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Measuring Social Development: Theoretical and Ethical Considerations

by
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Abstract
This paper surveys the various leading options as a metric for measuring the level of development in a society. It is then argued that the appropriate metric will be value-laden in a (fairly) rich sense. One metric is then shown to have substantial advantages in this regard.

Warning to readers: Some of the material in this paper is from papers that I have presented previously of published elsewhere. (In particular the section on Singer's case, and the decision procedure it leads to, I have taken from previous papers—though it is used here for a somewhat different purpose. The sections on the cultural imperialism objection are slightly modified versions of materials I presented to the joint CASID/CIDA sessions at the HSSFC meetings in Toronto this past spring.) However, some of the material is new and it is put together in different ways so that some of the connections between the basic goods approach and other approaches to questions of international justice will, I hope, be more clear.

Approaches to measuring development

Suppose we want to measure how developed a society is but are not sure how to proceed with this task. Two approaches—the visionary approach and the pedestrian approach—might suggest themselves. Those who adopt the visionary approach would first figure out exactly what it is for a society to be fully developed and then try to measure to what degree the society in question had that (no doubt complex) property. The pedestrian approach would begin by considering all the things we actually can measure (with the resources available to us and with the requisite degree of accuracy) and figure out which of those having more of counts towards saying a society is developed and measure those characteristics. Both approaches have, in addition to their obvious advantages, fatal flaws. And figuring out what are the merits and flaws in each approach will, I suggest, help us see some important matters more clearly.

Some notes on measurement

Since I am going to be talking about different ways of measuring development, let me begin with some commonplace observations about the nature and logic of measurement. The most widely cited definition of measurement comes from S. S. Steven who said that "Measurement [is] the assignment of numerals to objects or events according to [a] rule, any rule".[1] Suppose that we measure the temperature in both Halifax and Montevideo and we find that the temperature reading is higher in Halifax than Montevideo. From this we can infer that it is warmer in Halifax than in Montevideo. And, given what we now know about

[1] Quoted in James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement and Moral Importance*, page 93.

warmth, we can go on to infer that the mean kinetic energy is greater in Halifax than it is in Montevideo. But notice what we cannot do. Though we can *infer* from Halifax's higher temperature that it is warmer, we cannot *explain* the greater warmth in Halifax by citing the higher temperature. We cannot say that Halifax is warmer than Montevideo because the mercury climbs higher in the former city than it does in the latter. (In fact, it is the other way around, the mercury's climbing higher in Halifax than in Montevideo is explained by the fact that it is warmer in Halifax than in Montevideo.) As David Gauthier notes, "Measures do not themselves serve explanatory roles".[2]

Furthermore though we—knowing what we do about the nature of heat—can, from the fact that the temperature is higher in Halifax than in Montevideo, infer that the mean kinetic energy is higher in Halifax than in Montevideo, this inference is only warranted because we know all the following things:

- the temperature is higher in Halifax than in Montevideo
- temperature is a measure of heat
- heat is mean kinetic energy.

Were we lacking any of these distinct bits of information our inference would not be warranted. This brings us to the next point. The measure of something need not tell you about the true nature of the thing being measured. People were making quite accurate measures of temperature long before they discovered that temperature is mean kinetic energy. That is to say, they knew of the correlation between the amount that mercury expanded and the amount of warmth. But what

[2] David Gauthier in *Morals by Agreement* page 23. Gauthier's discussion of this point is an admirably clear one.

these two phenomena really amount to or what causal relations obtain between them was not fully understood. Furthermore, people knew a whole lot about how to make something warmer or colder long before they knew the true nature of heat. So, the ability to measure something does not entail knowledge of the nature of the thing being measured. And a lack of knowledge of the true nature of something does not entail an inability to know quite a lot about how to cause the thing we (still) don't fully understand. (If we had to know the true nature of things before we knew how to manipulate them our species would not have survived.) Of course, understanding the true nature of something often will tell one a lot about how to cause that thing. But how to cause something, how to measure it, and what its true nature is are three logically distinct questions.

We need also to distinguish between ordinal and cardinal measurement systems. An ordinal measure simply ranks the items being measured from most to least, without any indication of the relative strengths or weights that the items being measured have. So we might observe that Albert is taller than Betty who is taller than Carol. From this we can infer such things as that Albert is taller than Carol, that Carol is shorter than both Betty and Albert, and even that the difference in height between Albert and Carol is greater than that between Betty and Carol. But beyond this we cannot say very much. Cardinal scales give us more information. These measures give us not just a ranking but also an interval measure between those items being ranked. It is important to know whether a cardinal scale gives only an interval ranking or more. Thus if Albert it one meter tall, Betty 80cm and Carol 50 we can say that Albert is twice as tall as Carol. But this kind of inference

is not always warranted from the fact that we have a cardinal scale. To return to our original example of temperature, the Celsius scale is a cardinal temperature scale. And so we can say that the "difference between 30°C and 50°C is twice that between 20 °C and 30 °C. But 40 °C is not twice as hot as 20 °C".[3]

Of course, some cardinal scales tell you more than just intervals. Measurements of distance, mass, and even temperature (on the Kelvin scale) tell you intervals plus absolute amounts (relative to some system). It might seem that ideally for any given thing we want to measure, we would have a cardinal measurement scale which gave us absolute amounts of the thing measured. But this is not so. Consider utility, understood as a measure of preference. Here having an interval (rather than an absolute) scale tells the economist all she needs to know and tells it in away that avoids devastatingly difficult philosophic issues such as where the zero point should be—the issue simply does not matter as the assignment is arbitrary and any assignment of zero will do equally well.[4]

Essentially contested concepts

Thus far, I have spoken of the measurement of things used in various sciences. There is an important difference between things such as heat, height, weight, and even utility (*qua* measure of preference) and things like development. While there has been controversy over what heat, or height, or weight really is and controversy over how best to measure such things, these controversies take a different form from the controversies over what development is and how best to measure it.

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[3] Gauthier, page 63.

[4] Of course, some assignments make calculation a bit more difficult. But this can always be avoided by changing the zero point on the scale.

To see this consider different ways we might disagree over how developed a society is. One way is when we share a common conception of the concept of development but disagree over the issue of how much of that agreed upon conception the society we are examining actually has. Thus, to take a deliberately simplistic example, suppose you and I agree that the level of development of a society is a function of some characteristic of the individuals in that society, say how happy they are. So we are both inclined to be, say, Millian average utilitarians. But you think that the right way to measure how happy people are is to see how often and broadly they smile while I think that the proper way to measure happiness is to ask people how happy they are. So you go around taping people's faces and I go around handing out questionnaires asking people to rank themselves on a scale of –10 to +10, (where –10 is pure agony, 0 is the state of being neither happy nor unhappy, and +10 is absolute ecstasy). Now, if a lot of smiling people answer "–5" to my questionnaire or (a lot of frowning folks write "+8" on my questionnaire) you and I will disagree about how happy the people are, and, consequently, how developed the society actually is. You will remind me of such things as the fact the people frequently misunderstand questionnaires, they the often give deliberately false answers (perhaps so they can cash-in on development aid), and so forth. I will remind you that smiling is, at least partially, a function of socialization (so that in some societies smiling is a way of expressing disagreement or displeasure with someone else), that some observers visiting the southern United States during the period of slavery remarked that it seemed that the slaves smiled much more frequently and broadly than did the slave-owners, and so forth.[5] Here we agree on

[5] For a balanced discussion of how well off American slaves were see Sen, *Development as*

what it is that should be measured, we just disagree on how to best go about measuring that thing. We both agree that our measures are not the actual thing we think is important, we just disagree on which thing (smiling or numbers on a questionnaire) is more closely correlated with the entity we both really want to measure.

But suppose that while you think level of development is a direct function of the happiness of the members of a society, I think that measuring happiness (while interesting and important for other purposes) has nothing directly to do with development. Suppose I think that development is not a function of happiness but a function of something else, say the negative liberty of the members of the society. Then even if you and I come to agree on how best to measure both happiness and negative liberty (happiness varies directly with smiling, negative liberty varies inversely with religious, moral, and particularly legal constraints) we are not going to agree on how to measure development (unless—unlikely though this is—it happens that people's happiness varies directly with their negative liberty).

But there is another way in which we might disagree about how to measure the level of development of a society. Suppose one of us thinks (quite plausibly) that a society's level of development is not solely a direct function of some property—even some combination of properties such as happiness plus negative liberty—of the individuals in that society but also of something else. Suppose we think that the level of development of a society includes (as at least part of the account) how just the society is, so that, other things being equal, a more just society is *eo ipso* a more developed society. Then the task of measuring

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Freedom, pages 28 and 29 and the works cited there.

development becomes immediately much more complex. For now we need to know not just the relevant facts about the individuals in the society—how happy they are, how free they are, how long they live, how healthy they are, and on and on—but also to what extend and in which ways their activities accord with the requirements of justice. Furthermore, we may well disagree on what justice requires; you thinking that any just society will distribute its goods and services so that the worst-off group is as well off as is practicable in the circumstances while I think that a just society must include respect for core liberal human rights and nothing more. On top of all this we might disagree about how much weight to give (different) considerations of justice.

Given all this it might seem that even embarking on the task of measuring development is hopeless. We just never are going to settle all the different issues confronting us and so we are inevitably going to end up talking past ourselves no matter what measure we actually use. I will now argue that such skepticism is unwarranted.

Two stories of philosophic interest

Let me begin with two stories, familiar to philosophers but (alas) only to philosophers. One is set in the developed world the other in the developing world. I will begin in the developing world with Robert Nozick's story Wilt Chamberlain who, through no fault of his own, seems to cause social injustice to occur and then turn to Amartya Sen's tale of Annapurna, a wealthy property owner who wants to do the right thing.

Wilt Chamberlain is a great basketball player. Indeed (contrary to fact, but this is just a story) he is the greatest basketball player ever. His grace and skill are a joy to watch and, consequently, he has many fans. Now suppose you have designed the society in which Wilt and his many fans live. Since you designed it you have ensured that wealth (and other things) are distributed in a just manner. So, the present pattern of distribution in Wilt's society is, in your view just. Now suppose that Wilt's fans start paying Wilt extra to watch him play basketball. (In Nozick's original story there is a special added fee charged for games with Wilt in them and Wilt gets this special fee.) Soon the pattern of distribution in society changes from one that you considered just to one that you consider unjust. Now, the problem for you to explain is where did this injustice come from. Well, in one sense it is obvious, it came from all those transactions freely entered into between Wilt and his many fans. But this is simply to say that a series of transactions each of which was perfectly just led to an unjust outcome. (If you think that selling one's labor is inherently unjust change the story to something that you think is just, say gift giving. Suppose Wilt's fans all give him their money so that Wilt is obscenely rich and they are poor.) Nozick takes this to show that no theory of distributive justice can be concerned with the pattern of distribution within a society. Rather, any plausible theory of distributive justice has to be a historical theory; one which takes into account how the pattern of distribution arose. Put in Nozick's own terms no current time-slice theory of distributive justice can be correct, only historical ones.

We need not go into the very difficult question of whether Nozick is warranted in this claim. For our purposes all we need to note is that any plausible

theory of distributive justice will have at least a historical component; it cannot be a pure end state theory of distributive justice. This is important for present purposes because it shows that the task of figuring out what development is is logically distinct from issues of justice. We can ask what a society should seek to provide its members to be a developed society and that question is not simply a part of whatever justice requires for contemporary societies.

Amartya Sen has observed that ¨the real 'bite' of a theory of justice can, to a great extent, be understood from its informational base: what information is—or is not—taken to be directly relevant.¨[6] He illustrates the point with a little story.[7] Annapurna wants to hire someone to perform some chores around the house. She can hire Dinu, Bishano, or Rogini. There is no difference in the talents of the three (relative to the job Annapurna wants done) so Annapurna decides to make her choice on a moral basis. First she considers Dinu who is the poorest of the three applicants. Bishano, who has only recently become poor (though not as poor as Dinu) is the most unhappy with her state and would gain the most happiness if she got the job. Finally, there is Rogini who is neither the poorest or the least happy of the three. However, she has a disease (which she bears quite stoically) and could use the money to rid herself of the disease. (Rogini´s is so stoical because she comes from a poor family and has always been told that females should not expect

[6] Sen, 1999 page 57. Sen tells Annapurna´s story on pages 54-55.
[7] Sen has taken a traditional story told to many Indian children and modified it. According to the traditional story Annapurna has ample stocks of food. She decides to feed each of the three unfortunate women mentioned in the story and finds that despite this her stocks of food do not diminish but actually grow. The obvious moral being that through charitable acts one can gain more than one sacrifices. I thank Krishna Ahooja-Patel for bringing this point to my attention.

very much out of life.) Giving her the job would, Annapurna thinks, make the biggest difference tin terms of ¨quality of life and freedom from disease¨.

The story is supposed to make one think that John Rawls and other contemporary Kantians might think that Dinu should get the job, utilitarians that Bishanno should, and Aristotelians (such as Sen) that it would be best if Rogini got it. And this difference in thinking is because Rawlsians take primary goods as the appropriate metric here, utilitarians think utility is best suited to the task, and Sen thinks that capabilities to function as a normal human being is what should count. My view is that there is an alternative superior to the options Sen has laid out, that option is the basic goods approach to international development.

What to measure.

Whether one thinks that, as a matter of justice, items of value should be maximized, or distributed equally, or distributed according to merit, or by some other standard, the following question inevitably arises: *what* is it that should be maximized, or distributed equally, or distributed according to merit, or distributed by whatever standard one's preferred theory of justice recommends? [8]

What is the thing we are to use in determining whether the current state of affairs distributes things justly or unjustly? Or, what are we to use when deciding whether a change in states of affairs is an improvement with respect to justice? More precisely for present purposes, what should we use as the metric to decide how developed a society is, or whether our development projects are working?

[8] The range I will select here will be broader than that used by Amartya Sen in his famous paper "Equality of What?" (Sen, 1982), but the approach is the same.

The principle candidates to fulfill these roles are the following. (In each case I have provided a reference to a leading advocate for, or statement of, the view.)

Basic Goods: Things which one would be willing to have imposed upon oneself (or one's society) and which it is rational to want in those one is going to be interacting with (Wein).

Basic Needs: Those things minimally necessary to sustain human life (Braybrooke).

Capabilities: Those things which enable a person to function as a normal human being and hence are essential for human flourishing (Aristotle, Nussbaum, and Sen 1989).

Global Public Goods: Collective consumption goods or things of which consumption is nonrivalrous and nonexclusionary and of which these properties extend across widely dispersed (both spatially and temporally) people or countries (Kaul *et al*.).

Human Rights: Moral rights which individuals hold simply in virtue of being the sorts of entities which can be both sapient and sentient (e.g. Wein, 1999).

Primary Goods: Those things it is rational to want no matter what more specific things one happens to want (Rawls). Primary goods are normally divided into natural primary goods, such as health, vigor, intelligence, and imagination, and social primary goods, such as liberties and opportunities, income and wealth, and the social basis for self-respect.

Resources: Those things which people value, measured by how much others would sacrifice in terms of what they value in order to have them (Dworkin, 2000).

Utility: Revealed preferences (most economists, see Samuelson); net balance of pleasure over pain (Bentham); net balance of happiness over unhappiness (J.S. Mill); net balance of desirable states of consciousness over undesirable states of consciousness (Sidgwick); satisfaction of actual preferences (Bright); satisfaction of preferences which have survived full information and cognitive psychotherapy (Brandt); satisfaction of the net balance of personal but not external preferences (Harsanyi and Dworkin, 1978); net balance of positive hedonic hits over negative hedonic hits (Smart).

Well-being: That complex of things which makes a life go well for the person living that life (Griffith).

There is a lot to be said in favor of each of the concepts listed above for the roles I have outlined. Unfortunately, there is also a lot to be said against the suitability of each of these concepts for the various roles development theorists and theorists of justice have in mind. Here I will ignore well-being and the various forms of utility, simply because they are the metrics that have received by far the most attention. I will also simply state that I don't think the basic needs approach or the human rights approach can possibly be correct. There is a simple reason in each case. First we can imagine two societies where the basic needs of every person in each society have been provided for yet we might well judge that one of the two societies is far more developed than the other. Thus measuring how well provisions for meeting basic needs work is not measuring how developed a society is. In the case of human rights the problem is more theoretical. Even if one grants—and it is far from clear that one should—that Jeremy Bentham was wrong in thinking that

the very notion of natural rights is nonsense ("vile and pernicious nonsense, nonsense upon stilts"), it seems that we need some account of which human rights individuals actually have (or ought to be accorded) and why. And, obviously, human rights are not the sorts of thing that could justify themselves. Nor does it seem likely that there is a human right to have one's human rights respected. And so forth.

Given this, I will turn to the task of showing that basic goods are a plausible contender (along with primary goods, resources, capabilities, and global public goods) for what we should measure when we are measuring how developed a society is.

A Famous Example

The attitude that we have a very strong duty to rescue those in immediate danger and only a much weaker duty to assist the needy through charitable giving has been frequently challenged, most famously in the works of Peter Singer. Singer does this by means of a powerful thought experiment (Singer, 1972 & 79). A young child in Bengal is suffering from a lack of food. You are affluent enough to easily donate money to a charity which would use this money to save the starving Bengali child. Without your donation (or one from someone else), the child will soon die. While pondering these facts you walk past a shallow pond and notice a small child struggling to stay afloat. You could easily wade into the pond and rescue the child. If you do nothing (and no one else does anything), the child will soon die. Let us suppose that the cost of dry cleaning your muddy post-rescue clothes is at least as great as the cost of the donation needed to save the Bengali child. Let us also

suppose that others either cannot, or will not, do anything to save either of these children.

The matrix below outlines your options and the relevant outcomes.

Possible action	**A** give nothing and do nothing	**B** give money and do nothing	**C** give nothing and wade into pool	**D** give money and wade into pool
Expected outcome	Both children will die	One child lives and one dies	One child dies and one lives	Both children live

Assuming, as is the case in most societies, one is legally permitted to do any of the four actions outlined above, the issue becomes that of what one's moral duties are. Here we find considerable disagreement, but it is fair to say that almost everyone holds that common sense morality tells us that the duty to save the drowning child is stronger and more compelling than the duty to aid the starving Bengali child. A lot of intellectual effort has been spent trying to explain why this might be so.[9] But I think it is safe to say that Singer's position that the two duties are equally strong remains viable. That is to say, it seems that there is as much reason to help the one child as there is to help the other. So, options A and D seem to be the only defensible ones. (Singer goes on to argue that, given that A is unacceptable, D must be the morally proper choice.)

Basic Goods

I suggest that a good part of the reason it is so difficult to see how our moral thinking at the theoretical or critical level could diverge so radically from our moral thinking at the practical or intuitive level is because of the metrics we use when

[9]For my own attempt, see (Wein, 2001).

comparing different states of affairs.[10] Consider my list above. In terms of utility (however one conceives of it), both children stand to gain or lose roughly equally from your action or your inaction. Similarly for their needs and well-being, or the primary goods they will have access to, or the resources they will have at their disposal, or the capabilities they will realize if, but only if, you help them out.[11] The other concepts on my list are not directly relevant to this case,[12] except for basic goods—and it is with the concept of basic goods that we notice an immediate difference, a difference which goes a long way toward explaining the difference found in what common sense morality has to say about your duties to each of the two children.

Suppose that we had no moral duties and were deciding amongst ourselves if it would be wise to adopt some. Each of us would (gladly) be willing to take on the duty to rescue others in times of immediate danger when such rescue can be achieved with minimal risk to ourselves, providing of course that others would take

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[10] The terms "critical level" and "intuitive level" are R. M. Hare's (Hare 1981). It is important to remember that every moral *theory* (even intuitionism) employs something like this distinction, for without some such distinction we could not intelligibly ask questions about the wisdom of recognizing a set of rights and duties.

[11] It could be argued that the Bengali child loses less in the way of utility or well-being if you let her starve than if you let the other child drown, because the child you rescue from drowning will lead a better life in a society which can afford wading pools for its children than the post-famine child stuck in Bengal will be able to enjoy. The same might be said of Dworkinian resources or capabilities to function; even if you save the Bengali child the resources such a child will have or the freedom to develop and use her capabilities will be far less than those available to the drowning child. But, as Singer anticipated, the example can easily be modified to deal with these matters without reducing its intuitive force.

[12] Thinking in terms of human rights is not helpful here. Of course, both children ought to be accorded the same rights just in virtue of their both being humans in dire need. But the crucial question is whether such rights are limited to negative rights or whether they include some positive ones and, if the latter, whether the positive rights include both a right to be rescued and a right to aid when threatened with starvation and, if so, against whom these rights held are. The global public goods approach is unhelpful, though in a different way. Provisions for being rescued from wading pools and being provided with aid when famine strikes are not public goods.

on the same duty. The small inconvenience this duty is likely to impose on us—both because we are unlikely to ever have to act on it and because, even if we do, the cost of so doing is minimal—is easily outweighed by the benefits we would receive were we unfortunate enough to need rescuing ourselves.[13] Having a system of individual or personal duties to rescue one another in those rare cases where the need arises is, for all of us, a basic good. It is something we want in others and would be willing to have imposed upon ourselves.

By contrast, an individual or personal duty to aid those starving individuals who are far away from us is not a basic good. It is not something it would be rational for each of us to want either in others or in ourselves. This is because personal duties result in uncoordinated action and, as the history of international development efforts shows, uncoordinated action aimed at helping those who are far removed from us and about whom we know very little often causes more harm than good.

This danger is, of course, one that exists for the personal duty to rescue. We can imagine a situation in which a child appears to be drowning in a wading pool, but in fact the child is not in danger. (Perhaps the child is pretending to drown but is quite safe.) It is possible that two passing people, each unaware of the others efforts, rush in to save her. In their struggle to do good they bump into each other, collapse on the child, and cause her to drown. Such a scenario is possible but so unlikely that the benefits of having the personal duty to rescue (apparently) drowning children

[13] One can interpret such a defense of the duty to rescue either in Hobbesian contractarian terms (agreeing on the duty is in the self-interest of each person) or in social contractarian terms (the system of reciprocity is of mutual benefit).

clearly outweigh the costs. So a personal duty to rescue the drowning child is a basic good.

But a personal duty to aid the starving child is not a basic good because the probability that uncoordinated action to save distant starving children is much more likely to have unintended consequences which harm those children (or some others). And, this is just the way common sense morality has things. Everyone feels we have a strong and pressing duty—one that needs to be acted on immediately—to help the drowning child. It is a duty that requires action, not contemplation about what ideally might be the best action. But in the case of the starving child, the duty common sense morality provides us is neither so strong nor so pressing. Of course, we still feel there is some duty here. Somebody ought to do something for the starving child. After all, her need is just as great as that of the drowning one. But, as anyone who has made even a cursory study of international development efforts knows, what starving people need is coordinated action on the part of many people. And no doubt an coordinated international response system to deal with famines and natural disasters is, for all of us, a basic good. It is a basic good in the same way that a efficient domestic social safety net is a basic good. And the duty to provide that response system is a *political* duty we all have. (Unfortunately, it is one too few of us act on.) But the duty to help far off, starving children is not a *personal* duty requiring us to drop everything at this very moment and do something. (If you think there is such a *personal* duty, then you ought not to have been reading this article. You should have been out saving a child somewhere!)

Moral Education

We all try to teach our children to have and to *feel* those moral duties which we think will best serve to help them get through life as well as possible. We also hope that they will become the sorts of individuals who will willing do their fair share to contribute to those projects which can best be undertaken only by *collective* efforts. A basic goods approach explains why we want them to leap into action when they see a drowning child who they can easily save at only minor inconvenience. The basic goods approach also explains why we want them to think hard and act in concert with others to deal with the systemic problems which make life so difficult for so many people. Other approaches make it difficult to explain why morality tells us to deal with apparently similar cases in such dissimilar ways. I conclude that the basic goods approach—an approach which has us explore what basic goods each human is owed and owes to all others—is one that deserves further exploration.

Basic Goods and Global Distributive Justice

I have argued elsewhere that the basic goods approach to international development can serve to assist us in the intellectually arduous task of extending existing theories of distributive justice from the domestic area to questions dealing with global distributive justice.[14] I will not repeat these arguments here but merely rehearse the conclusions. The argument shows that if basic goods are substituted for primary goods in a Rawlsian theory of international justice one is able to develop a middle way between the non-redistibutive principles Rawls lays out in *The Law of Peoples* and the radical global redistributive principles which Thomas Pogge has

[14] See Wein 2002 Montevideo and Wein 2002 Toronto.

argued follow from the initial suppositions which make *A Theory of Justice* such a powerful and attractive work.[15] Furthermore the argument shows that if one adopts the sort of contructivist theory which would naturally follow from the pioneering work of David Gauthier in his *Morals by Agreement* and extends the theory to questions of international justice using basic goods as a metric one is able to move the theory away from the (so-called) global realism it seems to support to a more plausible account of the moral relations between rich and poor nations. Beyond this, there are other problems, such as the moral obligations of multinational corporations working in developing societies, which can benefit from being considered in terms of basic goods.[16]

The Cultural Imperialism Objection:

I now turn to a very serious objection to the basic goods approach, the cultural imperialism objection. Roughly speaking, the intuition behind the cultural imperialism objection is that the basic goods approach to measuring international development is imperialistic and by its very nature favors the forces of globalization when these conflict with attempts to preserve cultural diversity. I will first try to put this objection in its strongest form and then will turn to the task of showing how it poses no serious problem for the basic goods approach. If we are to take the cultural imperialism objection seriously it cannot simply be an objection of the form that when the forces of globalization conflict with those of cultural pluralism the latter always ought to be preferred. I take it that every sensible person holds that at least

[15] The definition of primary goods is those things it is rational to want no matter what more particular things one wants. Primary goods are normally divided into *natural* primary goods, such as health, vigor, intelligence, and imagination, and *social* primary goods, such as liberties and opportunities, income and wealth, and the social basis for self-respect.
[16] On this see Wein 2002 Pittsburgh.

sometimes, in at least some cases, it is a requirement of justice to favor globalization over cultural diversity—even westernized globalization over non-western diversity. A simple thought experiment shows this to be the case. Suppose it were discovered that the best way to protect people from torture was to propagate the belief that each person has a basic human right not to be gratuitously tortured.[17] Further suppose—what is false—that this idea is a uniquely western enlightenment idea. And that having it universally adopted across the planet would be a step in the rising dominance of the ideology of the post-Christian, feminist, liberal West and a defeat for the forces which seek to preserve cultural diversity of all forms (including, in this case, the forms that do not frown on torture as much as is necessary to reduce torture as much as possible). In this case we all hold that, as a matter of justice, globalization should win out over cultural diversity.

So the objection, if it is to be one we should take seriously (and I certainly think we need to take it seriously) can't simply be that the basic goods approach sometimes recommends common universal standards or even that it sometimes favors the advance of the post-Christian, feminist, liberal western value set over other value sets, for sometimes we should favor these values over alternative ones. Rather we must understand the objection as holding that the basic goods approach keeps us from seeing (or makes it easier for us not to see) that sometimes we have to make hard choices between competing values and instead encourages us to rest comfortably with the value system we have wisely or unwisely come to feel is apt

[17] Note that one cannot simply assume this without committing something like the zero tolerance fallacy. It has to be an empirical discovery that getting people to believe that folks have human rights best serves to discourage the behaviors that constitute violations of such supposed rights. On the zero tolerance fallacy see Barthelemy and Wein.

for us. The basic goods approach does this (so the objection presumably holds) because it asks us to consider only those things we would be willing to have imposed on ourselves and would want in those with whom we expect to be interacting. Notice it is those constraints/characteristics *we* would rationally want in those with whom *we* expect to be interacting.[18] This is, so the objection goes, surely too euro centric to be hidden within the metric we use to measure development.

So, the objection comes down to two points: first the basic good approach hides a bias towards the values of the post-christian, feminist, liberal West and, second, this bias can sometimes lead to a failure to appreciate certain claims of justice which other approaches might better reveal.

Response to the Cultural Imperialism Objection

But, as I have argued elsewhere, when used as a device to measure development *within* two leading theories of justice both yield better results using basic goods than without their use.[19] And, what is more, these results are better *in terms of preserving cultural diversity against globalization* than without basic goods as a measure. That is to say, when we think about matters of global justice at the critical level—that is to say, when we are deciding which values we ought to adopt regarding how to best preserve those forms of cultural pluralism which ought to be preserved—the basic goods approach actually does a better job than its alternatives. So, the cultural imperialism objection is misguided. Nonetheless, at the heart of the objection lies an important insight about the basic goods approach to

[18] It is sometimes suggested that the concept of rationality is inherently western. This is not so. The concept of rationality I will be using is widely adopted and has both non-western and western roots.

[19] See both Wein 2002 Montevideo and Wein 2002 Toronto. (See also the Appendix for a summary.)

international development. When we decide to provide others who are, in some respect, less fortunate than ourselves with more basic goods than they now have we are, in effect, providing them with that which is both a means to and a constituent of what it is to be a tolerant civilized society. And, it is only natural to expect that whenever a people move from intolerant, uncivilized, anti-social circumstances into ones which allow each person the best opportunity to lead the sort of life she decides would be best for her, there are going to be conflicts of values. The beauty of the basic goods approach is that it makes clear what it is about what the defenders of cultural pluralism celebrate that is worth having—*viz.*, a wide variety of forms to life, of systems of social interaction, which meet the minimal requirements of justice *and* the basic goods approach allows us to see which parts of which cultures (including which parts of our own culture) so desperately need to be reformed. But, it is a mistake to suppose that such reforms should always be to adopt the post-Christian, feminist, liberal western value set and abandon other value sets. To think otherwise is to fail to appreciate the full potential of the basic goods approach to international development.[20]

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[20] This paper was prepared for presentation the International Development Research Centre of Canada's lecture series at Saint Mary's University. While some of the material is original (for example, the material on mesurement) some of it has been borrowed from previous articles. For copies of those articles please contact me at sheldon.wein@stmarys.ca. I thank Bob Bright and Thea E. Smith for discussing these matters with me.

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