2. GARRETT HARDIN

Rich countries, argues Hardin, can be seen as lifeboats, full of relatively affluent people and floating through seas dotted with the world's poor, struggling to stay afloat. The poor, naturally, would like to clamber aboard (he lifeboat, and this raises the question of how those aboard should react. Hardin argues for a totally exclusionary policy on the grounds that this represents the only chance for the survival of humanity as a whole. If the affluent countries open their doors and let everyone in who wants to get in, Hardin argues, the effect will be that the lifeboat is swamped and everyone drowns, rich and poor alike. Even a less generous policy will be disastrous—allowing some poor people aboard will reduce the boat's "safety factor" to the point where adverse conditions would result in catastrophe, otherwise avoided. The potential for disaster, according to Hardin, stems partly from rapid human population growth, particularly in the poor countries, and the increasing demands this places on the earth's finite environment. Another problem is what he calls "the tragedy of the commons"—Earth's environment is being degraded because those who have a right to its resources aren't held to a corresponding duty to protect it.

Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor

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Environmentalists use the metaphor of the earth as a "spaceship" in trying to persuade countries, industries and people to stop wasting and polluting our natural resources. Since we all share life on this planet, they argue, no single person or institution has the right to destroy, waste, or use more than a fair share of its resources.

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But does everyone on earth have an equal right to an equal share of its resources? The spaceship metaphor can be dangerous when used by misguided idealists to justify suicidal policies for sharing our resources through uncontrolled immigration and foreign aid. In their enthusiastic but unrealistic generosity, they confuse the ethics of a spaceship with those of a lifeboat.

A true spaceship would have to be under the control of a captain, since no ship could possibly survive if its course were determined by committee. Spaceship Earth certainly has no captain; the United Nations is merely a toothless tiger, with little power to enforce any policy upon its bickering members.

If we divide the world crudely into rich nations and poor nations, two-thirds of them are desperately poor, and only one-third comparatively rich, with the United States the wealthiest of all. Metaphorically each rich nation can be seen as a lifeboat full of comparatively rich people. In the ocean outside each lifeboat swim the poor of the world, who would like to get in, or at least to share some of the wealth. What should the lifeboat passengers do?

First, we must recognize the limited capacity of any lifeboat. For example, a nation's land has a limited capacity to support a population and as the current energy crisis has shown us, in some ways we have already exceeded the carrying capacity of our land.

ADRIFT IN A MORAL SEA

So here we sit, say 50 people in our lifeboat. To be generous, let us assume it has room for 10 more, making a total capacity of 60. Suppose the 50 of us in the lifeboat see 100 others swimming in the water outside, begging for admission to our boat or for handouts. We have several options: We may be tempted to try to live by the Christian ideal of being "our brother's keeper," or by the Marxist ideal of "to each according to his needs." Since the needs of all in the water are the same, and since they can all be seen as "our brothers," we could take them all into our boat, making a total of 150 in a boat designed for 60. The boat swamps, everyone drowns. Complete justice, complete catastrophe.

Since the boat has an unused excess capacity of 10 more passengers, we could admit just 10 more to it. But which 10 do we let in? How

do we choose? Do we pick the best 10, the neediest 10, "first come, first served"? And what do we say to the 90 we exclude? If we do let an extra 10 into our lifeboat, we will have lost our "safety factor," an engineering principle of critical importance. For example, if we don't leave room for excess capacity as a safety factor in our country's agriculture, a new plant disease or a bad change in the weather could have disastrous consequences.

Suppose we decide to preserve our small safety factor and admit no more to the lifeboat. Our survival is then possible, although we shall have to be constantly on guard against boarding parties.

While this last solution clearly offers the only means of our survival, it is morally abhorrent to many people. Some say they feel guilty about their good luck. My reply is simple: "Get out and yield your place to others."'This may solve the problem of the guilt-ridden person's conscience, but it does not change the ethics of the lifeboat. The needy person to whom the guilt-ridden person yields his place will not himself feel guilty about his good luck. If he did, he would not climb aboard. The net result of conscience-stricken people giving up their unjustly held seats is the elimination of that sort of conscience from the lifeboat.

This is the basic metaphor within which we must work out our solutions. Let us now enrich the image, step by step, with substantive additions from the real world, a world that must solve real and pressing problems of overpopulation and hunger.

The harsh ethics of the lifeboat become even harsher when we consider the reproductive differences between the rich nations and the poor nations. The people inside the lifeboats are doubling in numbers every 87 years; those swimming around outside are doubling, on the average, every 35 years, more than twice as fast as the rich. And since the world's resources are dwindling, the difference in prosperity between the rich and the poor can only increase.

As of 1973, the US had a population of 210 million people, who were increasing by 0.8 percent per year. Outside our lifeboat, let us imagine another 210 million people (say, the combined populations of Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Morocco, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines) who are increasing at a rate of 3.3 percent per year. Put differently, the doubling time for this aggregate population is 21 years, compared to 87 years for the US.

MULTIPLYING THE RICH AND THE POOR

Now suppose the US agreed to pool its resources with those seven countries, with everyone receiving an equal share. Initially the ratio of Americans to non-Americans in this model would be one-to-one. But consider what the ratio would be after 87 years, by which time the Americans would have doubled to a population of 420 million. By then, doubling every 21 years, the other group would have swollen to 354 billion. Each American would have to share the available resources with more than eight people.

But, one could argue, this discussion assumes that current population trends will continue, and they may not. Quite so. Most likely the rate of population increase will decline much faster in the US than it will in the other countries, and there does not seem to be much we can do about it. In sharing with "each according to his needs," we must recognize that needs are determined by population size, which is determined by the rate of reproduction, which at present is regarded as a sovereign right of every nation, poor or not. This being so, the philanthropic load created by the sharing ethic of the spaceship can only increase.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS

The fundamental error of spaceship ethics, and the sharing it requires, is that it leads to what I call "the tragedy of the commons." Under a system of private property, the men who own property recognize their responsibility to care for it, for if they don't they will eventually suffer. A farmer, for instance, will allow no more cattle in a pasture than its carrying capacity justifies. If he overloads it, erosion sets in, weeds take over, and he loses the use of the pasture.

If a pasture becomes a commons open to all, the right of each to use it may not be matched by a corresponding responsibility to protect it. Asking everyone to use it with discretion will hardly do, for the considerate herdsman who refrains from overloading the commons suffers more than a selfish one who says his needs are greater. If everyone would restrain himself, all would be well; but it takes only one less than everyone to ruin a system of voluntary restraint. In a crowded world of less-than-perfect human beings, mutual ruin is inevitable if there are no controls. This is the tragedy of the commons.

One of the major tasks of education today should be the creation of such an acute awareness of the dangers of the commons that people will recognize its many varieties. For example, the air and water have become polluted because they are treated as commons. Further growth in the population or per-capita conversion of natural resources into pollutants will only make the problem worse. The same holds true for the fish of the oceans. Fishing fleets have nearly disappeared in many parts of the world, technological improvements in the art of fishing are hastening the day of complete ruin. Only the replacement of the system of the commons with a responsible system of control will save the land, air, water, and oceanic fisheries.

THE WORLD FOOD BANK

In recent years there has been a push to create a new commons called a World Food Bank, an international depository of food reserves to which nations would contribute according to their abilities and from which they would draw according to their needs. This humanitarian proposal has received support from many liberal international groups, and from such prominent citizens as Margaret Mead, UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, and Senators Edward Kennedy and George McGovern.

A world food bank appeals powerfully to our humanitarian impulses. But before we rush ahead with such a plan, let us recognize where the greatest political push comes from, lest we be disillusioned later. Our experience with the Food for Peace program, or Public Law 480, gives us the answer. This program moved billions of dollars worth of US surplus grain to food-short, population-long countries during the past two decades. But when PL 480 first became law, a headline in the business magazine *Forbes* revealed the real power behind it: "Feeding the World's Hungry Millions: How It Will Mean Billions for U.S. Business."

And indeed it did. In the years 1960 to 1970, US taxpayers spent a total of $7.9 billion on the Food for Peace program. Between 1948 and 1970, they also paid an additional $50 billion for other economic-aid programs, some of which went for food and food-producing machinery and technology. Though all US taxpayers were forced to contribute to the cost of PL 480, certain special interest groups gained handsomely under the program. Farmers did not have to contribute the grain; the

Government, or rather the taxpayers, bought it from them at full market prices. The increased demand raised prices of farm products generally. The manufacturers of farm machinery, fertilizers, and pesticides benefited by the farmers' extra efforts to grow more food. Grain elevators profited from storing the surplus until it could be shipped. Railroads made money hauling it to ports, and shipping lines profited from carrying it overseas. The implementation of PL 480 required the creation of a vast Government bureaucracy, which then acquired its own vested interest in continuing the program regardless of its merits.

EXTRACTING DOLLARS

Those who proposed and defended the Food for Peace program in public rarely mentioned its importance to any of these special interests. The public emphasis was always on its humanitarian effects. The combination of silent selfish interests and highly vocal humanitarian apologists made a powerful and successful lobby for extracting money from taxpayers. We can expect the same lobby to push now for the creation of a world food bank.

However great the potential benefit to selfish interests, it should not be a decisive argument against a truly humanitarian program. We must ask if such a program would actually do more good than harm, not only momentarily but also in the long run. Those who propose the food bank usually refer to a current "emergency" or "crisis" in terms of world food supply. But what is an emergency? Although they may be infrequent and sudden, everyone knows that emergencies will occur from time to time. A well-run family, company, organization, or country prepares for the likelihood of accidents and emergencies. It expects them, it budgets for them, it saves for them.

LEARNING THE HARD WAY

What happens if some organizations or countries budget for accidents and others do not? If each country is solely responsible for its own well-being, poorly managed ones will suffer. But they can learn from experience. They may mend their ways, and learn to budget for infrequent but certain emergencies. For example, the weather varies from

\ car to year, and periodic crop failures are certain. A wise and competent government saves out of the production of the good years in anticipation < if bad years to come. Joseph taught this policy to Pharaoh in Egypt more than two thousand years ago. Yet the great majority of the governments in the world today do not follow such a policy. They lack either the wisdom or the competence, or both. Should those nations that do manage to put something aside be forced to come to the rescue each time an emergency occurs among the poor nations?

"But it isn't their fault!" Some kindhearted liberals argue. "How can we blame the poor people who are caught in an emergency? Why must they suffer for the sins of their governments?" The concept of blame is simply not relevant here. The real question is, what are the operational consequences of establishing a world food bank? If it is open to every country every time a need develops, slovenly rulers will not be motivated to take Joseph's advice. Someone will always come to their aid. Some countries will deposit food in the world food bank, and others will withdraw it. There will be almost no overlap. As a result of such solutions to food shortage emergencies, the poor countries will not learn to mend their ways, and will suffer progressively greater emergencies as their populations grow.

POPULATION CONTROL THE CRUDE WAY

On the average, poor countries undergo a 2.5 percent increase in population each year; rich countries, about 0.8 percent. Only rich countries have anything in the way of food reserves set aside, and even they do not have as much as they should. Poor countries have none. If poor countries received no food from the outside, the rate of their population growth would be periodically checked by crop failures and famines. But if they can always draw on a world food bank in time of need, their population can continue to grow unchecked, and so will their "need" for aid. In the short run, a world food bank may diminish that need, but in the long run it actually increases the need without limit.

Without some system of worldwide food sharing, the proportion of people in the rich and poor nations might eventually stabilize. The overpopulated poor countries would decrease in numbers, while the rich countries that had room for more people would increase. But with a

well-meaning system of sharing, such as a world food bank, the growth differential between the rich and the poor countries will not only persist, it will increase. Because of the higher rate of population growth in the poor countries of the world, 88 percent of today's children are born poor, and only 12 percent rich. Year by year the ratio becomes worse, as the fast-reproducing poor outnumber the slow-reproducing rich.

A world food bank is thus a commons in disguise. People will have more motivation to draw from it than to add to any common store. The less provident and less able will multiply at the expense of the abler and more provident, bringing eventual ruin upon all who share in the commons. Besides, any system of "sharing" that amounts to foreign aid from the rich nations to the poor nations will carry the taint of charity, which will contribute little to the world peace so devoutly desired by those who support the idea of a world food bank.

As past US foreign-aid programs have amply and depressingly demonstrated, international charity frequently inspires mistrust and antagonism rather than gratitude on the part of the recipient nation.

CHINESE FISH AND MIRACLE RICE

The modern approach to foreign aid stresses the export of technology and advice rather than money and food. As an ancient Chinese proverb goes: "Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day; teach him how to fish and he will eat for the rest of his days." Acting on this advice, the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations have financed a number of programs for improving agriculture in the hungry nations. Known as the "Green Revolution," these programs have led to the development of "miracle rice" and "miracle wheat," new strains that offer bigger harvests and greater resistance to crop damage. Norman Borlaug, the Nobel Prize-winning agronomist who, supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, developed "miracle wheat," is one of the most prominent advocates of a world food bank.

Whether or not the Green Revolution can increase food production as much as its champions claim is a debatable but possibly irrelevant point. Those who support this well-intended humanitarian effort should first consider some of the fundamentals of human ecology. Ironically, one man who did was the late Alan Gregg, a vice president of the Rockefeller

I i nidation. Two decades ago he expressed strong doubts about the wisdom of such attempts to increase food production. He likened the gr< iwth and spread of humanity over the surface of the earth to the spread ('I cancer in the human body, remarking that "cancerous growths demand tood; but, as far as I know, they have never been cured by getting it."

OVERLOADING THE ENVIRONMENT

I'.very human born constitutes a draft on all aspects of the environment: food, air, water, forests, beaches, wildlife, scenery, and solitude. Food can, perhaps, be significantly increased to meet a growing demand. But what about clean beaches, unspoiled forests, and solitude? If we satisfy a growing population's need for food, we necessarily decrease its per capita supply of the other resources needed by men.

India, for example, now has a population of 600 million, which increases by 15 million each year. This population already puts a huge load on a relatively impoverished environment. The country's forests are now only a small fraction of what they were three centuries ago, and floods and erosion continually destroy the insufficient farmland that remains. Every one of the 15 million new lives added to India's population puts an additional burden on the environment, and increases the economic and social costs of crowding. However humanitarian our intent, every Indian life saved through medical or nutritional assistance from abroad diminishes the quality of life for those who remain, and for subsequent generations. If rich countries make it possible, through foreign aid, for 600 million Indians to swell to 1.2 billion in a mere twenty-eight years, as their current growth rate threatens, will future generations of Indians thank us for hastening the destruction of their environment? Will our good intentions be sufficient excuse for the consequences of our actions?

My final example of a commons in action is one for which the public has the least desire for rational discussion—immigration. Anyone who publicly questions the wisdom of current US immigration policy is promptly charged with bigotry, prejudice, ethnocentrism, chauvinism, isolationism, or selfishness. Rather than encounter such accusations, one would rather talk about other matters, leaving immigration policy to wallow in the crosscurrents of special interests that take no account of the good of the whole, or the interests of posterity.

Perhaps we still feel guilty about things we said in the past. Two generations ago the popular press frequently referred to Dagos, Wops, Polacks, Chinks, and Krauts in articles about how America was being "overrun" by foreigners of supposedly inferior genetic stock. But because the implied inferiority of foreigners was used then as justification for keeping them out, people now assume that restrictive policies could only be based on such misguided notions. There are other grounds.

A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS

Just consider the numbers involved. Our Government acknowledges a net inflow of 400,000 immigrants a year. While we have no hard data on the extent of illegal entries, educated guesses put the figure at about 600,000 a year. Since the natural increase (excess of births over deaths) of the resident population now runs about 1.7 million per year, the yearly gain from immigration amounts to at least 19 percent of the total annual increase, and may be as much as 37 percent if we include the estimate for illegal immigrants. Considering the growing use of birth-control devices, the potential effect of educational campaigns by such organizations as Planned Parenthood Federation of America and Zero Population Growth, and the influence of inflation and the housing shortage, the fertility rate of American women may decline so much that immigration could account for all the yearly increase in population. Should we not at least ask if that is what we want?

For the sake of those who worry about whether the "quality" of the average immigrant compares favorably with the quality of the average resident, let us assume that immigrants and native-born citizens are of exactly equal quality, however one defines that term. We will focus here only on quantity; and since our conclusions will depend on nothing else, all charges of bigotry and chauvinism become irrelevant.

IMMIGRATION VS. FOOD SUPPLY

World food banks move food to the people, hastening the exhaustion of the environment of the poor countries. Unrestricted immigration, on the other hand, moves people to the food, thus speeding up the destruction of the environment of the rich countries. We can easily understand why

I""'>i people should want to make this latter transfer, but why should lll Ii hosts encourage it?

As in the case of foreign-aid programs, immigration receives support from selfish interests and humanitarian impulses.The primary selfish interest in unimpeded immigration is the desire of employers for cheap labor, particularly in industries and trades that offer degrading work. In t lie past, one wave of foreigners after another was brought into the US to work at wretched jobs for wretched wages. In recent years the Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans have had this dubious honor.The interests (>f the employers of cheap labor mesh well with the guilty silence of the country's liberal intelligentsia. White Anglo-Saxon Protestants are particularly reluctant to call for a closing of the doors to immigration for fear of being called bigots.

But not all countries have such reluctant leadership. Most educated Hawaiians, for example, are keenly aware of the limits of their environment, particularly in terms of population growth. There is only so much room on the islands, and the islanders know it. To Hawaiians, immigrants from the other forty-nine states present as great a threat as those from other nations. At a recent meeting of Hawaiian government officials in Honolulu, I had the ironic delight of hearing a speaker, who like most of his audience, was of Japanese ancestry, ask how the country might practically and constitutionally close its doors to further immigration. One member of the audience countered: "How can we shut the doors now? We have many friends and relatives in Japan that we'd like to bring here someday so that they can enjoy Hawaii, too." The Japanese-American speaker smiled sympathetically and answered: "Yes, but we have children now, and someday we'll have grandchildren, too. We can bring more people here from Japan only by giving away some of the land that we hope to pass on to our grandchildren someday. What right do we have to do that?"

At this point, I can hear US liberals asking: "How can you justify slamming the door once you're inside? You say that immigrants should be kept out. But aren't we all immigrants, or the descendants of immigrants? If we insist on staying, must we not admit all others?" Our craving for intellectual order leads us to seek and prefer symmetrical rules and morals: a single rule for me and everybody else; the same rule yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Justice, we feel, should not change with time and place.

We Americans of non-Indian ancestry can look upon ourselves as the descendants of thieves who are guilty morally, if not legally, of stealing this land from its Indian owners. Should we then give back the land to the now-living American descendants of those Indians? However morally or logically sound this proposal may be, I, for one, am unwilling to live by it and I know no one else who is. Besides, the logical consequence would be absurd. Suppose that, intoxicated with a sense of pure justice, we should decide to turn our land over to the Indians. Since all our other wealth has also been derived from the land, wouldn't we be morally obliged to give that back to the Indians, too?

PURE JUSTICE VS. REALITY

Clearly, the concept of pure justice produces an infinite regression to absurdity. Centuries ago, wise men invented statutes of limitations to justify the rejection of such pure justice, in the interest of preventing continual disorder. The law zealously defends property rights, but only relatively recent property rights. Drawing a line after an arbitrary time has elapsed may be unjust, but the alternatives are worse.

We are all the descendants of thieves, and the world's resources are inequitably distributed. But we must begin the journey to tomorrow from the point where we are today. We cannot remake the past. We cannot safely divide the wealth equitably among all peoples so long as people reproduce at different rates. To do so would guarantee that our grandchildren, and everyone else's grandchildren, would have only a ruined world to inhabit.

To be generous with one's own possessions is quite different from being generous with those of posterity. We should call this point to the attention of those who, from a commendable love of justice and equality, would institute a system of the commons, either in the form of a world food bank, or of unrestricted immigration. We must convince them if we wish to save at least some parts of the world from environmental ruin.

Without a true world government to control reproduction and the use of available resources, the sharing ethic of the spaceship is impossible. For the foreseeable future, our survival demands that we govern our actions by the ethics of a lifeboat, harsh though they may be. Posterity will be satisfied with nothing less.

8. ONORA O'NEILL

O'Neill considers what three different kinds of moral theory say ought to be done about hunger and famine. She criticizes utilitarianism for requiring calculations that we are unable to make and for failing to prioritize human needs. Against theories that take human rights as basic, O'Neill points out that they are divided on the issue of whether some "welfare" rights—such as a right to subsistence—are human rights. Those who deny that such rights are human rights neglect human needs, she argues, while those who endorse such rights have yet to show convincingly who bears the correlative obligations. Many human rights theorists also fall short by denying that there are obligations of humanity or beneficence. O'Neill herself advocates a third kind of theorizing that takes human obligations as basic and, in particular, the Kantian obligation never to act in ways in which others cannot in principle also act. Such a theory, she argues, provides a better normative response to hunger and famine than utilitarianism and human rights approaches.

Rights, Obligations and World Hunger

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HUNGER AND FAMINE

Some of the facts of world hunger and poverty are now widely known. Among them are the following six:

1. World population is now over 5 billion and rising rapidly. It will exceed 6 billion by end of this century.

2. In many Third World countries, investment and growth have so far concentrated in an urbanized modern sector, whose benefits reach a minority.

3. In many poor countries, the number of destitute and landless increases even when there is economic growth.

4. In many African countries, harvests have been falling for two decades and dependence on imported grain is growing.

5. The rich countries of the North (for these purposes "the North" means the countries of North America, the EEC, and Australasia!) grow vast surpluses of grain. The grain that goes to poor countries is mostly sold.

6. The rural poor of the Third World are sometimes harmed by grain imports, which are distributed in towns, so depriving peasants of customers for their crops. These peasants then migrate to shantytowns.

And then there is Ethiopia. We can understand the famine in Ethiopia better in the wider context of world hunger. Famines are not unexpected natural catastrophes, but simply the harshest extreme of hunger. We know well enough where in the world poverty and hunger are constantly bad enough for minor difficulties to escalate into famine. Ethiopia had its last famine only ten years ago. We know which other regions in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are now vulnerable to famines. Famine is the tip of the iceberg of hunger. It is the bit that is publicized and to which we react; but the greater part of the suffering is less lurid and better hidden.

Most hungry people are not migrating listlessly or waiting for the arrival of relief supplies. They are leading their normal lives with their normal economic, social, and familial situations, earning and growing what they normally earn or grow, yet are always poor and often hungry. These normal conditions are less spectacular than famine, but affect far more people.

We are tempted to set famine aside from other, endemic hunger and poverty. We blame natural catastrophes such as floods, drought,

light, or cold for destroying crops and producing famines. But harsh 11 cumstances cause famines only when social and economic structures .ire too fragile to absorb such natural shocks. Californians know that >lcsert climates need not lead to famines. Minnesotans know that a terocious winter need not be reflected in countless annual deaths from i old. Yet both regions would have catastrophic annual mortality if they lacked appropriate social and economic structures. Many natural v atastrophes produce human catastrophes only when social structures are inadequate.

FOCUS ON ACTION

We could list the facts of world hunger, poverty, and famine endlessly. But facts alone do not tell us what to do. What surely matters is action. But here we meet a problem. Which action we advocate depends partly on our perception of the facts, and this perception itself depends partly on the particular ethical outlook we adopt. Both our perception of problems and our prescriptions for action reflect our ethical theory. Ethical theories are not elegant trimmings that decorate our reasoning about practical problems. They determine our entire focus. They lead us to see certain facts and principles as salient and others as insubstantial. They focus our action—or our inertia.

I shall here consider three theories of what ought to be done about hunger and famine. Two are widely known and discussed in present debates in the English-speaking world, while the third, though in many ways older and more familiar, now receives rather less public attention. I shall offer certain criticisms of the two prevailing approaches and recommend the third to your attention.

The first approach is one that makes human happiness and well-being the standard for assessing action. Its most common modern version is *utilitarianism.* For utilitarians, all ethical requirements are basically a matter of beneficence to others. The second approach takes respect for human rights as basic and interprets the central issues of world hunger as matters of justice, which can be secured if all rights are respected. The third approach takes fulfillment of human obligations as basic and insists that these obligations include both obligations of justice and obligations of help or beneficence to others, and above

all to others in need. Since no famine policy or development strategy would be adequate if it guided only individual action, all three of these positions will be considered as ways in which public and institutional policies as well as individual action might be guided.

MEASURING AND MAXIMIZING HAPPINESS

The central idea of all ethical reasoning that focuses on consequences or results is that action is right if it produces good results. The specifically utilitarian version of such thinking insists that the goodness of results be assessed by their contribution to total human happiness, and specifically that the best results are those that maximize human happiness. This position is very familiar to many of us because restricted versions of it are incorporated in economic theory and in business practice, and often used in daily decision making. It leads naturally to the question: What will maximize human happiness?

This seems such a simple question, but it has been given many unclear answers. Even discussions of hunger and famine, where the means to greater happiness may seem obvious, jangle with incompatible claims. The debates of the last decade show radical disagreements between utilitarian writers on world hunger.

The Australian philosopher Peter Singer has used simple economic considerations to argue that any serious utilitarian should undertake radical redistribution of his or her possessions and income to the poor. Standard marginalist considerations suggest that we can increase happiness by transferring resources from the rich to the poor. Any unhappiness caused by the loss of a luxury—such as a car—will be more than outweighed by the happiness produced by using the same funds to buy essential food for the hungry.

But the United States writer on famine, population, and ecological problems, Garrett Hardin, argues on the contrary that help to the poorest is forbidden on utilitarian grounds because it will in the end lead to the greatest misery. Drawing on the thought of the early-nineteenth-century economist and population theorist Thomas Malthus, he argues that food given to the poor will lead to population increases and ultimately to more people than can be fed and so ultimately to devastating famine and maximal misery.

It is an urgent practical question whether utilitarians can resolve these disagreements. The founder of utilitarianism, the late-eighteenth-century radical philosopher and polemicist Jeremy Bentham, thought we could do so with scientific rigor: It was only a matter of measuring and aggregating seven dimensions of human happiness. To help us he provided a pithy mnemonic verse in his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and of Legislation:*

> *Intense, long, certain, speedy,fruitful,pure,*—Such marks *vcvpleasures* and in *pains* endure. Such pleasures seek if *private* be thy end: If it be *public* wide let them *extend.*[1]

But this is simply not enough. Despite the recurrent optimism of some economists and decision theorists about measuring happiness in limited contexts, we know we cannot generally predict or measure or aggregate happiness with any precision.

ACCURACY, PRECISION, AND NEEDS

Yet we can, it seems, often make approximate judgments of human happiness. And perhaps that is enough. After all, we do not need great precision, but only reasonable (even if vague) accuracy. We know that hunger and destitution mean misery and that enough to eat ends that sort of misery. Do we need to know more?

If we are to be utilitarians, we do need to know more. We need not only to know what general result to aim at, but to work out what means to take. Since very small changes in actions and policies may vastly alter results, precise comparisons of many results are indispensable. Examples of some unsuspected results of intended beneficence make the point vivid. Some food aid policies have actually harmed those whom they were intended to benefit or to benefit those who were not in the first place the poorest. (This is not to say that food aid is dispensable—especially in cases of famine—but it is never enough to end misery, and it can be damaging if misdirected.) Some aid policies aimed at raising standards of life, for example by encouraging farmers to grow cash crops, have damaged the livelihood of subsistence farmers, and harmed the poorest. The benefits of aid are often diverted to those who are not in

the greatest need. The ubiquity of corruption also shows how essential it is for utilitarians to make precise and not vague judgments about how to increase human happiness. Benevolent intentions are quite easy to identify; but beneficent policies cannot be identified if we cannot predict and compare results precisely.

To do their calculations, utilitarians need not only precise measurements of happiness, but precise prediction of which policies lead to which results. They need the sort of comprehensive and predictive social science to which many researchers have aspired, but not attained. At present we cannot resolve even very basic disagreements between rival utilitarians. We cannot show whether happiness is maximized by attending to nearby desires where we can intervene personally (even if these are desires that reflect no needs), or by concentrating all our help on the neediest. Indeed, we often know too little even to predict which public policies will benefit the poor most.

If utilitarians somehow developed the precise methods of prediction and calculation that they lack, the results might not endorse help for the poor. Utilitarian thinking assigns no special importance to human need. Happiness produced by meeting the desires of those around us—even their desires for unneeded goods—may count as much as, or more than, happiness produced by ending real misery. All that matters is which desire is more intense. Since the neediest may be so weakened and apathetic that they no longer have strong desires, their need may count less and not more in a utilitarian calculus. But we know that charity that begins at home, where others' desires are evident to us, can find so much to do there that it often ends at home, too. So we can see that unless needs are given a certain priority in ethical thinking, they may be greatly neglected.

Meanwhile, utilitarian thinking unavoidably leaves vital dilemmas unclarified and unresolved. Was it beneficent, and so right, to negotiate massive development loans, although soaring interest rates have meant that much of poor countries' export earnings are now swallowed by interest payments? The present rich countries developed during a period of low and stable interest rates: They now control the ground rules of a world economy that does not provide that context of opportunity for remaining poor countries. Has it been happiness maximizing to provide development loans for poor countries in these conditions? Might happiness not be greater if poor countries had relied on lesser but

indigenous sources of investment? Or would the cost of slower growth have been a larger total of human misery that could have been avoided by higher interest rates?

These are bitter questions, and I do not know the answer in general or for particular countries. I raise them as an example of the difficulty of relying on predictions and calculations about maximal happiness in determining what ought to be done, and what it would be wrong to do.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The difficulties of utilitarian thinking may seem to arise from its ambitious scope. Utilitarianism tries to encompass the whole of morality under a single principle, and to select acts and policies that are not only right, but best or optimal. One alternative might be to aim for rather less. This might be done by looking at principles for evaluating acts and rejecting those that are wrong, rather than at grand proposals to find just those acts and policies that provide optimal results.

The most common contemporary embodiment of this approach is that of the human rights movement, which I shall consider next. The rhetoric of human rights is all around us—perhaps never more so than at present in the English-speaking world, and particularly in the United States. The sources of the rhetoric are well known. The earlier ones are the grand eighteenth-century documents, such as Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man,* and the declaration of rights of the United States and the French revolutions. The more recent growth of concern for human rights reflects a considerable revival of such thinking in the post-World War II search for foundations for a new international order, which gave rise to various United Nations documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The modern human rights movement gained impetus from the commitment of the Carter administration to a foreign policy that hoped to secure respect for human rights in other countries. While the Reagan administration and the Thatcher government have not taken a comprehensive commitment to human rights to heart, both have based their political outlook on a certain restricted picture of human rights, in which rights to property and one range of economic freedoms are given special emphasis. All these approaches take the central ethical requirement in human affairs to be respect for justice and construe justice as a matter of respect for rights.

LIBERTY RIGHTS AND WELFARE RIGHTS

Within the tradition of discussion of human rights there is considerable disagreement about the list of rights that justice comprises. In general terms, the more right-wing proponents of the tradition assert that there are only rights to liberty, hence that we have only the corresponding obligations of noninterference with others' liberty. Other more left-wing proponents of human rights assert that there are also certain "welfare" rights, hence certain positive obligations to help and assist others. Those who think that all rights are liberty rights point to supposed rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, including the right to unregulated economic activity. On this view it is unjust to interfere with others'exercise of democratic political rights or capitalist economic rights. Those who think that there are also "welfare" rights point to supposed rights to food or basic health care or welfare payments. Since rights to unregulated economic activity are incompatible with these, they reject unrestricted economic "rights."

These disagreements cannot be settled by appeal to documents. The United Nations documents were a political compromise and resolutely confer *all* sorts of rights. Proponents of liberty rights therefore think that these documents advocate some spurious "rights,"which are neither part of nor compatible with justice. However, it is worth remembering that this political compromise has in fact been accepted by nearly all governments, who therefore have a prima facie institutionalized treaty obligation to enact both liberty and "welfare" rights. This can be an awkward point given that many people in the West tend to fault the Eastern bloc countries for their violation of liberty rights but to overlook the systematic denial in the West of certain economic and welfare rights (such as a right to employment), which the international documents endorse.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMAN NEEDS

It matters hugely for the destitute which interpretation of rights is acceptable and is used to guide policies and decisions. If human rights are all liberty rights, then justice to the poor and hungry is achieved by laissez-faire—provided we do not curtail their liberties, all is just. For example, if a transnational suddenly closes its operations in a poor

country, so devastating the local economy, no injustice has been done. Or if the IMF requires severe economic retrenchment so that interest payments can be made, this is just, whatever hardships are inflicted. Or if commodity price shifts leave those who depend on a single cash crop—such as coffee, rubber, or palm oil—greatly impoverished, this is just, since no liberties will have been violated. If all human rights are liberty rights, then the needs of the poor are of no concern in working out what may be done without injustice.

But if some human rights are welfare or economic rights, justice will require that some of these needs be met. For example, if there are rights to food or to subsistence, then it is unjust not to meet these needs, and unjust not to regulate any economic activities that will prevent their being met. However, any claim that there are "welfare" rights is mere rhetoric unless the corresponding obligations are justified and allocated. And here the advocates of human rights are often evasive. It is a significant and not a trivial matter that there is no human obligations movement.

RIGHTS, LIBERTY, AND AUTONOMY

These disputes cannot be settled unless we can show which rights there are. The eighteenth-century pioneers often claimed that certain rights were self-evident. This claim now seems brazen, and in any case cannot settle disputes between the advocates of different sets of rights. The most impressive line of argument aimed at settling these disputes takes it that human rights constitute collectively the largest possible realization of human *liberty* or of human *autonomy*. However, even if we could justify assuming that either liberty or autonomy is the most fundamental of moral concerns, these two approaches lead to quite divergent claims about what rights there are. In addition, the advocates of each approach often disagree among themselves about exactly which rights there are.

Those who think that what is fundamental is *liberty*, understood as mere, "negative" noninterference by others, allow only for liberty rights. The idea of a consistent partitioning of human liberty would collapse as soon as we try to add rights to receive help or services, for the obligations that make these "welfare" rights a reality will be

incompatible with various rights of action that basic liberty rights include. If we are obligated to provide food for all who need it, we cannot have unrestricted rights to do what we want with any food we have. At best certain societies may use their liberty rights to set up institutionalized rights to certain benefits—e.g., to education, welfare, health care—as has been done in most of the economically advanced nations. But an institutionalized right is not a natural or human right. The rights institutionalized in the developed countries have no bearing on the hunger and poverty in the Third World, where such rights have not been set up.

Those who think that it is autonomy rather than mere noninterference that is fundamental insist that there are some "welfare" rights to goods and services, such as a right to subsistence. For without adequate nutrition and shelter, human autonomy is destroyed, and liberty rights themselves would be pointless. But the advocates of subsistence rights have so far produced no convincing arguments to show who should bear obligations to feed others. Yet this is the question that matters most if "rights to subsistence" are to meet human needs.

RIGHTS AND CHARITY

Many advocates of human rights point out that we should not worry too much if rights theory neglects human needs. We should remember that justice is not the whole of morality, which can also require voluntarily given help. The needs of the poor can be met by charity. This thought appeals to many people. But it is an unconvincing one in the context of a theory of human rights. The rights perspective itself undercuts the status of charity, regarding it not as any sort of obligation, but as something that we are free to do or to omit, a matter of supererogation rather than of obligation. Such a view of help for the needy may be comfortable for the "haves" of this world, since it suggests that they go beyond duty and do something especially good if they help others at all. But it is depressing for the "have-nots" who cannot claim help of anybody, since it is not a matter of right. They can just hope help will happen; and usually what happens will be witheringly inadequate.

HUMAN AGENCY, RIGHTS, AND OBLIGATIONS

Justice need not be understood in the terms either of the human rights movement or of the utilitarian view of justice as just one contribution among others to human happiness. One way in which a different approach can be taken is by looking first at obligations rather than at rights. This has been a standard approach to ethical questions, both before and throughout the Christian tradition. Rights are eighteenth-century upstarts in moral discourse, as is the elevation of individual happiness to be the arbiter of moral judgment. Both these approaches see human beings in a somewhat passive way. This is plain enough in the utilitarian picture of human beings as loci of pains and pleasures. But it is less obvious that men and women are seen as passive in the theory of human rights. On the contrary, the turn to rights is sometimes defended on the grounds that it assigns a more active role to the powerless, who are to see themselves as wronged claimants rather than as the humble petitioners of more traditional, feudal pictures.

It is true that the human rights movement sees human beings *more* as agents than did feudal and utilitarian theories. But it still does not see them as fully autonomous: Claimants basically agitate for others to act. When we claim liberty rights or rights of authority, our first demand is that others act, so yielding us a space or opportunity in which we may or may not act. When we claim "welfare" rights, we need not picture ourselves as acting at all, but must see whoever bears the corresponding obligations as acting. By contrast, when we talk about obligations, we are speaking directly to those agents and agencies with the power to produce or refuse changes—the very audience that the rights perspective addresses only indirectly.

The French philosopher Simone Weil, writing during the Second World War, put the point this way in *The Need for Roots:*

> The notion of obligations comes before that of rights, which is subordinate and relative to the former. A right is not effectual by itself, but only in relation to the obligation to which it corresponds, the effective exercise of a right springing not from the individual who possesses it, but from other men who consider themselves as being under a certain obligation towards him.[2]

We do not know what a right amounts to until we know who has what obligation to do what for whom under which circumstances. When we try to be definite about rights, we always have to talk about obligations.

A fundamental difficulty with the rhetoric of rights is that it addresses only part—and the less powerful part—of the relevant audience. This rhetoric may have results if the poor are not wholly powerless; but where they are, claiming rights provides meager pickings. When the poor are powerless, it is the powerful who must be convinced that they have certain obligations—whether or not the beneficiaries claim the performance of these obligations as their right. The first concern of an ethical theory that focuses on action should be obligations, rather than rights.

WHAT OBLIGATIONS OF JUSTICE ARE THERE?

A theory of obligations can help deliberation about world hunger only if it is possible to show what obligations human beings have. The effort to show this without reliance on theological assumptions was made in the eighteenth century by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Recently Kant's work has often been seen as one more theory of human rights. This may be because he based his argument for human obligations on a construction analogous to that used in thinking of human rights as a partitioning of maximal human liberty or autonomy. For he asks what principles of action could consistently be shared by all agents. The root idea behind such a system of principles is that human obligations are obligations never to act in ways in which others cannot in principle also act. The fundamental principles of action must be shareable, rather than principles available only to a privileged few. Kant's method of determining the principles of obligation cannot be applied to the superficial detail of action: We evidently cannot eat the very grain another eats or have every one share the same roof. But we can try to see that the deep principles of our lives and of our institutions are shareable by all, and then work out the implications of these deep principles for particular situations.

If we use the Kantian construction, we can reach some interesting conclusions about human obligations. One obligation of justice that

e merges from the construction is that of noncoercion. For a fundamental principle of coercion in some matter cannot be shared by all, since those who are coerced are prevented from acting, and so cannot share the principle of action. Coercion, we might say with Kant, is not *universalizable.*

This argument alone does not tell us what noncoercion requires in particular situations. Clearly it rules out many things that respect for liberty rights rules out. For example, a principle of noncoercion rules out killing, maiming, assaulting, and threatening others. This range of obligations not to coerce are as important for the well fed as for the hungry. But other aspects of noncoercion are peculiarly important for the hungry. Those who aim to act on a principle of noncoercion must take account of the fact that it is always rather easy to coerce those who are weak or vulnerable by activities that would not coerce richer or more powerful people.

Avoiding coercion is not just a matter of avoiding a short list of interferences in others'action, as rights approaches would have us imagine. Avoiding coercion means making sure that in our dealings with others we leave them room either to accept or to refuse the offers and suggestions made. This shows why an emphasis on obligations not to coerce is particularly telling in evaluating our dealings with the poor: They are so easily coerced. We can make them "offers they cannot refuse" with the greatest of ease. What might be genuine offers among equals, which others can accept or reject, can be threatening and unrefusable for the needy and vulnerable.They can be harmed in ways that threaten life by standard commercial or legal procedures, such as business deals that locate dangerous industrial processes in urban areas, or exact stiff political concessions for investment, or for what passes as aid, or that set harsh commercial conditions on "aid," such as mandating unneeded imports from a "donor" nation.

Arrangements of these sorts can coerce even when they use the outward forms of commercial bargaining and legality. These forms of bargaining are designed for use between agents of roughly equal power. They may not be enough to protect the powerless. Hence both individuals and agencies such as corporations and national governments (both of the North and of the South) and aid agencies must meet exacting standards if they are not to coerce the vulnerable in ordinary legal, diplomatic, and commercial

dealings. Economic or material justice cannot be achieved without avoiding institutionalized as well as individual forms of coercion.

A second fundamental obligation of justice is that of avoiding deception. A principle of deception, too, is not universalizable, because victims of deception, like victims of coercion, are in principle precluded from sharing the perpetrator's principle of action, which is kept hidden from them. However, since the obligation of nondeception is relevant to all public and political life, and not solely for dealings that affect the poor, the hungry, and the vulnerable (although they are more easily deceived), I shall not explore its implications here.

OBLIGATIONS TO HELP: EMERGENCY RELIEF, DEVELOPMENT, AND RESPECT

In a rights framework, the whole of our moral obligations are brought under the heading of justice. But an obligations approach of the Kantian type also justifies obligations that are not obligations of justice and whose performance cannot be claimed as rights. Some types of action cannot be done for all others, so they cannot be a universal obligation or have corresponding rights. Yet they also are not contingent on any special relationship, so they cannot be a matter of special, institutionalized obligation. Yet they can be a matter of obligation. A theory of obligation, unlike a theory of rights, can allow for "imperfect" obligations, which are not allocated to specified recipients and so cannot be claimed.

This provides a further way in which an appreciation of need can enter into a theory of human obligations. We know that others in need are vulnerable and not self-sufficient. It follows that, even if they are not coerced, they may be unable to act, and so unable to become or remain autonomous agents who could act on principles that can be universally shared. Hence, if our fundamental commitment is to treat others as agents who could share the same principles that we act on, then we must be committed equally to strategies and policies that enable them to become and to remain agents. If we do anything less, we do not view others as doers like ourselves. However, nobody and no agent can do everything to sustain the autonomy of all others. Hence obligations to help are not and cannot be obligations to meet all needs; but they can be obligations not to base our lives on principles that are indifferent to

r neglectful of others' need and what it actually takes to sustain their agency. In particular situations such "imperfect" obligations may require specific and arduous action. The fact that we cannot help everyone only shows that we have no obligation to help everyone, and not that we have no obligation to help anyone.

If we are not indifferent or neglectful of the requirements for sustaining others' autonomy we will, I suggest, find ourselves committed not only to justice but to various further principles in our action toward the poor and vulnerable. First we will be committed to material help that sustains agency, by helping people over the threshold of poverty below which possibilities for autonomous action are absent or meager. Since sustained and systematic help is needed if vulnerability and dependence are not to recur endlessly, this implies a commitment to development policies as well as to emergency food aid.

Unreliable aid does not secure autonomy. But nor, of course, can withholding food aid in emergencies secure autonomy. Since human needs are recurrent, food aid is not enough. Food is eaten and is gone; help can secure others' agency only if it constructs social and economic institutions that can meet human needs on a sustained basis.This means that help to the poorest and most vulnerable must seek sustainable production to make sure that when a given cycle of consumption is past, more is in the pipeline. Development of the relevant sort is evidently not only an economic matter, it also includes the development of human skills by appropriate education and institutional changes that help poor and vulnerable people to gain some control over their lives.

Since the basis of these obligations to help is the claim that principles of action must be shareable by all, the pursuit of development must not itself reduce or damage others' agency. It must not fail to respect those who are helped. Their desires and views must be sought, and their participation respected. Agency is not fostered if the poor experience "donor" agencies as new oppressors. Others'autonomy is not sustained if they are left feeling that they have been the victims of good works.

CONCLUSIONS AND AFTERTHOUGHTS

The theory of obligations just sketched is surprisingly familiar to most of us. It is not distant from pictures of human obligation that we find

in the Christian tradition, and in the idiom of much of our social life. And it chimes closely with other traditions, too. Many of the voluntary aid agencies are fond of quoting a Chinese proverb that runs: Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him to fish and you feed him for life. President Reagan too has quoted this saying.

Although the position is traditional and familiar, the favored ethical theories of today do not endorse it. Utilitarian perspectives endorse the pursuit of happiness without specific concern to meet needs; human rights perspectives do not vindicate obligations to help those in need. It therefore seems appropriate to end with some polemical questions rather than a feeling of reassurance. How and why have we allowed uncertain images of maximal happiness and self-centered visions of claiming human rights to distort our understanding of central ethical notions such as justice, beneficence, and respect for human agents? Why have so many people been sure that our obligations to others are a matter of not interfering in their concern—of doing... nothing?

If human obligations are based on the requirements for respecting and securing one another's agency, then we may find another of Simone Weil's remarks to the point:

> The obligation is only performed if the respect is effectively expressed in a real, not a fictitious, way; and this can only be done through the medium of Man's earthly needs. . . . On this point, the human conscience has never varied. Thousands of years ago, the Egyptians believed that no soul could justify itself after death unless it could say,"I have never let anyone suffer from hunger." All Christians know they are liable to hear Christ say to them one day, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat." Every one looks on progress as being, in the first place, a transition to a state of human society in which people will not suffer from hunger.[3]

To make that transition is indeed no longer a matter of feeding the beggar at the gate. Modern opportunities are broader and demand political as well as—perhaps more than—merely individual action. Of course, no individual can do everything. But this will daunt only those who are riveted by an exclusively individual conception of human endeavor and success. If we remember that many human activities and successes are not individual, we need not be daunted. We can then act

ii the knowledge that no individual and no institution is prevented !h>m making those decisions within its power in ways that help fulfill i it her than spurn obligations to the hungry.

NOTES

1. Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and of Legislation* (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1948), p. 29.
2. Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* (New York Harper 8c Row, 1952), p. 3.
3. Ibid., p. 6.