerations in all other areas, we cannot assume it in

international affairs.

For any sort of moral calculation which gave weight to the interests of others, sought to enhance human rights, or to maximize utility, the policies described above would clearly be unjustified. One possible justification would be a global "trickle down" approach, where the wealth of the West helps to develop the Rest.

Certainly recent years have seen a decrease in poverty in some developing countries, most notably in China. But two points should be kept in mind: 1) the tariffs on imports from the poorest countries, first-world support for dictators, self-serving aid practices, and similar mechanisms have not been the cause of such declines in poverty and 2) Thomas Pogge's argument that acting to bring about a less unjust world is not acceptable if more just options are readily available. Abolishing or reducing the practices mentioned in 1 arguably would be more just alternatives.

All of this is to dispute the contention that the anarchy of the international system exists objectively and is so described by realism. It is also possible to question whether, if the unregulated competition among states is an objective feature of the world rather than one created by realist discourse and action, it rationally follows that states should act amorally and egotistically. Might not a rational response be to try to end the anarchy? Thomas Hobbes, who held that humankind would exist in an anarchic state of nature if not for a sovereign, viewed the compact with the sovereign as rational and preferable to anarchy, and most political contract theories at the state level or lower hold similar assumptions about the rationality and desirability of ending anarchy rather than promoting it. The reluctance to apply similar thinking above the state level may be more a legacy of the historical development of states than a policy that is objectively rational.

CHAPTER V

DECONTEXTUALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The second charge I have leveled against popular discourse is that it decontextualizes. Failing to consider broader (typically global) contexts is a feature of both pro- and anti-aid arguments. The missing context will differ, depending on the theme, but typically it involves giving exclusively local explanations for phenomena (like wealth, poverty, and corruption) that have broader explanations.

Although here I consider the prevalence of decontextualization in popular themes on aid, it should be noted that professional aid discourses can be charged with decontextualization as well. The journalist Linda Polman notes that humanitarian aid in disaster areas and war zones suffers from failing to consider important contexts. Specifically she charges humanitarian aid with ignoring the political environment in which it operates - providing assistance to all who need it regardless of who they are or the effects of giving aid. She cites the case of the international aid community supporting Hutu genocidaires in refugee camps in Zaire. Such support enabled them to re-group and continue to murder Tutsis in both Rwanda and Zaire.[1] In cases such as the starvation during the Biafran War and the Ethiopian famine, aid groups also ignored the political causes of the food shortages, instead accepting at face value the explanations offered by the Biafran and Ethiopian governments, she charges. The aid that these governments then received served to worsen hunger, Polman argues, as both used it to strengthen

[1] Polman, Linda. The Crisis Caravan: What's Wrong with Humanitarian Aid? New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010. Ch. 1.

themselves and further the policies that caused starvation.[2]

The anthropologist James Ferguson, in his study of a Canadian aid project in Lesotho, also attributed the spectacular failure of that project to its blindness of the political economic realities of Lesotho. The aid organization failed to consider the international quality of Lesotho's economy, specifically its dependence upon South Africa. Instead of acknowledging Lesotho's role as a labor reserve for the South African mining industry, the aid organization acted on the presumption that Lesotho was an agricultural economy, its underdevelopment caused by a disconnect from the global economy, and its people ignorant of basic market principles. Treating Lesotho as essentially an atomic entity whose economic situation could be entirely understood and remedied via internal and local factors led to the failure of the Canadian aid project.[3]

Given that Lesotho, a tiny, weak country, is entirely surrounded by a large and economically powerful South Africa, it would seem unsurprising that its economic fortunes would be largely dependent upon South Africa. The discourse of the aid organizations, however, Ferguson argues, locked them into talking about and thinking about Lesotho's poverty as an internal matter.

A similar kind of atomism - seeing states and economies as independent, disconnected entities with sharp demarcations - underlies much of the decontextualizing that occurs in popular American aid discourse. In the preceding chapters I considered the most prominent themes in popular discussions about aid. Now I will examine how moral arguments for aid as a positive duty, the "our money" argument, and the corruption argument fail to consider essential elements of underdevelopment.

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[2] *Ibid.* Ch. 7, 8

[3] Ferguson, James. The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

The national interest arguments appear to be less open to the charge of factual decontextualization, that is failing to consider key empirical aspects. I argued, that in practice the national interest justification leads donor interests to trump recipient interests. The shortcoming then may be less a factual decontextualizing and more of a moral decontextualizing where concerns broader than national interest may guide policy. My critiques of that have already been covered in the preceding section.

Decontextualization and Generosity

Moral arguments for foreign aid as a positive obligation or charity decontextualize by failing to consider what, if any, role the donors played in the contributing to the problems of the recipient country. It would seem that aid given to a group one has wronged is of a different quality than aid given to a group one has not wronged.

Generally, it would be thought that aid of the former sort carries a weightier obligation, all other things being equal. This weightier obligation gives the "donor" less latitude in providing assistance - if I have stolen something from you, my compensating you is generally not something I am free to do at my own leisure, in the manner of my choosing. The flip side of this is that when donors give charitably (that is, supererogatorily), rather than to re-compensate for past wrongs, it is felt that they are entitled to choose the nature of their assistance. This feeling is captured by the adage "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth."

I do not intend to defend this view, only try to sketch it out as a common assumption. It is important to distinguish between two positions, both of which occur in "positive" pro-aid discourse: 1) that aid is supererogatory (i.e., charity) and 2) that giving aid is required

by a positive obligation. The former most readily lends itself to the "gift horse" stance. The very nature of "positive obligations" are that they are obligations, and as such constrain acceptable responses to them. Provided one is positioned to do so, many people would hold that rescuing a child from drowning is an obligation, not a charity. If one accepts that governments have positive duties to their citizens, then the government is not justified in using ineffective or low-quality assistance in discharging those duties. Nonetheless, even positive obligations often seem to be felt less strongly than negative obligations - a government which fails to provide a social safety net for its citizens is not held to be as bad as a government which unduly jails or kills its citizens.

The "gift horse" approach is widely evident in popular discourse, with criticisms of American aid practices (particularly criticisms by recipient countries) often met with the rebuttal that "they are free to turn down aid." Many Americans feel that the U.S. is overly generous towards foreign nations, and this assumption likely helps to reinforce the popular arguments that the U.S. should instead focus on its own problems. The popularity of this argument and the underlying assumptions about American generosity likely contribute to the popularity of the national interest argument. In essence, the anti-aid argument states that the U.S. is too generous for its own good, and the national interest argument responds that American generosity actually will greatly benefit American interests. Neither questions the premise that U.S. aid policy is generous, which itself requires the assumption that U.S. policies and actions do not wrong developing countries. If significant wrongs do in fact occur, then aid, particularly aid designed to advance U.S. interests, cannot be considered generous.

The arguments for aid as charity or even as a positive obligation imply that such

wrongs do not occur, that the moral case for aid is based on essentially altruistic principles. I do not intend to deny that such principles do exist, or that the case for aid as a positive obligation cannot be made or should not be made. What I do claim, however, is that aid as positive obligation and, especially, aid as charity understate the case for aid, given the greater importance that Americans tend to place on negative obligations. When the positive cases for aid are made, they risk obscuring the case for aid as compensation for harms. If the reality is that rich countries cause undue harm to poor countries, the arguments that rich countries are insufficiently generous or insufficiently concerned about helping the poor are needlessly weak and even obscurantist.

For such reasons, the charitable and positive obligation arguments about aid tend, even in their strongest iterations (e.g., Peter Unger's arguments) to assume a global order in which the negative rights of people in poorer countries are not violated by powerful countries or international organizations. As I will argue in the next section, this implied assumption decontextualizes, removing the fortunes of national economies from the international relations that influence those economies. While Unger and Singer may believe a violation of a positive duty (specifically to save lives that could easily be saved) is as morally grave as a violation of a negative duty, the reality is that such views tend, except in highly localized situations (e.g., saving a drowning child), to be shared by few.

One final point here is that the aid as charity or aid as positive obligation also has a tendency, although not inherent, to view dominant aid practices as unproblematic. Popular arguments about aid often portray the argument as dichotomous - either aid should be stopped or reduced or aid should be continued or increased. Politicians, like presidents Bush and Obama, who make the pro-aid arguments understandably cannot

challenge the status quo of official assistance. They cannot, for example, criticize USAID for placing U.S. interests over efficiency. While there are many exceptions, even those who do not hold political office who make the pro-aid arguments are often unlikely to criticize aid practices.

When actual aid practices are ignored and the argument is cast as either pro-aid or anti-aid, the morality of the concept of "aid" is divorced from the reality of aid practices. The association of critiques of aid practices with opposition to the concept of aid may make it more difficult for those in favor of aid to accept justified criticisms of inefficient aid practices. Actual official forms of aid, as argued in chapter II, often are not effective at advancing humanitarian goals.

This type of decontextualizing, using support for the concept of "aid" to justify increasing or maintaining present aid practices, would seem to largely occur on the pro-aid side. Yet presumably something similar happens in anti-aid arguments when opposition to the abstract idea of aid drives, on the grounds that it is overly generous, opposition to aid that actually is intended to advance American interests.

The Wealth of Nations

As mentioned in chapter III, the idea that wealth is individually earned is common in American discourse. American narratives, especially political narratives, reiterate that hard work is rewarded and that people are largely responsible for their success or failure. Polls indicate the popularity of these ideas.[4] And, despite some apparent obstacles, due in

[4] Marshall, Gordon et al. "What is and What Ought to Be: Popular Beliefs about Distributive Justice in Thirteen Countries." *European Sociological Review*, Vol. 15, No. 4, December 1999. p. 349-367. American respondents were the most likely of respondents from the 13 developed and former Soviet countries to think that "hard work and effort" were important for success, with 93% believing so. p. 352, 365.

cases perhaps to racism or sexism, to a pure meritocracy, opportunities do exist in the U.S. that are lacking elsewhere. Also, as Thomas Pogge notes, even the poor in the U.S. have some degree of political power: "In [rich] countries, the domestic poor have at least some capacity to articulate their claims and some power to make their voices heard."[5]

In thinking internationally, however, a problem is that Americans often take reasoning and assumptions about individual merit and effort (assumptions which may be appropriate in a domestic American context) and apply them to people globally or to countries. What are assumed to be commonsense ideas are a result of cultural assumptions about individual effort and merit. Applying individualized ideas about wealth and poverty may be problematic enough domestically, but it is likely to lead to even greater distortions internationally. In arguments about foreign atomic (that is, isolated, local, and individualized) explanations and conceptions of wealth and poverty abound. It is for this reason that I argue that the "our money" arguments in anti-aid discourse severely decontextualize.

There are two ways in which these arguments atomize economic relations. One is individually, the other is nationally. Corresponding arguments would be "It is my money and I worked hard for it" and "American tax dollars should go to solve American problems first."

There is reason to think, however, that at the individual level, individual effort may play less of a role in success and wealth than the argument assumes. The work of a journalist and two economists give reasons to think that individual success may be largely due to social factors.

The journalist Malcolm Gladwell, in examining the various causes of genius and

[5] p. 127

excellence, invokes examples as varied as Canadian hockey, personal computers, and corporate law, to argue that the success of the most outstanding individuals in the field was due more to social factors than to individual traits.

In Canadian hockey, to use one example, professional players are disproportionately born earlier in the year. This is an odd occurrence which Gladwell explains by pointing out that the cut-off birth date of youth hockey in Canada is January 1st. Those born in January and the other early months, then, will be nearly a full year older (and therefore bigger) than others in their cohort born toward the end of the year. Obviously the bigger players will have some, albeit slight, advantage. This slight advantage, however, is compounded, as coaches perceive the better performance of the larger players as a difference in skill. The coaches then will be more likely to select those players for more advanced leagues, where they receive more training and play more games against better opponents.

Their skill at hockey gets reinforced by coaches and parents, and they stick with it longer, getting praise and/or pressure to play. The slight initial advantage turns into a major advantage, and, as the years go by, the drastic difference between a professional hockey player and someone who only played a couple years as a kid can develop. What popular narratives then attribute to natural talent exists, all because of an arbitrary social factor, the way youth hockey was organized.

Of course, individual traits matter - a paraplegic is not going to be a star hockey player and a person with an IQ of 50 is not going to be a powerful lawyer. But beyond some basic qualifying characteristics that many people have, one's environment plays a large role in determining who is a star and who is not.

Gladwell advocates acknowledging the role that the environment plays and using our knowledge to make people, on average, more successful:

> We could easily take control of the machinery of achievement .... But we don't. And Why? Because we cling to the idea that success is a simple function of individual merit and that the world in which we all grow up and the rules we choose to write as a society don't matter at all.[6]

That idea applies beyond the realm of youth hockey, of course, and some of its most powerful instantiations are where people justify their superior positions. The idea that success is heavily influenced by such arbitrary factors may make those who are successful uncomfortable. The insistence on individual merit and desert is then, unsurprisingly, a core feature of much popular reasoning about foreign aid. If Gladwell is right, or even somewhat right, the explanatory power of individual effort has been greatly overstated. Perhaps in few places is this more true than in explanations of the wealth of individuals in the global North and the poverty of individuals in the global South.

This may make for some good speculation, but is there anything more solid to back up the idea that individual wealth is not individually created? The economist Herbert Simon estimated that at least 90% of the income in wealthy societies was due to the access to the social capital that came with living in a developed, high-income society.[7] Presumably some individuals may have a greater share of their income due to personal effort while others (those inheriting large estates) may have none of their wealth traceable to their own effort. Simon's estimate could be seen as a presumed average then for most people.

While Simon thinks that at least 90% of income is due to social capital, the real number may even be higher. The average income in the least developed countries is

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[6] *Ibid.* p. 33

[7] Simon, Herbert A. "UBI and the Flat Tax: A Response to 'A Basic Income for All' by Philippe van Parijs." Boston Review. Oct./Nov. 2000. <http://bostonreview.net/BR25.5/simon.html>.

much less than 10% of the average income in the most developed countries. To give two examples, Mali has a GDP per capita PPP (purchasing power parity dollars) of $1,200 a year, while the U.S. has a GDP per capita of around $47,000 a year.[8] These are national averages - the gross domestic product divided by the population, and given a relatively high level of income inequality in both countries, actual incomes may often be significantly different. Nonetheless, it provides reason to think that social circumstances may account for more than 90% of wealth. American GDP per capita is nearly 40 times that of Mali's. Another way of putting that is that Mali's per capita GDP is about 2.5% of the U.S.'s, rather than the 10% that Simon's minimal estimate would imply.

Of course this might be due to the different levels of effort that workers in the two countries make. If we assume that, then with equal effort, workers in Mali should make 10% of what American workers make (if the other 90% is explained by social capital). We would have to assume then, that, since Malians, on average, make 2.5% instead (and actual incomes for many are significantly lower), Americans put in about four times more effort.

Is this the case? Admittedly anecdotal evidence is not the most solid, but in my experience in Mali, I witnessed men and women doing backbreaking labor in the fields, in extreme heat. Groups of women would get together, with each lifting heavy sticks up and down to pound millet. The groups included elderly women, sometimes stooped over from a lifetime of hard agricultural work. It was customary for guests to the area to give out cola nuts, a mild stimulant, which the women chewed in order to work harder. All of this took place in heat approaching, if not over, 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and with little

[8] "Report for Selected Countries and Subjects." IMF. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2010/02/weodata/weorept.aspx?sy=2008&ey=2015&scsm=1&ssd=1&sort=country&ds=.&br=1&pr1.x=46&pr1.y=13&c=678%2C111&s=PPPPC&grp=0&a=>.

available shade. At the end of the day, the women would then have to walk several kilometers back to their village and likely begin domestic duties like cooking and caring for children. These women, being in a remote village, almost certainly earned less than the Malian average, and it is highly unlikely that an average worker in a developed country would put in four times more effort in the course of a day.

Although it is difficult to measure effort objectively, it might be objected that there are two proxies for measuring effort, and these justify those in developed countries keeping their higher earnings. The first proxy is unemployment. It is true that in Mali and other poor countries, unemployment is high, and this is most noticeable in urban areas, since they attract the unemployed from the countryside. Certainly in cities it is not uncommon to see unemployed men loitering, drinking, or otherwise seemingly putting in less effort than an American worker. This unemployment is not usually by choice, however, and employment is necessarily social - one is hired by another, one starts a business to meet a demand that another creates, and so forth. With this in mind, unemployment rates are, rather than entirely the result of individual effort, something that comes from abundant social capital.

The second potential proxy is efficiency. It might be admitted that a Malian woman in the fields works harder than an American farmer, but the American farmer produces far greater output. The technology, infrastructure, and markets at her disposal allow her to produce and sell more, entitling her to earn more.

Undeniably it is true that the above help to explain why a American farmer would earn more than a Malian farmer. But these are all also kinds of social capital. The American farmer benefits from living in a highly developed country with advanced technology,

favorable government farm policies, reliable infrastructure, and a solid market and trade network that help ensure her stable suppliers and customers bound by law to honor their contracts. But she did not create that out of her own effort. She may be more efficient, but that efficiency is due heavily to her social and economic environment.

This leads to the work of the second economist, Michael Kremer. Kremer has notably done work showing that the productivity of an individual relies greatly on interactions with others – a high-skilled worker will tend to be less productive if she is paired with lower skilled workers.[9] Kremer's "O-Ring" theory (named after the small component that failed and caused the space shuttle *Challenger* to explode) shows that one failure can doom an entire project. In working with others, the likelihood of success depends on the skill of the others. High-income countries tend not only to provide better education, training, institutions and infrastructure, but also attract professionals from developing countries (brain drain). If you are a highly skilled Malian farmer, but the government does not maintain the roads to the market or your suppliers are unreliable, your opportunity to increase your output is greatly limited. Success is affected by a large number of interactions with others, and the failure of one interaction is enough to doom individual effort.

Being born in the U.S. will almost certainly afford more opportunities than being born in Mali. Warren Buffett expressed the influence of luck when he said "If you stick me down in the middle of Bangladesh or Peru, you'll find out how much this talent is going to produce in the wrong kind of soil."[10]

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[9] Todaro, Michael P. and Stephen C. Smith. Economic Development. 10th ed. Boston: Pearson Addison-Wesley, 2009. p. 179-180.

[10] Qtd. in Singer, Peter. The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty. New York: Random House, 2009. p. 26.

In the U.S., the reliability of social institutions, infrastructure, laws, and markets generally is taken for granted. When two individuals in the U.S. start up two different businesses, they are unlikely to have access to drastically different levels of social capital. Because a basic minimum of social capital can so easily be assumed, and most Americans have no experience with places where social capital is significantly less, we may be likely to ignore it, and instead see individual effort as the determinant of success.

Those who make the personal freedom argument against foreign aid and assert that income is entirely the product of individual effort and therefore is entirely deserved therefore decontextualize wealth production. They take the income of an individual in isolation of the socio-economic factors which can be shown to greatly influence it. The impact of social capital and context on individual fortunes would seem to go against a number of dominant narratives and cultural attitudes about individualism and self-sufficiency.

The importance of social context may undermine the individualistic ideas of wealth, but they would appear to support the nationalistic concept of wealth. It could be argued that if wealth is generated by American social capital, the wealth might not be due to individual effort, but it nonetheless is American and should go to improving American society. Herbert Simon argued that his estimate provided a moral basis for income tax rates of at least 90%, although actual rates should, in order to not destroy incentives, be kept lower. Should those taxes be directed to entirely domestic purposes?[11]

If the individualistic concept of wealth fails because it assumes an atomic view of individual success, the nationalist view runs into problems for analogous reasons. It assumes that American wealth is entirely (and fairly) earned by Americans and that

[11] This is not Simon's stance.

American payments to other countries are supererogatory. There is ample evidence that the public takes a nationalized view of international economic relations.

Polls, for example, indicate strong popular support for mercantilist policies and opposition to free trade and off-shoring. Many Americans believe that foreign trade is bad for the economy and that the economic damage done by imports was not outweighed by the economic benefits of exports. In studies, majorities opposed trade agreements that benefited the U.S., but benefited another party to the agreement more.[12]

This approach to international economics also appears to ground the argument that foreign aid should be abolished and the money spent to help Americans. It is a nationalist view in both that holds that the American economy is largely self-sufficient and understandable in isolation from economic relations with other states and that entering into economic relations with other states is problematic and will do more harm than good.

The link between a nationalist view of wealth and opposition to aid is given by Marian Tupy, a policy analyst at the libertarian CATO Institute.[13] He argues that calling for aid on the grounds of justice "obfuscates the most important problems Africa faces: bad governments and misguided policies."[14]

Tupy argues that for "most people" justice is a matter of negative and, although he does not use this term, intermediate rights. It involves, in his words, "determination of harm, identification of the guilty and compensation of the injured." If Western prosperity does not actively cause harm to Africans, then the inequality between the two is not an injustice. He goes on to claim that the money spent in the West is a product of the West's

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[12] Drezner, Daniel W. "The Realist Tradition in American Public Opinion." p. 61-2
[13] Tupy, working with CATO, presumably does not share the protectionist outlook described above.
[14] Tupy, Marian. "Is Aid a Matter of Justice?" The Cato Institute. 22 Apr. 2010. <http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=11712>.

production abilities, and the money that is spent comes from primarily other Westerners.

To begin with, a focus on money is rather arbitrary. Money by itself does not create material goods. Production requires material resources, and many of these, including infamously oil, come from outside the West. The economies of many developing countries rely on exporting oil, minerals, or agricultural goods to industrialized countries. Commodities alone are significant sources of earning for developing countries: in 2005, commodities made up at least half of the export earnings of 95 of 141 developing countries.[15]

When developing countries, notably in Asia, also produce large amounts of manufactured goods for export to the West and developing countries such as China, Indonesia, Mexico, Brazil, and India are major trading partners with industrialized countries, it is increasingly untenable to assert that "Western consumption reflects Western production. Every dollar that people in the West spend, they first have to produce or borrow, mainly from other Westerners."[16]

Given that China is the largest creditor to the U.S., this argument seems obviously mistaken even if the argument is limited only to money. To be fair, Africa is the focus of Tupy's argument, and African countries often export the least to the West. However, Western countries import large amounts of African goods, particularly oil and minerals, and, if one takes a historical perspective which encompasses the extraction of resources from African colonies and the period of slavery which preceded the colonial era, one can clearly see that even, or perhaps especially, in the case of Africa, Western consumption

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[15] "Overview of the Situation of Commodities in Developing Countries." Common Fund for Commodities. New York: Office of the Chairman of the Group of 77, 21-3 Mar. 2005. <http://www.g77.org/ifcc11/docs/doc-04-ifcc11.pdf>. p. 1

[16] Tupy, Marian. "Is Aid a Matter of Justice?"

was not solely a product of Western production.

A strong dichotomy between Americans and foreigners (or the West and the Rest) is held, and economic matters are assumed to follow that dichotomy. Arguably this kind of individualized nationalism also lies behind realist assumptions - in order to exclude the out-group of other nations from moral consideration, realism must posit a strong in-group versus out-group dichotomy.

It is questionable, though, whether economic relations are so neatly atomized. For one thing, what could be called "legitimate" trade relations form a large part of the American economy - off-shoring reduces prices that Americans pay for many consumer goods, foreign companies invest in the U.S., American companies export overseas, and so on. Americans may well underestimate the beneficial aspects of these relations for the American economy.

Mirroring the logic of Tupy's question, we could also ask what non-Western consumption reflects. Aid consists of a very small part of developing countries' economies. In China and elsewhere the portion of the economy that is traceable to aid would be negligible. Does non-Western consumption reflect non-Western production only? Is there really such a sharp divide between the West and the non-West? Many developing countries (such as China, Brazil, and Mexico) have Western countries as their largest trade partners, and many Western countries have developing countries as theirs. The definition of the "West" may plausibly include Mexico and Brazil, but certainly, if any countries are not a part of the West, it would be China and India, yet both play large roles in the economic relations of Western countries. China in particular is noted for the quantity of its exports to the U.S. and other developed countries.

Perhaps more relevant here, however, are what could be called the "illegitimate" relations. Here could be included the WTO agreement Pogge criticizes, the American subsidies that harm West African cotton farmers discussed previously, the role that oil and other resources from friendly dictators play in the American economy, the negative externalities of American (and other industrialized country) pollution, and the developed world's exploitation of the global commons. These activities are something less than the free and fair relations that we require of domestic economic interactions,[17] and the economic benefits that these activities have for the U.S. range from minor (cotton subsidies) to major (oil imports).

Furthermore, this is to only take a synchronic view of the current state of the economy. If one looks historically the neat boundaries among national economies are even blurrier. European colonial powers transferred material or economic power from the colonies to the imperial core, often while also legally prohibiting colonized peoples from gaining high levels of education or high-level jobs reserved for Europeans. The British in India, for example, used their power to destroy India's initially superior textile and garment industry so that British manufacturers could export to the subcontinent. British colonial policy also included neglecting education and health care, so that by independence India had a literacy rate of 17% and a life expectancy of 32.5 years. Perhaps worse, during colonialism, the British did little to prevent famines that killed millions, the last of which led the Indian economist Amartya Sen to famously argue that famines are largely due to

[17] Within the U.S. we would not accept an industry polluting a poor area, the government or private businesses purchasing stolen property, or the courts being overtly biased in favor of the rich. This isn't to say these behaviors do not occur - journalists or investigators do not uncommonly expose such wrongdoings. It is to say that such behaviors are not publicly acceptable. It is, on the other hand, acceptable for an oil company to purchase oil taken out of the ground in a country whose leader came to power without or against the will of his people, for the government to support that leader, or U.S. trade negotiators getting international trade rules biased in favor of developed countries. Such behaviors not only would be rarely criticized, they may, especially in the last case, be publicly praised.

undemocratic governance.[18]

In such cases, some of the wealth of the British was a result of the same practices that caused a lot of the poverty of the Indians. Nor is this unique to British India. A similar story could be told of Belgium and the Congo or the French and Haiti. Nor did the economic benefits gained by the British go away. The income from Indian resources would have gained interest, inflated, and been reinvested so that, over the years, it would not have dissipated but rather have compounded.

For such reasons, both historical and current, the atomized picture of national economies that Tupy and many others assume or argue for is highly decontextualized. Ferguson shows us the problems that come with ignoring key contextual components of economic explanations. Much like it is impossible to understand the contemporary drug violence in Mexico without including the U.S., and like it was problematic to explain Lesotho's economy without including South Africa, purely internal, national explanations of wealth or poverty are untenable, or becoming increasingly less so in a globalizing world.

It needs to be added that such explanations also serve to benefit the powerful, those countries who gained from historical oppressions or who today gain from esoteric treaties or dealings with dictators far removed from Western media and audiences. Those in power often have ideologies which benefit them by explaining and justifying why they are better off. Such ideologies are presumably meant both for internal consumption, as few people are comfortable believing they are doing something morally wrong, and such ideologies would help to reduce cognitive dissonance, and for others, not in power, so

[18] Sachs, Jeffrey D. The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time. New York: Penguin Books, 2005. p. 173-6.

that they accept the status quo. It is quite plausible that a decontextualized view of national economies, one which obscures the ways in which powerful countries benefit at the expense of less weaker countries while rousing public indignation about the "high" levels of "generous" foreign aid, is such an ideology.

It is helpful to close this section by quoting Thomas Pogge:

> The heavy concentration of development economics on *national* development encourages the view, widespread in the developed countries, that world poverty today can be fully explained in terms of national and local factors. This view ... is further reinforced by our reluctance to see ourselves as causally connected to severe poverty...[19]

Corruption

The focus, that Pogge decries and Ferguson warns against, on economic development as a matter of local factors often singles out corruption. That bad governance and corruption play a role in economic underdevelopment has been rather well established, if its exact impact is unknown.

My charge here is not that those who make the corruption (including bad governance) argument are mistaken about the pernicious effects it has on development. It is that concern about corruption, while necessary and important, often, particularly in popular anti-aid arguments in America, ignores some of the international causes and incentives for corruption. This is not to shift blame, as there is surely enough of that to go around. But if claims about corruption are lacking an important, international context, this obscures some of the causes of corruption, making it difficult to address high-level corruption. It also obscures the complicity that powerful countries have in corruption.

If we cannot understand Lesotho's economy in isolation from South Africa's, can we

[19] Pogge, Thomas. World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms. p. 15.

understand Nigeria's economy or political corruption in isolation from its oil exports to developed countries? The curse of oil that dooms many countries with the very natural resource that could enrich them would not exist without external entities and markets. So while Tupy and others might see corruption in Nigeria as explainable by purely local factors, it is necessary to ask about the broader international context.

The U.S. and other developed countries have a history of backing corrupt dictators. One of the most egregious current examples is that of Equatorial Guinea's Teodoro Obiang. Equatorial Guinea's small size and large oil reserves results in a GDP (PPP) per capita greater than a number of high-income developed countries. The World Bank lists a higher GDP (PPP) per capita for Equatorial Guinea than Japan, Germany, or the United Kingdom.[20] Yet much of the population lives in extreme poverty, as the oil wealth flows entirely to the ruling dictator. Equatorial Guinea ranks 117,th just below Guatemala, on the 2010 Human Development Index (HDI). Yet even this position is overly optimistic, as the HDI is calculated using Gross National Income (PPP) per capita[21] to represent standard of living. Such calculations do not consider the actual distribution of income, thus Equatorial Guinea would see its ranking increase when large amounts of money flow into the country. That this money does not make it into the hands of the people does not, in the calculation, lower Equatorial Guinea's standard of living. The inflating effect of this portion of the HDI calculation undoubtedly lifts Equatorial Guinea's overall ranking.

Such a skewed distribution of wealth often requires a repressive state, and Equatorial Guinea also ranks badly in this area. In 2010 Freedom House listed Equatorial Guinea on

[20] "CIA - The World Factbook -- Country Comparison :: GDP - Per Capita (PPP)." CIA World Factbook. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2004rank.html>.
[21] Prior to 2009, the HDI used GDP (PPP) per capita to measure well-being.

its "worst of the worst" list, behind only Burma.[22] One notable concern raised by Freedom House in its report on Equatorial Guinea is that it requires its citizens leaving the country to obtain the government's permission in the form of "exit visas."[23] It is telling of its state of relations with the U.S. that Equatorial Guinea is one of only a few countries in Africa that does not even require American citizens to obtain entry visas.

Although the president came to power in a coup and cannot by any reasonable measure be thought to be representing the will of his people or acting in their best interests, American oil companies have not hesitated to purchase oil from him. Nor are they the only ones who have not hesitated to accept his money - he reportedly has a mansion in Malibu worth $35 million and a fleet of luxury cars.

Obiang is among the most corrupt and brutal leaders in the world and also squanders the resource revenue that could bring great wealth to the people of his country. Equatorial Guinea is an extreme case of how bad governance and corruption can wreck an economy. Yet in 2006 U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called Obiang a "good friend" and his military has participated in the "American International Military Education and Training program."[24]

While here I have chosen one of the worst of the worst as an example and gone into some detail, corruption in other countries also cannot be understood as having purely internal or local causes. This is most obvious in other countries that suffer from the "resource curse." Natural resource wealth has failed to make it into the hands of the

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[22] LaFranchi, Howard. "Burma tops "worst of the worst" list of human rights violators." *The Christian Science Monitor*. 3 June 2010. <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2010/0603/Burma-tops-worst-of-the-worst-list-of-human-rights-violators>.

[23] "Freedom House: Freedom in the World 2010 - Equatorial Guinea." Freedomhouse.org. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2010&country=7818>.

[24] Elliott, Justin. "What Other Dictators Does the U.S. Support?" Salon.com 2 Feb. 2011. <http://www.salon.com/news/politics/war_room/2011/02/02/american_allies_dictators>.

people of Angola, a country ranked one of the most corrupt.[25] Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, not to mention a number of Middle Eastern countries, are also notorious examples of the resource curse.

Yet the resource curse almost by definition cannot be explained by purely internal factors. The oil and minerals of these countries are not being sold domestically. Instead they are sold to countries or companies elsewhere in the world, often in the developed world, despite the fact that these resources are essentially stolen from the people by leaders they did not choose. Sometimes countries which benefit from receiving these resources go even further and provide military or other support for the regime in power, helping to ensure both an oppressive stability and a flow of resources.

Other times corruption is supported from the outside because of military or strategic interests. U.S. support for Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and for Mobutu of Zaire are two, now notorious, examples. In such cases the foreign aid that is given is not transparent and does little to help in anything that could be considered a humanitarian project. Another example is Uzbekistan, where, seeing the dictatorship as an ally in the War on Terror, the U.S. has provided support for intelligence and police services, despite evidence of systemic torture and murder, and even of prisoners being boiled to death. Other examples include Turkmenistan, which like Uzbekistan is one of Freedom House's "worst of the worst," and Saudi Arabia.[26] This should not imply that U.S. policy is unique. France, for example, has provided support, including military support, for dictators in former colonies such as Chad, Togo, and Cameroon.

A number of arguments can and are put forth by the defenders of these relationships to

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[25] Singer, Peter. The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty. p. 30-31.
[26] "What Other Dictators Does the U.S. Support?"

justify them. Often these arguments rely on an assumption of realism, which I have argued against elsewhere. Sometimes the arguments attempt to make a moral case, perhaps by arguing that backing a dictator is preferable to anarchy and chaos, or an even worse dictator coming to power. Backing a dictator, it could be argued, may allow for one to eventually push for reforms.

These arguments seem implausible. The track record of Western support for dictators indicates that much of the time, significant reform never occurs. From Mobutu to Mubarak to Uzbekistan, reforms, if they are even discussed, do not materialize. This indicates that, as inducing reform is not a reason for the relationship, inducing reform is at best a secondary goal and at worst something undesirable to both parties. The prevention of anarchy and chaos seems laudable enough, except that entrenching a dictator without a plausible route for reform appears to at most postpone anarchy and chaos, and may even exacerbate the chaos once the people do revolt against the oppression or the dictator dies. It is difficult, especially given the demonstrated propensity such policies have to produce unintended consequences, to argue that these policies result in a greater good (or a lesser evil).

Moreover, it is difficult to morally justify actions against foreigners that very few Americans would ever think morally justified in the U.S. If we reject even comparatively slight infringements on our freedom, we should hesitate to so quickly assume that highly oppressive actions in other countries are justifiable. That so many are, for the sake of slight national advantages, quick to write off the rights or freedoms of those in foreign countries indicates a disturbing bias. The questionability of this bias is no less when it is called realism.

It should be noted that critiques of U.S. and other nations' foreign policy here does not require any belief that powerful countries have any obligation to spread democracy, promote reform, or otherwise take positive steps to help the populations of other countries. Perhaps powerful countries do fail to live up to such positive obligations. Without having to accept that, however, it is obvious that when the U.S. and other countries provide support for leaders enacting oppressive policies, they fail to abide by basic negative obligations to refrain from causing undue harm.

Whatever the justifiability of the foreign backing of corrupt or oppressive governments, however, it is clear that in many cases, bad governance and corruption cannot be understood as purely local issues. In keeping with the assumptions toward atomic nationalism, corruption, both in popular and professional discourse, is often portrayed as an internally-caused affliction of certain countries.

This can be a problem for development professionals because it may be an entirely inaccurate portrayal. Insofar as bad governance affects development prospects and outside influences abet bad governance, effective development likely requires addressing those outside influences, the policies of foreign countries and companies. The aid agencies of the U.S. and other countries not only appear to be unequipped and politically unable to question accepted foreign policy, they are often directly involved in implementing it. The focus of U.S. official assistance is often on furthering U.S. foreign policy aims, thus the focus of aid on strategic countries like Egypt, Israel, and Colombia.

In popular discourse, the corruption theme often obscures the role that the U.S. and other countries play in promoting corruption. While not denying that developed countries do often promote rights and democracy in other countries, developed countries tend to be

most vocal when the rights and democracy are lacking in unfriendly countries rather than in military allies or friendly resource-rich nations. The international system, as it is, tends to reward certain types of corruption.

The Compensation Argument

Thus far, I have focused primarily on the harms caused by outside support for dictators and abusive rulers. This support takes many forms, including overt military and financial assistance and a willingness to accept essentially stolen commodities from undemocratic governments. There are a number of features which recommend this as an example. Such practices are often rather straightforwardly harmful to innocent populations and, aside from realist attempts to bypass moral objections, are among the most difficult of international relationships to ethically justify.

Yet such relationships are not the only examples of harms that the contemporary global system enables and which realist and decontextualizing assumptions, in foreign aid as well as elsewhere, permit or obscure. While what follows is by no means an exhaustive list, it does help to advance the argument that economic fortunes are heavily dependent on international factors. It will also assist in making an argument that certain types of aid are justified on compensatory grounds.

Two of the other areas which stand out as prominent cases of severe harms by developed countries against at least some developing countries are global warming and the global arms trade.

First is the issue of global warming and climate change. Accepting that climate scientists are largely correct about the likely extent of anthropogenic climate change, it is

predicted that those less developed countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, which have contributed the least to climate change will experience the greatest harms.[27] This is doubly unjust: not only will the harm mostly befall those who have done the least to cause the problem and who have benefited the least from global industrialization and greenhouse gas emission, those same countries are the poorest in the world, the most dependent upon agriculture, and the least able to afford to take steps to protect their populations.

An article from *The Guardian* offers some examples of what the former chief of the U.K.'s Department for International Development argues climate change holds in store for Africa:

> [Africa] is already warming faster than the global average and ... people living there can expect more intense droughts, floods and storm surges.... There will be less drinking water, diseases such as malaria will spread and the poorest will be hit the hardest as farmland is damaged in the coming century....'There is already evidence that Africa is warming faster than the global average, with more warm spells and fewer extremely cold days. Northern and southern Africa are likely to become as much as 4C hotter over the next 100 years, and [will become] much drier.' [He] predicts hunger on the continent could increase dramatically in the short term as droughts and desertification increase, and climate change affects water supplies. 'Projected reductions in crop yields could be as much as 50% by 2020 and 90% by 2100.'[28]

Poor countries in other regions are also expected to experience the worst effects of climate change. Bangladesh, a low-lying country especially prone to flooding may be particularly hard hit. A sea-level rise of three feet would be enough to submerge a quarter of the country, while, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change the

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[27] Singer, Peter. One World: The Ethics of Globalization. 2nd ed. Yale: Yale University Press, 2004. p. 17-18

[28] Vidal, John. "Climate Change Will Devastate Africa, Top UK Scientists Warn." The Guardian. 28 Oct. 2009. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/oct/28/africa-climate-change-sir-gordon-conway>.

salt from the seawater could cause "steep" drops in food production.[29] Despite Bangladesh's vulnerability, it and other least developed countries are regularly excluded from climate talks, and efforts to raise money or receive international assistance have met with little success.[30]

Some low-lying Pacific islands may face complete submersion. Others, such as the Solomon Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia, are resettling people on higher points of their islands.[31] As with Bangladesh, these countries have contributed negligibly to climate change.

The greenhouse gas emissions that are theorized to be responsible for climate change have largely and historically been emitted by the highly developed countries of the West. While countries, both highly developed and least developed, are anticipated to suffer the effects of climate change, highly developed countries, which have benefited the most from such emissions, will, due to stronger economies, be the best prepared to deal with rising sea levels and a warmer climate. The temperate latitudes, where most developed countries lie, will tend to be harmed less than the tropical altitudes, where most developing countries lie. Temperate and cooler latitudes are even expected to benefit somewhat as global warming creates a climate there more hospitable to crop production.[32] Canada, Siberia, and Europe may become more hospitable to crops, but what of countries like Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali? The agriculture of such

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[29] Chopra, Anuj. " How Global Warming Threatens Millions in Bangladesh." US News and World Report. 26 Mar. 2009. <http://www.usnews.com/news/energy/articles/2009/03/26/how-global-warming-threatens-millions-in-bangladesh?PageNr=1>.

[30] Vidal, John. "Bangladesh is Speaking Up on Global Warming." The Guardian. 26 Mar. 2008. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/mar/26/bangladesh>.

[31] Malkin, Bonnie. "Climate Change to Force 75 Million Pacific Islanders from Their Homes." The Telegraph. 27 July 2009. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/environment/climatechange/5915829/Climate-change-to-force-75-million-Pacific-Islanders-from-their-homes.html>.

[32] Singer, Peter. One World: The Ethics of Globalization. p. 17

countries already faces threats from desertification and fragile ecologies.

My own experience in Ghana indicated similar concerns: the Ghanaian rainy season was growing increasingly unpredictable, with potentially disastrous implications for a country heavily dependent upon agriculture, and therefore heavily dependent upon knowing when the seasonal rains will start and end. The anecdotes collected from Ghanaians are supported by available research.[33]

The second harm to be considered here is the global arms trade. This issue largely accompanies the problematic relationships between developed countries and developing-world dictators. Many dictators who receive Western support also receive Western weapons. According to the Center for Defense Information, "The U.S. sells weapons to over 150 countries worldwide... Eighty percent of current recipients of U.S. weapons are unelected governments, and about 2/3 of them are in the State Department's public record of human rights abusers."[34]

Arms sales reinforce the power of elites with the money to buy weapons from arms-supplying companies or states. As such, the global arms trade helps to strengthen the power of those who have the money and power to buy weapons. In many countries this is an undemocratic government. While many developing countries also sell weapons in the global arms trade, it is clearly dominated by the industrialized countries, with the U.S. accounting for 61% of the value of arms agreements with developing nations in 2008 and 38% of such agreements in 2009. Russia, the second most prolific supplier accounted for 11% and 23% in the respective years, and Western European countries combined had

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[33] "Research Shows Rainy Season in Ghana Getting Shorter." Ghana Business News. 27 Sept. 2010. <http://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2010/09/27/research-shows-rainy-season-in-ghana-getting-shorter/>.
[34] "The Human Cost of America's Arms Sales." Center for Defense Information. 8 Nov. 1998. <http://www.cdi.org/adm/Transcripts/1209/index.htm>.

14% and 24%.[35]

While the "global arms trade" carries negative connotations, there are presumably legitimate applications of the arms trade. Selling weapons to legitimate non-oppressive governments for necessary self-defense purposes is perhaps the least problematic example. Needless to say, however, many cases do not meet such standards.

Aside from the open sales to oppressive governments just mentioned, there is also a troubling lack of oversight and even an effort on the behalf of some powerful countries to prevent checks on the trade. In 2006, the U.S. was the only Security Council member to vote against an Arms Trade Treaty at the United Nations. Such a treaty is argued by human rights campaigners to be necessary because "[c]urrently there are no comprehensive, legally binding international rules governing the arms trade, and gaps and loopholes in national controls mean weapons are ending up in conflict zones and in the hands of human rights abusers."[36] In 2009, the Obama administration overturned the previous administration's opposition to the treaty on the condition that the talks be consensus based, essentially allowing the U.S., or any other country, to veto them.[37] As of this writing, the treaty remains to be negotiated.

Although trade in chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons often receives the most attention and understandably is typically of greater concern to American audiences, small arms cause actual harms that exceeds potential harms from "weapons of mass destruction" in all but the more extreme scenarios (e.g., a large nuclear war with multiple

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[35] Grimmett, Richard F. "Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 2002-2009." Congressional Research Service. 10 Sept. 2010. p. 24

[36] "Arms Trade Treaty Questions and Answers." Oxfam. <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/get_involved/campaign/control_arms/att_qanda.html>.

[37] Mohammed, Arshad. "U.S. Reverses Stance on Treaty to Regulate Arms Trade." Reuters. 14 Oct. 2009. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/10/15/us-arms-usa-treaty-idustre59e0q920091015>.

nuclear exchanges). Estimates of global deaths from small arms violence is in the hundreds of thousands, and this appears to particularly affect less developed regions.[38] The countries in these regions have seen large official in-flows of weaponry, particularly during the Cold War. Leaving aside the debate of whether the Cold War justified the growth of the arms trade, there is no doubting that both the past and the contemporary willingness of industrialized countries to provide arms has helped to fuel this violence. Even if it is granted that the arms trade was justified during the Cold War, the continuing impact of these weapons and the role they have played in conflicts and human rights abuses indicates some level of responsibility on the part of the suppliers.

The arms trade has harmful consequences beyond the direct violence to which its products contribute. Government funds in developing countries go to purchasing weapons rather than to needed economic development and social programs. To the extent that the availability of arms increases violence or corruption, it negatively affects the ability of the developing country to grow its economy.

The Small Arms Survey, a research project at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Switzerland, gives examples of other costs associated with the arms trade, including higher healthcare and policing costs, and lost productivity.[39] The financial costs could be more easily shouldered by countries with strong economies. They present much more serious problems to countries with weak or developing economies.

Moreover a strong military can reduce the government's accountability to its people.

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[38] Valenti, Maria et al. "Armed Violence: A Health Problem, a Public Health Approach." Journal of Public Health Policy. Vol. 28 No. 4 2007. p. 390.

[39] "Social and Economic Costs." Small Arms Survey. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/armed-violence/social-and-economic-costs.html>.

The interests of the military may carry more weight to the detriment of much needed popular feedback. It has been noted that plentiful natural resources can reduce a government's accountability to its people by reducing its reliance on their taxes. A well funded military may well have a similar effect. At the least the more well-funded a military is, the stronger and more loyal it will tend to be, creating a stronger barrier for the civilians of the country to overcome in any attempt at political change.

The economist Paul Collier notes that high levels of military spending exists in many of the poorest countries in the world. This spending is sometimes a part of an arms race, a response to the existence of large quantities of weapons in rival countries. Perhaps more often, as Collier argues, this spending is an attempt to thwart coups by keeping the military happy. To keep countries from diverting badly needed funds to military spending preventing coups, Collier urges an international agreement to intervene in the event of a coup against a democratically elected government and thereby remove the incentives which lead to coups.[40]

Collier's argument implies a seemingly positive obligation to actively intervene, yet some of the incentives for coups could be removed by purely negative actions. Not selling weapons to, or doing business with, governments that come to power by force would also remove major coup incentives. Of course, lacking a global institutional framework, there would be few realistic mechanisms for enforcing compliance. Each country would have strong incentives to "cheat," especially in the case of resource-rich countries. Implementing adequate institutional mechanisms in this case is a prime example of a method of avoiding the aforementioned "sucker" problem, yet it requires

[40] Collier, Paul. The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

precisely the kind of willingness to prioritize interests other than direct national interests that realism rejects.

Crime and conflict, the proximate causes of the costs associated with the arms trade, would exist to some extent without any such trade. The problem is rather that the arms trade serves to increase and exacerbate crime and conflict as well as entrench oppressive leaders. One troubling example is of French arms deals to Rwanda both before and during the genocide. A Human Rights Watch report detailed the alleged involvement:

> Official deliveries of arms by the French government to other governments are regulated by well-defined rules, but in the case of Rwanda—as in many others—the rules were rarely followed. According to the National Assembly investigative commission, thirty-one of thirty-six deliveries of weapons to Rwanda during the years 1990 to 1994 were made "without following the rules." According to the commission, there were no legal and official deliveries of arms after April 8, 1994, a position reiterated by an official from the Ministry of Defense....
>
> Research done by the Arms Division of Human Rights Watch established that the French government or French companies operating under government license delivered arms to the Rwandan forces five times in May and June through the town of Goma, just across the border from Gisenyi, in Zaire. The first of these shipments may have taken place before May 17, when the Security Council imposed an embargo on the supply of arms to the interim government, but it was still done in disregard of its April 30 appeal "to refrain from providing arms or any military assistance" to the parties to the conflict.[41]

Nor are these the only harms that could be considered. First world demand for illicit drugs, over-fishing of the world's oceans by industrialized countries, trade barriers, and heavy third world marketing by first world tobacco companies[42] [43] are some other strong

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[41] "Acknowledging Genocide." Human Rights Watch. 12 Mar. 2009. <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1999/rwanda/Geno15-8-02.htm#P522_169459>.

[42] "Tobacco Giant 'Breaks Youth Code.'" BBC. 28 June 2008. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7475259.stm>.

examples of ways in which developed countries, either through public policy or private actions, unduly harm developing countries.

The existence of harms such as those presented here indicates a strong case for an alternate justification for aid, one based on the concept of compensation. These harms also conflict with much popular American discourse about aid and assumptions about the international system as atomic, with each countries' fate entirely internally determined. To a large extent, that assumption helps to shape discourse about foreign aid, and, as evidenced by the work of James Ferguson, not only at the popular level.

The concept of aid as compensation is not a concept which is entirely foreign to American popular discourse. Earlier sections showed some prevalence of talk about aid as a negative duty. It appears safe to say, however, that this particular theme is far from dominant.

If it is accepted that significant harms are done to developing countries by developed countries, however, there is strong reason think that the compensatory argument may be correct. At the very least, it is widely accepted that if an agent unduly harms a moral patient, some form of redress is often morally required. Arguably the very concept of duties not to harm others requires some form of compensation when harms are committed. Without the obligation to compensate for undue harms (what Thomas Pogge calls an "intermediate duty"), once an agent has violated a negative duty and harmed another, her duties cease. Odd indeed would be a moral system which requires one to refrain from unduly harming others, yet contains no mechanism to repair such harms, either directly (payment from the perpetrator) or through social and legal assistance.

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[43] "Why Tobacco is a Public Health Priority." World Health Organization. <http://www.who.int/tobacco/health_priority/en/>.

Most Americans, as well as people in other cultures, would likely accept that if one harms another unduly, some duty exists to compensate for the harm caused.[44] Making the argument for aid as compensation involves not so much establishing that undue harms merit compensation, which many will agree upon, but defusing objections this moral concept cannot be applied to international cases.

An easy way to avoid applying this argument to the international system is to take a realist form of extreme moral exclusionism. This exclusionism is hinted at in American aid discourse. It is obscured, although implied through actions and policies, by the national interest arguments. It is hinted at more strongly in anti-aid arguments about domestic priorities. The moral exclusionism is often justified based on views about the anarchic and atomic nature of international relations, concepts of reciprocity, and ideas that the U.S. is too generous or does too much. I have given reasons here to think that these justifications do not work.

Anything short of the above type of moral exclusionism would require that the interests of those in other countries be granted some weight. Even if this weighing of interests greatly favors American interests, it is likely that a number of currently accepted policies would be prohibited. Protectionist measures favor American cotton growers, providing additional profit, and perhaps even some jobs. Yet the extent to which they disadvantage very poor growers in developing countries, pushing them at times into life-threatening poverty, weighs heavily against them, so long as the foreign population is granted some consideration.

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[44] This does not hold in all cases of undue harm. In some cases compensation is replaced by punishment or "rehabilitation." Even here language often reflects the idea of compensation, with time in prison sometimes referred to as "paying one's dues to society." At the international level, punishing is generally much more difficult. In these cases, given the widespread nature of the harms mentioned, it seems unfeasible for any sort of non-compensatory punishment to be desirable or effective.

There is a good reason why even a heavy weighting of national interests will at times fail to justify policy. The first is the concept of diminishing returns. One hundred dollars a year more in income has a negligible effect for most Americans, even the poorest of Americans. One hundred dollars more a year likely will significantly improve the life of a Malian farmer, possible lifting her entire family out of extreme poverty and perhaps even having a positive effect on others in her village, as she buys more goods and services or expands her production. Given the great benefit to the Malian and the negligible benefit to the American, no plausible weighting of interests can lead to justification for a policy where the American receives subsidies and other forms of assistance that help to reduce the amount of money earned by the Malian. This is even more pronounced when the American actor is an industry or business with the clout and money to lobby on these issues, as is typically the case.

Furthermore, there arguably may be an additional moral weight placed on the interests of the less advantaged. This goes beyond the idea of diminishing returns. The value that $100 has for the Malian farmer is equivalent to the value that some amount of money has to an American farmer (how much depends on the wealth of the farmer and other factors).

Yet a case could be made that even when considering otherwise equal values, the Malian should be favored, given the overall disadvantages that she faces. John Rawls theory of "maximin," the idea that when inequalities occur they should benefit the least-advantaged makes such a case.

This is not uncontroversial, and Rawls's *Theory of Justice* itself was devoted to discussing issues of justice within countries rather than among them. Egalitarian

concerns, if accepted, provide a reason beyond the concept of diminishing returns not to give equal weight to otherwise equal interests that both the advantaged and disadvantaged have.

What other arguments can be mustered that provide an ethical defense of the practices which cause severe global harms? It could be objected that the harms developed countries cause are offset either by harms that developing countries commit or by ways in which developed countries help developing countries. Neither argument is plausible.

While there certainly are some ways in which developing countries harm developed countries, the far greater military and economic power of developed countries, along with their greater capability to shape international institutions tends to greatly limit the ways in which weaker countries can harm them. Many of the candidates which come most readily to mind, such as terrorism, piracy, and the supply side of the illicit drug trade, are due not to official policy or widely accepted behaviors, but to a failure of governmental policy. Support for and doing business with corrupt dictators, economic actions which contribute to global warming, and the developed country arms trade are all either official policies or openly accepted by strong, democratically legitimate governments.

Do other actions of the developed countries offset the harms caused directly or indirectly by their official policies? The most obvious option here is foreign aid, yet, as this thesis has argued, aid policy (at least in the U.S.) is largely oriented towards promoting economic and military national interests rather than providing effective assistance. Perhaps because of this, the current forms and levels of aid are unlikely even to make up for the harmful effects from global warming. The World Bank estimates that,

due to global warming, India faces a decline in crop yield of 4.5% to 9%[45] and 5% of GDP[46] and Africa 4% of GDP[47]. This does not adequately capture the associated human suffering. The World Bank cites evidence "that one percentage point of agricultural GDP growth in developing countries increases the consumption of the poorest third of the population by four to six percentage points."[48] In Africa, where economies are overwhelmingly agricultural, the 4% projected GDP decline may translate into 16-24% less consumption by the poorest. Global warming is expected not only to decrease agricultural productivity in the tropics, but also to increase tropical diseases and drought.[49]

Moreover, greater amounts of aid, as noted in chapter II, often go to countries relatively better off. Helping middle income countries instead of low income countries fails to rectify harms to the latter.

Arguing that overall aid totals currently balances harms caused wrongly assumes all developing countries to be one homogeneous mass, with harm to one being able to be offset by assistance to another. Furthermore even within countries, taking an aggregate view can be inappropriate. It is hardly adequate compensation to provide assistance and opportunities to elites when the poorest are subject to the greatest harms.

The argument about harms has used aggregate terms (developed countries and developing countries) itself, and has, for the sake of simplicity, focused on cases where,

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[45] "World Development Report 2010: Development and Climate Change". The World Bank. 22 Oct. 2009. <http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTRESEARCH/EXTWDRS/EXTWDR2010/0,,contentMDK:21969137~menuPK:5287748~pagePK:64167689~piPK:64167673~theSitePK:5287741,00.html>. p. 40-1

[46] "A Bad Climate for Development." The Economist. 17 Sept. 2009. <http://www.economist.com/node/14447171>.

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] "World Development Report 2010: Development and Climate Change." p. 41

[49] *Ibid.*

due largely to the actions of many or most developed countries, harms are caused which disproportionately affect developing countries. To more fully consider issues of fault and compensation for countries or groups within countries, detailed case studies of various aspects of their foreign relations would be needed.

It likely will turn out that some developed countries are responsible for greater levels of harm than others, and that some developing countries have been harmed more than others. Moreover, some developing nations may be owed compensation by specific first- or second- world countries and not by others. It also is entirely possible that some worse-off countries will, in considering compensation for harms, be owed less than relatively more prosperous countries.

This, and the possibility that a compensatory justification of aid may very well not end extreme poverty, is an objection that merits consideration. The contention here, however, is not that aid as compensation exhausts the possible justifications for aid. It may be that positive obligations exist, and that even lacking a compensatory case, states able to do so should offer assistance on humanitarian grounds when appropriate. The argument has been only that a case exists for a compensatory justification of aid.

Given that Americans tend to see negative obligations as stronger than positive obligations, a strong case can be made for efficient aid. Rejecting it would require either denying that undue harms are caused or that undue harms entail a duty to help rectify those harms. The first is undermined by available evidence on the nature of global warming, developed-world support for dictators, the arms trade, and other transnational issues. The latter requires rejecting a largely accepted and fundamental moral belief. Perhaps a strong case can be made for doing so, yet the most obvious candidate, the

moral exclusionism of realism, has been shown earlier to be deficient. So long as we maintain common ideas about the relationship among justice, negative harms, and compensation, we are required to acknowledge the case for aid as compensation.

Given the many ways in which aid was argued to be ineffective or even harmful, arguing for some form of aid needs an explanation. The problematic practices of aid discussed in chapter II are often justified by the assumptions and arguments I have sought to dispel here. Aid, I have argued, has failed at its humanitarian goals in large part because these goals have been secondary to other interests. The prioritization of these other, national, interests is abetted by the tendency to view aid as charity or the international system as consisting of isolated entities. If the existence of negative harms is solidly established, those stances are difficult to maintain.

Perhaps, given the problems with aid so far and the tendency of political interests to overshadow effective aid, it might be best for compensation to take some other form? It could be argued that any type of aid will breed dependency and ultimately should be rejected. Perhaps the best form of compensation is only to abolish harmful practices?

Certainly, given the problems with much official aid, this is a tempting position. It seems, however, that some form of aid or another likely will be a necessary feature of any adequate compensation. Ending unjust policies and arrangements may lead to a level playing field, but one where one team has already been handicapped. Ending an unjust practice without adequate compensation may perpetuate inequalities.

Additionally, one of the largest harms discussed, global warming, physically cannot simply be ended. Even if greenhouse gas emissions were entirely eliminated, the impact of current and past emissions would continue for some time. Ending all emissions may be

a form of injustice itself if it prevents newly industrializing countries from economically developing. It is difficult to see any ethically defensible solution here which does not involve forms of aid or assistance.

The history of Western aid has justifiably made many suspicious of aid altogether. Yet, while there is a danger of aid being used to reinforce global inequities, there is also a risk that no compensation will reinforce those same inequities. In order for aid to be an effective form of compensation, it would have to actually be effective. This would likely mean randomized testing to determine what works and what does not, as well as not allowing aid to be captured by domestic donor interests. While this is easier said than done, there is reason to think that aid can be made effective.[50]

One key way both to make aid more effective and to help ensure its legitimacy is to get feedback from those receiving the aid, including on the fundamental question of whether the aid is desired at all. If a case for compensation can be made, it should be the prerogative of recipients to determine whether they will accept it as well as have a say in what form it takes.

Certainly a number of practical hurdles would need to be overcome, such as how the views of the people can be effectively solicited and integrated into aid projects and the potential problem of implementation in undemocratic countries. Despite the daunting nature of these problems, there is no reason to think that they are in principle insurmountable.

Another objection to the compensation argument is a skepticism of the value of "development" and the argument that poverty is a construct of development discourse.

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[50] Some such attempts can be found in Easterly, William. Reinventing Foreign Aid.

Development interventions, the argument goes, are responsible for the actual harm associated with severe poverty. Western standards of "development" are arbitrary cultural artifacts. The anthropologist Arturo Escobar makes a similar argument in his book *Encountering Development.* As Escobar details them, a number of interventions, including IMF economic restructuring, have led to greater harms. Most people who live in material conditions that those in the West would find severely impoverished in fact do live happy and fulfilled lives.

Acknowledging these important points do not need to lead one to reject development, however. It is important to keep in mind the importance of power and its relationship to development. If the argument becomes relativistic rejection, it risks ceding power to the more developed countries. The best hope of reducing the coercive power of dominant states is to reduce inequities between them and the rest of world. Deconstructing "development" is a worthwhile endeavor which can shed light on the problematic history of international development as a discipline. To take this further to a rejection of the value of development, however, yields to established power rather than effectively challenging it.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to present here a picture of popular American discourse on aid. Beginning with the available opinions and data captured by polls, I have tried to delve into more depth on the major themes found. The major themes and arguments explored were that aid is in U.S. strategic or economic interest, that aid is a positive obligation or a charity, and that foreign aid should not be given because there are more urgent domestic priorities or because aid money belongs to Americans, and finally that aid should not be given because of corruption in recipient countries.

Under-girding these arguments are assumptions about the role of morality in international relations and the nature of international relations themselves. Many of the dominant themes, both for and against aid, assumed the acceptability of strongly prioritizing national or domestic interests above other concerns or an essentially atomized view of the world, or both.

Both assumptions were argued to be problematic. The prioritization of national interests tends to a realist kind of moral exclusionism, which carries a number of implications that many would not accept, and the amoral and anarchic nature of international relations, a common justification, was argued to be insufficient, especially since it is used to justify contributing to the anarchy.

The decontextualized view of international relations ignored many of the ways in which economies and states interact. These interactions can be international, in the form of official policies, or transnational. Arguments in favor of aid are much more likely to acknowledge global interconnections, yet when used to advance an argument for aid on

solely positive grounds, tend to misrepresent or ignore many of the harms and coercive uses of power globally.

Both assumptions help to further the power of the global status quo, arguably which is why they are common on both sides of the aid debate. Where realist assumptions straightforwardly justify international harms, the decontextualizing assumptions obscure them - success in developed countries is attributable entirely to internal factors, and poverty in developing countries is attributable entirely to internal factors, such as corruption. This view is demonstrably wrong in a number of cases, yet retains much popularity.

Both the realist and decontextualized views function as justificatory ideologies. They function not only as explanations of success and failure, but as justifications for allowing troubling international practices. I have argued that a number of such harms are clearly committed by the strongest countries. Namely, the harms considered were the alliances, both political and economic, between developed democracies and oppressive and corrupt dictatorships, global warming, and the global arms trade. These examples do not exhaust the list of harms that actually occur, but were chosen because of the scale of involvement of developed countries and the extent to which they affect or will affect large numbers of developing countries.

Such harms are arguably a key part of the economies of developed countries. Certainly the legitimacy granted to whoever has control of resources in developing countries is important in ensuring a steady flow of these resources to developed countries. The emission of greenhouse gases has been and will continue to be a major side-effect of industrialized economies. The arms trade brings profit to weapons makers in the

developed world, but plays an even larger economic role in securing the friendship and stability of the aforementioned resource-rich dictatorships.

These harms largely remain unacknowledged by popular American discourse, and acknowledging them challenges dominant assumptions. Their existence has a further implication for foreign aid. If we accept relatively uncontroversial views about the need to compensate for causing undue harms, it can easily be argued that many developed countries owe compensation to developing countries. In the last few pages of this thesis I have attempted to sketch out that view. Approaching aid from this perspective may help to avoid some of the worst abuses and inefficiencies of official aid as well as emphasize the importance of local voices in aid projects. If aid is not charity but compensation for harms caused, it gains extra imperative to be both humble and truly effective.

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VITA

Jeffrey Haines is a graduate student in the Institute of Humanities, Batten Arts & Letters Building, Rm. 3041, Old Dominion University. This is his second academic thesis, the first being an undergraduate honors thesis. He holds a B.A. in Philosophy from the University of North Florida (2006). Additionally, he has studied at Political Science at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco and at the University of Ghana in Accra, Ghana. He has also lived in India.