

Addressing Poverty and Climate Change: The Varieties of Social Engagement

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“About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.
In Breughel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.”

W. H. Auden, “Musée des Beaux Arts”¹

The world is marked by very great poverty and inequality. The lives of many of our fellow inhabitants of this planet are blighted by malnutrition, disease, and destitution. Yet mass suffering is often met by casual indifference or acceptance, and sometimes even by active

¹ From W. H. Auden, *Poems*, selected by John Fuller (London: Faber and Faber, 2000 [1938]), p. 29.

support of the status quo. As Auden vividly describes, while tragedies occur elsewhere in the world, the vast majority of us continue in our daily tasks and turn away “quite leisurely from the disaster.” It is in response to this reality that Academics Stand Against Poverty (ASAP) asks: “What, in light of mass poverty, are the responsibilities of academics?”

In this article I propose to explore two issues. The first concerns what kinds of contributions academics can make to reducing poverty. I argue that academics can contribute in a number of ways, and I seek to spell out the diversity of the options available. I concentrate on four ways in which these contributions might differ. These differences concern: (i) whether their *direct* focus is on changing policies or on changing the behaviour of the affluent or on empowering the disadvantaged (the target); (ii) whether they seek to block specific harmful policies or to canvass particular beneficial policies (the positive/negative nature of the contribution); (iii) whether their focus is on specific policies or whether they seek more generally to shape the way that the issues that bear on poverty are framed (the specificity/generality of the contribution); and (iv) the means by which academics can make a contribution (the *modalities* of social engagement). It is, I think, important to recognize this diversity. Some may be unable to contribute in some ways but can contribute in others; some may be more adept at some kinds of anti-poverty initiatives than they are at others; and some may simply be more willing to pursue certain activities rather than others. Recognizing and describing the different options available to academics can hopefully encourage greater participation in all kinds of anti-poverty action.

My second aim is to outline some norms that should inform any academic involvement in activities that seek to reduce poverty. I set out six proposals. These concern: (i) the need to construct coalitions among people with different ethical frameworks; (ii) the value of constructing non-ideal theory on the basis of our best understanding of an ideal world; (iii) the need for integrated analysis that connects anti-poverty initiatives to other areas

of moral concern; (iv) the vital importance of interdisciplinarity; (v) the need for epistemic modesty and revisability; and (vi) the need for accountability.

Before continuing, I would like to make three preliminary points. First, I believe that academics can make a valuable contribution to attempts to eradicate poverty. I cannot develop a full-blown defense of that assumption here but I do wish to say something in its defence. It is helpful to ask why one might object to projects such as ASAP. I foresee (at least) four types of objection: critics might argue (i) that attempts by academics to contribute to the eradication of poverty are ineffective (the *Ineffectiveness Argument*); (ii) that while they would yield some benefits these benefits are too small to justify the effort required to achieve them (the *Meagerness Argument*); (iii) that the kinds of projects promoted by ASAP may not only be ineffective but may actually be harmful (the *Harmfulness Argument*); and (iv) that even if anti-poverty initiatives yield benefits (and, specifically, benefits that outweigh the costs involved) it is wrong for academics to engage in such initiatives because doing so would contravene some other responsibility, or responsibilities, that apply to them (the *Countervailing Responsibility Argument*).²

Let us briefly consider these concerns, beginning with the first two. Now while I can see that academic involvement in anti-poverty projects may generate no benefits, or insufficient benefits given the effort involved, I can see no *a priori* reason why either of these would necessarily be the case. These are concerns that should, of course, inform any project to address poverty, but they alone cannot justify blanket rejection as opposed to a need for careful consideration of a given initiative. They bear on the question of *how* anti-poverty initiatives should be pursued rather than on *whether* they should be pursued. The same is true of the claim that well-intentioned policies may have malign effects. While this is certainly

² For similar, but non-identical, taxonomy of responses to reform see Albert O. Hirschman *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991).

possible, what this points to is the need for scrupulous evaluation of any anti-poverty initiatives – rather than a total embargo on any such initiative.

But what about the potential countervailing responsibilities for academics? In this symposium Luis Cabrera and Thomas Pogge discuss some potential countervailing responsibilities, and make a number of telling points.³ One key question is whether academics are required to be ‘neutral’ in these kinds of normative debates. A fully comprehensive answer to this question would have to discuss the *meaning* of neutrality (what would mean it for academics to be neutral?); its *possibility* (to what extent is it attainable?); its *value* (are academics under an obligation to be neutral?); its *moral importance* (if there is an obligation, how weighty is it?); its *limits* (must academics be neutral on all subjects - rape? murder? genocide?); and, finally, what we might call *the domain* that it governs (if ‘neutrality’ applies to academics, should it govern all academic activities or merely some?). Much could be said on each of these different issues surrounding neutrality. Here, however, I shall reserve myself simply to a point about the domain of neutrality. For even if we grant to the critic the idea that academics must be neutral in some sense, it seems very implausible to think that this should apply in all domains of an academic’s work. The ideal of neutrality has whatever place it enjoys in the classroom and lecture hall: it seems reasonable to think that academics should not use the classroom to convert people to the goal of eradicating poverty. However, teaching is only one part of the profession of an academic; and, there is no reason to think that a norm of neutrality should apply either to the focus of academics’ research or to their attempts to disseminate their research more widely and to influence the world we live in. Any norm of neutrality in the classroom thus does not preclude, for example, engaging in research which helps alleviate poverty; or advising policymakers, social movements or think tanks; or acting as a public intellectual seeking to change public attitudes.

³ See Cabrera and Pogge ‘Academics Stand Against Poverty: An Idea Whose Time Has Come’ this issue.

My second point concerns the examples that I will be using to inform my analysis. In what follows I will make particular reference to the links between poverty and climate change. There are two reasons for addressing global poverty in the light of climate change. First, climate change will be, and to some extent already is, a major driver of global poverty. If we consider the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's estimates of "likely" changes in temperatures, we see that the global mean temperatures in the period between 2090 and 2099 are projected to be between 1.1 and 6.4 degrees Celsius higher than they were in the period from 1980-1999. In the same period sea-levels may rise by up to 59 centimeters.⁴ These changes will have calamitous effects on people's capacity to enjoy human rights to life, food, water, and health. Increased temperatures, raised sea-levels, and severe weather events can, for example, be ruinous to agriculture. Recent research finds that there will be "45–55 million extra people at risk of hunger by the 2080s for 2.5°C warming, which rises to 65–75 million for a 3°C warming."⁵ If global mean temperatures rise by 3–4°C then a further 80–125 million people will be at risk.⁶

Given the prospect of such horrendous outcomes, many hold that global average temperatures must not rise by more than 2°C when compared with pre-industrial temperatures.⁷ It bears noting, however, that even increases of less than 2°C have contributed to, and will continue to contribute to, poverty, disease, and malnutrition. Rachel Warren refers to evidence that a 0.6°C increase from pre-industrial temperatures resulted in an

⁴ Susan Solomon, Dahe Qin and Martin Manning 'Technical Summary' in *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) edited by Susan Solomon, Dahe Qin, Martin Manning, Melinda Marquis, Kristen Averyt, Melinda M. B. Tignor, Henry LeRoy Miller, and Zhenlin Chen, p.70.

⁵ Bill Hare 'Relationship between Increases in Global Mean Temperature and Impacts on Ecosystems, Food Production, Water and Socio-Economic Systems' in *Avoiding Dangerous Climate Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) edited by Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, Wolfgang Cramer, Nebojsa Nakicenovic, Tom Wigley, and Gary Yohe, 2006), p.179.

⁶ Bill Hare 'Relationship between Increases in Global Mean Temperature and Impacts on Ecosystems, Food Production, Water and Socio-Economic Systems', p.179.

⁷ See the European Commission 'Winning the Battle Against Global Climate Change' (issued on 9 February 2005 and available at http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2005/com2005_0035en01.pdf), p.3.

“increase in extreme rainfall patterns causing drought and flood,” and that in Africa “abrupt change in regional rainfall cause draught and water stress, food insecurity, and loss of grassland in the Sahel.”⁸ She further adds that if there is a 1°C increase there will be reduced agricultural production in crops such as barley and rice in Africa; in Peru melting glaciers will lead to problems with water supply, energy and agriculture; and there will also be loss of life from flooding in the Americas. In addition to this, a 1°C increase may result in an additional 18 to 60 million people being vulnerable to suffering from hunger, and an additional 300 to 1,600 million people being subject to water stress.⁹ In other words, temperature increases of 1°C or less threaten people’s access to food and water and contribute to global poverty.

A second reason for considering global poverty in connection with climate change is that some of the policies proposed in order to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference may compromise poverty avoidance. For example, putting limits on the greenhouse gas emissions of the global poor without providing financial assistance for low-carbon energy substitutes will severely undermine the capacity for those laboring under such constraints to attain a decent minimum standard of living. Additionally, putting a price on the use of carbon (through, say, a carbon tax) can—depending on how it is designed—contribute to “fuel poverty” and to poverty more generally.

This relationship between mitigation policies and poverty is not, I should stress, necessarily a competitive one. Mitigation policies may not simply undermine people’s entitlements, but may also provide additional opportunities for lifting people out of poverty. Some carbon tax schemes might, for example, generate a “double dividend”: that is, deter environmentally destructive behavior and generate funds. Similarly, fixing an upper limit of

⁸ Rachel Warren ‘Impacts of Global Climate Change at Different Annual Mean Global Temperature Increases’ in *Avoiding Dangerous Climate Change* ed Schellnhuber et al, p.95.

⁹ Warren *ibid*, p.95.

greenhouse gas emissions and auctioning off emissions permits can generate resources for the world's least advantaged.¹⁰ My point is that the policies designed to mitigate climate change can have considerable impacts on people's ability to meet their core needs, and thus, in this sense, climate change and poverty are inherently interlinked.

I turn now to my third preliminary comment. Although the focus of this article is on what role academics can play in combating global poverty, I am not suggesting that *only* academics can fulfill these roles. Where academics can play a role it is often, in part, because of two resources that they can draw on: first, their expertise (in, say, economics or the natural sciences) can of course assist them; second, in some countries academics in certain disciplines possess “authority” or “epistemic credibility” and in virtue of this can influence others.

It is, of course, true that others outside academia might also possess such expertise or authority; and it would be foolish to deny the expertise of a contemporary equivalent of John Stuart Mill just because he or she did not hold an academic post. Also, while I do think that academics in very many disciplines can contribute to the anti-poverty effort—including those in psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, law, economics, politics, international relations, philosophy, literature, biology, chemistry, and physics—I am not committed to the claim that members of all academic disciplines can, or must, do so.¹¹

I now want to turn to the question of what kinds of contribution academics can make to the task of eradicating global poverty.

TARGETS OF ANTI-POVERTY INITIATIVES

¹⁰ See Oliver Tickell *Kyoto2: How to Manage the Global Greenhouse* (London: Zed Books, 2008); Peter Barnes, *Who Owns the Sky? Our Common Assets and the Future of Capitalism* (Washington DC: Island Press, 2001); and Peter Barnes, Robert Costanza, Paul Hawken, David Orr, Elinor Ostrom, Alvaro Umaña and Oran Young ‘Creating an Earth Atmospheric Trust’, *Science* vol.319 no.5864 (2008), p.724.

¹¹ See Onora O’Neill’s contribution to this special issue, where she argues that academics are not a natural kind and thus raises the question of whether a focus on the role of academics is appropriate.

I begin with the point that anti-poverty initiatives undertaken by academics might have different targets. We can distinguish here between three different kinds of targets. First, there are initiatives whose direct aim is to change individual behavior and to persuade the affluent to donate money to the least advantaged (hereafter *Behavioral Approaches*). Good examples of this kind of approach are seen in the actions of those like Peter Singer and organizations like Giving What We Can.¹² The initiatives of both seek to persuade the wealthy to give to charities.

Behavioral approaches can be contrasted with a second kind of approach, namely what I shall term *Policy-Directed Approaches*. These refer to initiatives in which academics focus their efforts *directly* on the policies of the governments of affluent countries, either campaigning for new policies or against harmful ones. This approach aims to persuade influential politicians and policy-makers to select policies that will not cause poverty and that will in fact contribute to its eradication.¹³ Campaigns for a financial transactions tax or for the cancelation of sovereign debt are examples of this approach.

It might be hard to determine which of these kinds of venture should take priority. On the one hand, it can reasonably be argued that bringing about structural change is crucial if we are to alleviate global poverty. On the other hand, academics (and indeed individuals more generally) may have little chance of causing policy changes but may be able to stimulate some behavioral change.¹⁴ So structural reforms will have greater effects, but

¹² <http://www.givingwhatwecan.org>.

¹³ One might also include under this heading campaigns to change the policies of economic corporations as well as governments.

¹⁴ For a debate surrounding these issues see Andrew Kuper 'More Than Charity: Cosmopolitan Alternatives to the "Singer Solution"', *Ethics and International Affairs* vol.16 no.1 (2002), pp.107-120; Peter Singer 'Poverty, Facts, and Political Philosophies: Response to "More than Charity"', *Ethics and International Affairs* vol.16 no.1 (2002), pp.121-124; Andrew Kuper 'Facts, Theories, and Hard Choices: Reply to Peter Singer', *Ethics and International Affairs* vol.16 no.1 (2002), pp.125-126; Peter Singer 'Achieving the Best Outcome: Final Rejoinder', *Ethics and International Affairs* vol.16 no.1 (2002), pp.127-128.

engaging in campaigns for such reforms might have a low probability of having an effect; whereas behavioral changes have a higher probability of success, but their effects are likely to be much smaller. Determining what would maximize expected benefits is thus not necessarily straightforward. It will also vary among different academics. Those with links to the policy world or with relevant anti-poverty policy expertise may have greater reason to focus on policy changes. Those who lack such qualities but are, for example, excellent communicators may have more reason to focus on bringing about behavioral change.

Thus far I have mentioned two kinds of targets, both of which focus on persuading advantaged members of the world. As such, both approaches can be contrasted with initiatives that seek directly to empower the disadvantaged (*Enabling Approaches*). Academics can, for example, work to produce affordable medicines or scientific innovations or more efficient agricultural techniques and share them on a “creative commons” basis to enable the least advantaged to make use of them.¹⁵ This approach does not directly seek to change the behavior of the affluent or the policies of their governments, but rather seeks to empower the victims of global poverty to assist themselves.

TYPES OF CONTRIBUTION

I turn now to a second set of distinctions, which concerns the different types of contributions that academics might make. We can distinguish here between what I shall call “blocking harm” and “positive policy proposals.”

A: Blocking Harm. First, academics can seek to act in ways which discourage others from inflicting avoidable poverty on others. For example, academics can campaign against the

¹⁵ For examples see Yochai Benkler *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), chapter 9.

infliction of harm that results from agricultural subsidies or tariffs and quotas.¹⁶ Such restrictions on trade can often be highly disadvantageous for farmers in the developing world (as well as for consumers in affluent countries who pay more than they would otherwise have to). Academics can also campaign against policies that encourage dangerous climate change or against policies which seek to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases but do so in ways that needlessly jeopardize the interests of the poor. Consider, for example, policies that reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of developing countries (e.g. tariffs on exported goods because of the greenhouse gas emissions involved in the production of transportation) but which do not provide alternative sources of energy for those affected. To cite another example, the policy on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD), which was agreed to at the 13th Conference of the Parties, aims to remunerate people not to engage in deforestation.¹⁷ There are, however, grave concerns that this policy might lead to poor communities being denied access to forests and the monies being diverted to government officials rather than accruing to the least advantaged.

Consider also current energy policy. In the last decade both the European Union and the United States have encouraged the development of biofuels, including ethanol (made from sugar and corn, among other things) and biodiesel (made from such sources as rapeseed, jatropha, and palm oil). The drivers of the push for biofuels include, in some cases, a commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and, in other cases, a desire to promote energy security. This has led to an increased emphasis in recent years on using biomass for transportation. There have, however, been some grave concerns about the effects of such policies, notably the significant increase in food prices in 2007–2008. There have been

¹⁶ Kym Anderson ‘Subsidies and Trade Barriers’ in *Global Crises, Global Solutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) edited by Bjørn Lomborg, pp.541-577.

¹⁷ For information see <http://www.un-redd.org/>.

concerns that this expansion of biofuels has led to the seizure of land and the displacement of people from their traditional homelands. Moreover, sugarcane production in Brazil has involved severe violations of labor rights.¹⁸

In this kind of case academics concerned about poverty can act together to make clear that the energy policy of affluent societies should not compromise people's human rights to food and water, their labor rights, and their rights to use the land on which they depend for their livelihood, and to highlight how biofuels policy might compromise these human rights. The 2011 report of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, *Biofuels: Ethical Issues*, is one example of this kind of work. The authors—who included plant scientists, experts on scientific innovation, economists, a lawyer, a theologian and a political philosopher—maintained that biofuel production was morally defensible only if it met five principles, including: a commitment to human rights (including rights to food, water, health, and physical integrity); principles of fair trade; rights to just reward; and a just sharing of any benefits resulting from biofuel use (including sharing benefits to enable development).¹⁹

B: Promoting Specific Proposals. Unlike the first kind of contribution (which is primarily negative in nature), academics might also engage in positive proposals, and there are a number of initiatives that fit into this pattern. Perhaps the best known is the idea of a financial transactions tax originally proposed by Nobel Laureate James Tobin.²⁰ Tobin's aim was to reduce market instabilities (which would assist developing economies), but many have also argued that the finances generated from the tax should be spent on aiding developing countries.

¹⁸ For discussion of these concerns see Nuffield Council on Bioethics *Biofuels: Ethical Issues* (London: Nuffield Council on Bioethics, 2011), Chapter 2 especially pp.28-41. This is available at:

http://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/sites/default/files/Biofuels_ethical_issues_FULL%20REPORT_0.pdf

Disclosure: I am one of the members of the working party that produced this report.

¹⁹ Nuffield Council *Biofuels*, chapter 4 especially p.64.

²⁰ See James Tobin 'A Proposal for International Monetary Reform', *Eastern Economic Journal* vol.4 nos.3-4 (1978), pp.153-159.

A second important example is the Health Impact Fund, pioneered by Thomas Pogge, and the related proposal advanced by Michael Kremer and Rachel Glennerster.²¹ Both of these proposals outline methods for incentivizing research on neglected diseases and giving companies incentives to develop and deploy medicines to combat the diseases of the poor and vulnerable.

A third example is Leif Wenar's important work on Clean Trade. Wenar's work details how much of the natural resources that are traded is in effect stolen property; and it chronicles the malign effects that this has for resource rich countries, including authoritarianism, conflict, and reduced economic development. In response, Wenar proposes a system for ensuring that the members of a country are granted rights to the property rights in its jurisdiction.²² In a similar spirit, the Oxford economist Paul Collier has proposed a five step program to combat what he terms the "natural resources trap" in his book *The Bottom Billion*.²³ To address the pathologies that can result from such abundance in natural resources, Collier proposes "a charter for natural resources" that governs the (i) contracts governing the acquisition of natural resources, (ii) shares the risks involved in natural resource extraction equitably, (iii) stipulates that the volume of revenues raised is transparent, (iv) also stipulates that the ways in which the public revenues generated are spent are transparent, and (v) regulates the spending of revenue over time in order to cope with fluctuations in revenue.²⁴

III: SPECIFICITY VERSUS GENERALITY

²¹ For the work of Thomas Pogge and his associates on the Health Impact Fund see <http://www.yale.edu/macmillan/igh/>. See, in particular, Thomas Pogge Aidan Hollis and Thomas Pogge *The Health Impact Fund: Making New Medicines Accessible for All* (Incentives for Global Health, 2008); and Thomas Pogge, Matthew Rimmer and Kim Rubenstein (editors) *Incentives for Global Public Health: Patent Law and Access to Essential Medicines* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). See also Michael Kremer and Rachel Glennerster *Strong Medicine: Creating Incentives for Pharmaceutical Research of Neglected Diseases* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

²² See Leif Wenar 'Property Rights and the Resource Curse', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* vol.36 no.1 (2008), pp.2-32. See, more generally, the papers are <http://wenar.info/CleanTrade.html>.

²³ Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can be Done About It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). See pp.38–52 for an analysis of the "natural resources trap."

²⁴ *Ibid.* pp.140-141; cf also p.142ff. See also <http://www.naturalresourcecharter.org/>.

In addition to making specific policy proposals, academics can also make contributions at a more general or abstract level. They can, for example, inform how poverty is conceptualized; they can affect how policy issues are framed and can bring out the implications of existing and proposed policy arrangements; they can combat false beliefs that underpin practices that perpetuate global poverty; they can generate knowledge that enables the least advantaged to promote their interests and also assists their advocates; and they can provide a normative framework for thinking about global poverty. Let us consider each in turn.

§1. Conceptualizing Poverty. One role academics can play, and have played, is challenging prevailing conceptualizations of poverty, conceptualizations that may minimize the problem and downplay the enormity of what needs to be done. A good example of this is the work by Thomas Pogge and Sanjay Reddy on how to measure global poverty, and their critique of the methodology employed by the World Bank.²⁵ Humanity is less likely to make progress toward eliminating poverty if it relies on faulty metrics, and so work on more accurately measuring poverty can both help provide important data to those concerned with alleviating poverty, and also help to hold policymakers to account.

§2. Framing, Representation, and Bringing out Implications for Poverty. Second, academics can contribute to how an issue is framed, and can affect the extent to which an issue is understood by policy-makers and by the general public. Consider for example the Assessment Reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). These reports (largely authored, I should add, by academics, including many of great distinction) are highly valuable overviews of the physical causes of climate change, its impacts, and the

²⁵ Sanjay G. Reddy and Thomas Pogge 'How *Not* to Count the Poor' in *Debates on The Measurement of Global Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) edited by Sudhir Anand, Paul Segal and Joseph E. Stiglitz, pp.42-85.

possibilities for mitigation and adaptation. However, the volumes on impacts – for all their many merits – do not provide a set of normative criteria (say, measures of poverty or the enjoyment of human rights to food, water, and health) and then systematically assess the effects of climate change on such criteria.²⁶ Academics concerned about global poverty can help provide a comprehensive analysis of the impacts of climate change on these kinds of factors.²⁷

Another example concerning climate change is also illustrative. At present, the framework most commonly employed by policy-makers to determine climate policy is dominated by economic analyses (like that of the Stern Review). This economic framework is, however, problematic for two reasons: first, it is essentially aggregative (it is concerned with total consumption) and so it is insensitive to the number of people below a poverty threshold; and second, it relies on a complex formula for assessing future impacts (the social discount rate). But the social discount rate used is highly opaque and occludes the implications of inaction or delayed action on climate change for poverty. Academics can play a crucial role here by rendering the complex intelligible and bringing out the implications for poverty of various policies.

To explain: Many of the adverse impacts of climate change will occur in the future; its effects will reverberate for centuries, indeed thousands of years.²⁸ It is therefore essential to have a method for thinking about these future implications. The dominant analyses of future impacts employed by economists use a social discount rate. This draws on a formula

²⁶ Martin Parry, Osvaldo Canziani, Jean Palutikof, Paul van der Linden and Clair Hanson (editors) *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability - Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²⁷ I have sought to do this in 'Climate Change, Human Rights and Moral Thresholds' in *Human Rights and Climate Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) edited by Stephen Humphreys, with a foreword by Mary Robinson, pp.69-90. See also International Council on Human Rights Policy *Climate Change and Human Rights: A Rough Guide* (International Council on Human Rights Policy, Versoix, Switzerland, 2008) (available at: http://www.ichrp.org/files/reports/45/136_report.pdf). Disclosure: I was an advisor for this report.

²⁸ David Archer *The Long Thaw: How Humans are Changing the Next 100,000 Years of Earth's Climate* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), p.1.

first devised by the brilliant philosopher and economist Frank Ramsey, but which has been modified and expanded over time. The Ramsey formula holds that the social discount rate (SDR) is captured by the following formula:

$$\text{SDR} = \delta + \eta \times (\text{rate of increase in consumption per capita})^{29}$$

The two variables (δ and η) are crucial and play a critical role in determining how much action should be taken now. This framework is shared by economists who disagree on much else, such as Nicholas Stern and Richard Nordhaus.³⁰ For Stern the first variable, δ , refers to (i) the extent of pure time preference (that is the rate at which future interests should be discounted simply because they are in the future), and (ii) the probability that humanity will become extinct. The second variable, η , actually combines three different variables, namely: (iii) aversion to inequality over time, (iv) aversion to inequality over space, and (v) aversion to risk.³¹ So the social discount rate—which is employed to determine how much action to take now—reflects five very different values.

The dominant frameworks that are used to guide policy depend heavily on this concept, but (a) it does not necessarily accord any independent weight to the poor (though adjusting η can, to some extent, build in a greater concern for the poor); and (b) it is highly complex and opaque to the general public, and consequently people are unable to hold government policy to account on this issue. Academics thus have a key role to play in ensuring that the normative frameworks employed to assess the impacts of climate change are designed with a view to protecting the poor and vulnerable and that they are comprehensible.

²⁹ F. P. Ramsey, 'A Mathematical Theory of Saving', *Economic Journal*, vol.38 no.152 (1928), pp.543–559.

³⁰ See Sir Nicholas Stern, *The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.52 and William Nordhaus *A Question of Balance: Weighing the Options on Global Warming Policies* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), p.33.

³¹ For a helpful discussion of η see Wilfred Beckerman and Cameron Hepburn, 'Ethics of the Discount Rate in the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change,' *World Economics*, vol.8 no.1 (2007), p.193ff.

§3. *Knowledge Gaps and the Vulnerable*. Third, academics can also provide research that the vulnerable may themselves use. Currently the most vulnerable often lack access to knowledge that would better enable them to cope with threats to their livelihood. Those who work in the natural sciences and social sciences can, however, make a positive contribution by sharing their research via, for example, “creative commons” frameworks (rather than, say, in prohibitively expensive journals that representatives of the global poor can ill afford). In his important book *The Wealth of Networks*, Yochai Benkler chronicles the ways in which development can be furthered through the sharing of software, knowledge, and information. He brings out in particular how a creative commons approach can facilitate progress on food security and the sharing of agricultural information and techniques, and on health and the development of vaccines.³²

Academics can also provide knowledge that enables the least advantaged to assist themselves regarding the impacts of climate change. Most of the resources devoted to climate science focus on climate models that make projections of the global average increases in temperatures and sea-rises. These integrated assessment models do not, however, make any projections about the likely effects in particular places. Affluent countries can afford to produce research on such specific local-level effects, but many of the most vulnerable countries (such as low-lying small island states) cannot.³³ One role that climate researchers can perform, therefore, is to undertake research on the likely effects of climate changes on vulnerable countries and share this information with local policy-makers so that they might be better equipped to deal with them.

³² Benkler *The Wealth of Networks*, pp.329-344 (on food security) and pp.344-353 (on access to medicines).

³³ For discussion see Jon Barnett and John Campbell *Change and Small Island States: Power, Knowledge and the South Pacific* (London: Earthscan, 2010).

§4. *Knowledge Gaps and Enabling Assistance.* An additional useful role that academics can perform is to provide empirical guidance and advice to those who wish to donate to charities but are not sure which charities are the most effective. This point has been recognized by Peter Singer, who discusses this topic in his book *The Life You Can Save*, and by Keith Horton in his contribution to this symposium.³⁴ As Singer points out, nonacademics can, and do already, provide assessments. Singer himself often draws on findings from GiveWell, an organization set up by two hedge fund founders to assess charities. But as Leif Wenar argues, GiveWell’s methodology and analysis could be improved in many ways.³⁵ In a series of publications Wenar draws attention to the many problems involved in assessing charities and the lack of research on the subject. Given this lack of research, academics trained to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of social policies can contribute an invaluable service by providing comprehensive and systematic analyses of what works, what does not, and how charities can do better.³⁶

§5. *Social Moral Epistemology.* Academics can also make other kinds of epistemic contributions. It is widely recognized that the perpetuation of unjust practices and ideologies—such as racism, sexism, and fascism—depends on widespread false beliefs, and that combating these evils involves undermining their epistemic props. In a similar fashion,

³⁴ See Singer *The Life You Can Save: How to Play Your Part in Ending World Poverty* (London: Picador, 2009), chapter 6. See also Keith Horton’s contribution to this issue for an excellent discussion of the role that academics can play in evaluating the effectiveness of aid programmes.

³⁵ See GiveWell at <http://givewell.org/>. For Singer’s discussion of GiveWell and its founders see *The Life You Can Save*, pp.81-93. Note also that Giving What We Can recommends charities (<http://www.givingwhatwecan.org/resources/recommended-charities.php>) and that it has drawn on GiveWell, among other organizations (<http://www.givingwhatwecan.org/resources/our-methodology.php>). For Wenar’s critique see his ‘Poverty is No Pond: Challenges for the Affluent’ in *Giving Well: The Ethics of Philanthropy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), edited by Patricia Illingworth, Thomas Pogge and Leif Wenar, pp.124-126.

³⁶ On the problems of assessment see Wenar ‘What We Owe to Distant Others’, *Politics, Philosophy and Economics*, vol.2 no.3 (2003), pp.291-296 (especially pp.294 & 296); ‘Accountability in International Development Aid’, *Ethics and International Affairs* vol.20 no.1 (2006), pp.18-20; and ‘Poverty is no Pond’, pp. 108–123 (especially pp.118-123). For the role that academics might play see Wenar, ‘What We Owe to Distant Others,’ p. 297, and ‘Poverty is no Pond,’ p. 128. For a different approach, see Wenar ‘Accountability in International Development Aid,’ pp. 17–23.

academics can aid the struggle against global poverty by helping to provide a social environment that undermines the false beliefs that help sustain global injustice. My point here draws on Allen Buchanan's important work on what he terms "social moral epistemology," where the latter refers to "the study of the social practices and institutions that promote (or impede) the formation, preservation, and transmission of true beliefs so far as true beliefs facilitate right action or reduce the incidence of wrong action."³⁷ It seems plausible that the persistence of mass poverty, the practices that help perpetuate it, and our inaction on the issue depend in part on false beliefs (such as the belief that "it is all their own doing" or the idea that "our governments are providing sufficient financial assistance").³⁸ Academics can thus play an important role both by challenging the false beliefs that underpin this behavior and, more generally, by creating a social and political environment in which false but damaging beliefs are challenged and undermined.

§6. *Developing Normative Frameworks.* Finally, academics help provide a plausible normative framework for thinking about poverty. One vital contribution concerns the allocation of responsibilities.³⁹ Affirmations of human rights that do not also provide an account of who should do what are inherently incomplete. Moral and legal scholars can play a vital role here. Indeed, Thomas Pogge notes that research by Henry Shue, Philip Alston, and Asbjorn Eide on the nature of the responsibilities that correspond to human rights has shaped UN documents on human rights.⁴⁰ In Shue's seminal work, *Basic Rights*, he famously

³⁷ 'Social Moral Epistemology', *Social Philosophy and Policy* vol.19 no.2 (2002), p. 126. See also Buchanan 'Philosophy and Public Policy: A Role for Social Moral Epistemology', *Journal of Applied Philosophy* vol. 26 no. 3 (2009), pp. 276–290.

³⁸ For the latter see Singer's overview of the beliefs of Americans concerning how much aid they think that Americans donate to overseas aid (*The Life You Can Save*, pp. 33–35).

³⁹ This is a point that has often been pressed by Onora O'Neill: see, for example, her critique of accounts which treat rights as basic in O'Neill *Towards Justice and Virtue: A Constructive Account of Practical Reasoning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially pp.128-134.

⁴⁰ My source of information is Pogge 'Shue on Rights and Duties' in *Global Basic Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) edited by Charles Beitz and Robert Goodin, p.125 footnote 11. Pogge cites Philip Alston and Katarina Tomaševski (editors) *The Right to Food* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984) and Asbjorn

set out three kinds of duties that must be honored if people are to enjoy human rights: duties to avoid depriving; to protect from deprivation; and to aid the deprived.⁴¹ A variant of this tripartite formula is now widely employed in human rights documents, and the latter refer to duties to “respect,” “protect,” and “fulfill”. A recent example is the 2011 ‘Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the issue of Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises’ (by John Ruggie) which explicitly seeks to articulate “Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights” that implement what it refers to as the ““Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework”.⁴²

THE MODALITIES

The analysis of the role of academics in combating global poverty is incomplete until we have an account of the mechanisms by which academics can contribute. To determine what means are available to academics we need first to refer to the three kinds of targets specified above, for the appropriate means will depend to a large extent on what the direct target of the initiative is.

Consider, first, projects designed to change the behavior of individuals in affluent countries. The primary means for doing this will be for academics to disseminate their findings and arguments in articles for newspapers and/or on the Internet, by putting podcasts online, and by writing accessible books for the general public. Some, most notably Peter Singer, have done much of this kind of work. To relate this to the classifications created in

Eide, Wenche Barth Eide, Susantha Goonatilake and Joan Gussow (editors) *Food as a Human Right* (Tokyo: United Nations University, 1984), pp.169-174.

⁴¹ Henry Shue *Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence, and U. S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) second edition with a new afterword, p.60.

⁴² See <http://www.business-humanrights.org/media/documents/ruggie/ruggie-guiding-principles-21-mar-2011.pdf>. I am grateful to Leif Wenar for drawing my attention to this.

previous sections: this kind of intervention can sometimes be *specific*—for example, canvassing particular proposals, such as fair trade initiatives, or campaigning against particular proposals. Academics can also operate at a more *general* level: clearly they can use electronic and print media to present the moral case for anti-poverty efforts, to present valuable information and challenge misconceptions, and to provide assessments of different charities.

Consider now the means of contributing to the policy-making process. Academics might be able to contribute in two ways here. One course of action available is to participate in reports, such as those produced by international organizations such as the IPCC, World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and UNESCO. Academics can also participate in reports produced by national bodies, such as the Royal Society or the Nuffield Council on Bioethics. Or they can work together with highly respected think tanks and nongovernmental organizations, such as Oxfam. Second, academics can give evidence and submit research to political actors at both the national and international level, such as national legislatures and the institutions that are part of the UN system.

The third kind of target mentioned was “empowering the global poor or their representatives.” There are (at least) two ways that academics can perform this kind of role. First, academics can engage in a kind of capacity building.⁴³ Developing countries, and Less Developed Countries in particular, often lack access to legal and economic expertise. This leaves them ill-equipped to negotiate at meetings of international organizations, such as the Ministerial Conferences of the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the Conference of the

⁴³ For an example see Academics for Higher Education & Development (<http://www.ahed-upesed.org/>).

Parties meetings of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The following figures from the UNDP give a sense of the problem:

In 2004, 33 developing countries, 10 of them in Africa, that were WTO members or in the process of accession had no permanent representative. The average size of a least developed country WTO mission is two professional staff. At the other extreme, the European Union has 140 staff to make its case in WTO negotiations. That is without taking into account trade officials in national capitals, which would multiply that number several times over.⁴⁴

Timmons Roberts and Bradley Parks report that the same situation exists at the annual Conference of the Parties (COP) negotiations on climate change, where the United States and European Union bring vastly greater numbers of formal delegates, lawyers, economists, and scientists than do African and small island states.⁴⁵ One role that academics with the relevant legal or economic or scientific training can play is to provide advice for representatives from developing countries.

Second, academics with expertise in agricultural techniques or disease prevention initiatives or civil engineering or weather prediction can seek to empower vulnerable communities by sharing their knowledge and expertise, whether in person or by making their research available online.

SIX PROPOSED RULES OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Having set out different ways in which academics can contribute to the eradication of global poverty, I now wish to set out six proposals that I suggest should govern these activities.

These apply, in particular, to initiatives that involve proposing a specific policy instrument or combating a given policy. My starting point—from which I seek to derive these six

⁴⁴ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2005: International Cooperation at a Crossroads – Aid, Trade and Security in an Unequal World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.146.

⁴⁵ J. Timmons Roberts and Bradley C. Parks *A Climate of Injustice: Global Inequality, North-South Politics, and Climate Policy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2007), pp.14-19.

proposals—is that there are three desirable properties for any academic initiative that seeks to contribute to the eradication of poverty. Such initiatives should:

(Pi) be politically achievable,

(Pii) succeed in reducing poverty, and

(Piii) serve, more generally, to bring us closer to a better world. I mean by this that they should:

(Piiia) not act in ways which impede the realization of other moral requirements when there are other options available which realize the eradication of poverty to the same degree (or more) and which do not impede the realization of the other moral requirements as much; and also

(Piiib) not act in ways which, though they ameliorate global poverty, have other effects so awful that the positive contribution to making the world a better place attributable to the reduction of poverty is outweighed by these malign side-effects.⁴⁶

Seeking Shared Goals even in the Absence of Shared Starting Points. Given this starting point (and, in particular, Pi), my first proposal is that those who seek to combat poverty have good reason to create coalitions with others centered on that shared goal, *but who do not necessarily require shared ethical starting points.* The reasoning underlying this first suggestion is straightforward: for practical purposes what matters is building a coalition in order to further a crucial moral objective. It is a luxury to work only with those who share one's fundamental commitments all the way down. This suggestion will naturally bring to mind John Rawls's concept of an "overlapping consensus."⁴⁷ Like Rawls's concept, the idea is to have agreement on some core values (or, in this case, policies) without there necessarily being agreement all the way down. Consider the campaign to cancel some, or all, of the debts

⁴⁶ For a similar but non-identical approach see David Wiens's instructive discussion in 'Toward a Pragmatic Moral Theory of State Sovereignty' (unpublished) *Public Reason* (7 November 2008), section 3. This is available at: <http://publicreason.net/2008/11/07/ppps-toward-a-pragmatic-moral-theory-of-state-sovereignty/>. By contrast with Wiens, I think that decision-making in non-ideal circumstances ought to be informed by an understanding of the ideal. See Wiens 'Prescribing Institutions Without Ideal Theory', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol.20, no.1 (2012), pp.45–70.

⁴⁷ See here ASAP's own initiative along the lines I am canvassing (and the fact that it too uses the idea of an overlapping consensus): <http://asap.betaelements.net/projects/the-global-poverty-consensus-report/>.

owed by some developing countries. It is a familiar observation that those who support this are motivated by a variety of ethical commitments. For some the duty to cancel debt is grounded in a commitment to a faith (and, of course, this category is in turn very diverse); for others it is underpinned by a wholly secular commitment to human rights; and for still others it is based on charity, compassion, and human decency.

It should be noted that my proposed norm is slightly differently from the idea of an “overlapping consensus” as Rawls employs that concept. Rawls stresses that this refers to a consensus between “reasonable” comprehensive doctrines, whereas my claim does not insist that the consensus be between reasonable persons (as Rawls defines “reasonable”).⁴⁸ In addition, my suggestion is compatible with people adopting something close to what Rawls terms a “modus vivendi”—that is, a purely strategic alliance between people who can agree on the goal of eradicating poverty, but might disagree on the reasons for supporting this goal.⁴⁹

Note there are two obvious limitations to this suggestion. (A third possible limitation is noted in the next subsection.) First, we should record that this norm is defeasible. There may be cases, for example, where reaching a consensus with one group of people may clash with fundamental moral convictions. Sharing a platform with others may be incompatible with standing firm on other principles. Second, there are often limits on the extent to which it is possible to make detailed and specific policies without relying on normative assumptions that others (who share the same broad objectives) may reject. For example, people might agree that poverty is bad but disagree on (i) the moral weight of that state of affairs (for example, those who conceive of it as an injustice might rate it as worse than those who think that it is not unjust but that charity calls for donations to the poor); and people might also disagree on (ii) who is responsible for eradicating poverty (some might think it is those who

⁴⁸ Rawls *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p.144.

⁴⁹ Rawls *Political Liberalism*, pp.147-148.

cause the poverty who bear responsibility; others may ascribe the responsibility to those with the greatest ability to pay). In addition to this, (iii) some might disagree on which moral constraints, if any, should apply to anti-poverty policies. In other words, a shared commitment to combating poverty may not provide enough of a normative framework to guide anti-poverty policy; confronting other key questions integrally related to eliminating poverty may require moving to more controversial claims.

The Mode of Normative Reasoning. I turn now to a second suggestion (one animated by Piii) concerning the type of normative reasoning that is appropriate when seeking to advance specific policies or concrete actions. To make my point it is necessary to locate it in a broader theoretical framework about the ethics of social transformation. In his important work *Envisioning Real Utopias*, Erik Olin Wright argues that an adequate “theory of social transformation” must include four elements: (i) an account of the forces that sustain the status quo and thwart progress; (ii) an account of the opportunities for transformation; (iii) an analysis of the future changes with respect to (i) and (ii); and (iv) an account of what people should do now.⁵⁰ Our concern here is with the role that academics can play, if any, with respect to that last element.

Now, drawing on this framework, we can distinguish between two kinds of normative reasoning. First, there is the kind of mode of reasoning that is necessary to address the question posed by Wright’s fourth component of a theory of social transformation. This kind of reasoning is very context-specific and is concerned with which particular policy options or concrete actions particular people should adopt in specific circumstances at specific times. Let us call this *normative policy-oriented reasoning*. (The term ‘policy’ in this formulation should be understood in an inclusive way to include both policy instruments (eg taxes) and

⁵⁰ Erik Olin Wright *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London and New York: Verso, 2010), p.273: cf Part III.

also the creation and reform of political institutions.) Examples of the kinds of contemporary questions where this kind of reasoning is appropriate include: “Should citizens of affluent countries campaign for a financial transactions tax?” and “Should they argue for a system of carbon taxes or a system in which emissions permits are auctioned off?”

This kind of reasoning can be contrasted with what I shall term *normative principle-oriented reasoning*, where the latter refers to more general abstract reasoning, such as: “Who should bear the burden involved in eradicating global poverty?” and “Do people have a right not to suffer from poverty?” Thus, whereas policy-oriented reasoning is concerned with the *policies* people should pursue in the circumstances they face, principle-oriented reasoning is concerned with the general *principles* that apply to them.⁵¹

The claim that I wish to advance (my second suggestion) is that the *normative policy-oriented reasoning* that should be employed in combating poverty is (a) distinct in nature from *principle-oriented reasoning* in at least one crucial respect, but that (b) it is nonetheless dependent upon it and indeed should be conducted in light of our best understanding of the principles that would apply in an ideal world. This claim—especially (b)—is likely to be controversial.

Let us consider the first point: normative policy-oriented reasoning differs crucially from principle-oriented reasoning because the former, unlike the latter, must necessarily be informed by an understanding of each of the three other components that Wright mentions in his account of social transformation, namely, the *constraints* that face particular courses of action that seek to change the status quo (factor i), the *opportunities* that are available to

⁵¹ My distinction is similar in spirit to G. A. Cohen’s distinction between “rules of regulation” and “fundamental principles” (*Rescuing Justice and Equality* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp.3, 19-21, 253-254, 263-272, 276-279, 283, 285-286 & 323-327). But I think the two distinctions are not coextensive. Normative policy-oriented reasoning is focused on specific *policies* (e.g. the Tobin tax or reducing tariffs) not *rules*. It operates at a different level of specificity. The difference is apparent when we recall that Cohen maintains that what the parties in Rawls’s Original Position would be choosing are “rules of regulation” (and not principles of justice). However plausible this is (and I am sympathetic to Cohen’s claims) it is clear that the parties are not selecting specific policies. Rules of regulation are the rules that should govern social life, whereas policies are the means by which to achieve rules of regulation.

pursue particular courses of action (factor ii), and the *future prospects* of both (factor iii).

Because it concerns what particular policies or courses of action should be adopted, policy-oriented reasoning requires an understanding of what obstacles and opportunities each particular policy faces. Consider, for example, the following factors, all of which are highly relevant to any decision about which concrete policies to adopt:

- ❖ The nature of the existing institutional structure. It matters whether the institutional structure that is already in place is more suited to policy A rather than B because if B requires a new institutional structure then the cost of that needs to be borne in mind. (To give an example: The fact that the European Community has an emissions trading scheme in place thus gives us a pro tanto reason to seek to build on, and reform, that scheme rather than implement a scheme of carbon taxes.)
- ❖ The sentiments of voters. (For example: voters may, for example, be more hostile to carbon taxes than to schemes that allocate emissions permits).
- ❖ What pressure groups, or other political actors, are willing to support or combat. (For example, efforts to promote development by campaigning against tariffs on agricultural imports could harness the support of consumers' associations in affluent countries because consumers would benefit from removing tariffs.)

Each of these facts is highly relevant to any concrete policy-oriented reasoning, but, they are not, I submit, relevant for assessing general normative principles. Consider the last factor: that the implementation of a principle (say a principle of fair trade) might be supported by the consumers of affluent countries simply does not bear on the moral defensibility of that principle, but it *is* germane to the practical policy-oriented question of whether it makes sense to devote resources to campaigning for that principle (say one removing tariffs on goods from developing countries). Academics who seek to contribute to the task of eliminating poverty must then have a good understanding of the relevant political opportunities and obstacles.

Consider now the second (more controversial) point. Amartya Sen has famously argued that theorizing about ideal principles of justice is not necessary to guide what we should do in the here and now. For that we should engage in “comparative assessments,” Sen argues, and these do not require an appreciation of the ideal. One might think along these

lines that normative policy-oriented reasoning does not require a full understanding of ideal principles of justice. I think, however, that this is mistaken. And my second point is that normative policy-directed reasoning should be informed by an understanding of the principles that would apply in an ideal society.⁵² Sen's view depends on the assumption that we can just decide that the status quo is terrible and that a better state of affairs is achievable from here *without having an understanding of the ideal*. However, as A. John Simmons and Pablo Gilabert have persuasively argued, a purely comparative approach (which is not informed by an understanding of the ideal) is inadequate because the policies that we choose at a given time to meet a given social objective may greatly affect what is possible in the further future.⁵³ The policies that we choose now to meet a modest objective will often have knock-on effects that have an impact on whether a further improvement is *possible* or not, how *difficult* it is to attain, and how *costly* it is to attain.⁵⁴

The literatures in different branches of the social sciences on the phenomenon of “path dependence” are highly relevant here. As numerous scholars in historical sociology (for example, James Mahoney), economics (W. Brian Arthur and Douglass North), and political science (Paul Pierson) have chronicled, policies undertaken at one point in time can create path dependencies.⁵⁵ There is a variety of mechanisms that can play an important role here,

⁵² Clearly my remarks here bear on the recent debates on the value or otherwise of ideal theory and its relationship to nonideal theory. Space precludes defending my position in full. My views on ideal theory are close to those defended by David Estlund *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), chapter XIV; Pablo Gilabert ‘Comparative Assessments of Justice, Political Feasibility, and Ideal Theory’, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* vol.15 no.1 (2012), pp.39-56; Zofia Stemplowska ‘What’s Ideal about Ideal Theory?’, *Social Theory and Practice* vol.34 no.3 (2008), pp.319–340; and Adam Swift ‘The Value of Philosophy in Nonideal Circumstances’, *Social Theory and Practice* vol.34 no.3 (2008), pp.363-387.

⁵³ A. John Simmons ‘Ideal and Nonideal Theory’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* vol.38 no.1 (2010), pp.21-22, 25 & 34-35 (especially p.21), and Gilabert ‘Comparative Assessments of Justice, Political Feasibility, and Ideal Theory’, section 4.1 p.14.

⁵⁴ For the distinction between ‘difficulty’ and ‘cost’ see G. A. Cohen *Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp.238-240.

⁵⁵ I am greatly indebted to, and draw here on, W. Brian Arthur *Increasing Returns and Path Dependence in the Economy* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), James Mahoney ‘Path Dependence in Historical Sociology’, *Theory and Society* vol.29 no.4 (2000), pp.507-548, Douglass C. North *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), especially

including self-reinforcing mechanisms or positive feedbacks, lock-in, or simple inertia. In addition, sequencing is often extremely important, and the realization of some important ideal at a certain time may require the prior implementation of another policy at an earlier point.⁵⁶ If, however, we bracket out our ideal we may fail to implement one policy at that earlier moment and thus be unable to realize that ideal in the future. Given these dependencies (and their well-attested significance in the empirical literatures on social transformation) it is highly dangerous to bracket out our own vision of the ideal society. If we do so, we may find ourselves bound down a route that is an improvement on the status quo, but closes off (or makes more costly or more difficult) more ideal options. And that is clearly undesirable.

It should, however, be noted that the second norm may be in tension with the first. While it might be possible to build coalitions around the goal of eradicating poverty, it is much less likely that there will be a consensus on the nature of the ideal. Thus, to the extent that we have reason to bear in mind the long-term realization of the ideal, we have reason to go beyond what currently enjoys widespread support. Academics seeking to contribute to the struggle against poverty therefore need to avoid two extremes. They should not blindly follow the second norm and pursue the ideal without building the necessary coalitions emphasized by the first norm: that would be to make “the best the enemy of the good.” And, they should not blindly follow the first norm and ignore the ideal: that might commit us to the “pretty-bad-but-better-than-status-quo” when options are available to move to a closer realization of an ideal world.⁵⁷ Ultimately, we should seek to balance the two in whatever way would bring us closer to a fairer world (Piii). This, of course, is easier said than done.

pp.93-100, Scott E. Page ‘Path Dependence’, *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* vol.1 no.1 (2006), pp.87-115, and Paul Pierson *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp.17-53.

⁵⁶ Pierson *Politics in Time*, pp.54-78.

⁵⁷ For a similar point made in a rather different context see Gilabert ‘Comparative Assessments of Justice, Political Feasibility, and Ideal Theory’, p.48.

Integrationism versus Isolationism. My third proposal holds that any anti-poverty initiatives should not treat global poverty (or some aspect of global poverty) in isolation from other policy issues (what I shall term an Isolationist approach), but must explore its links with other challenges and consider them in a more holistic fashion (what I term Integrationism). Poverty is profoundly interconnected with many other kinds of issues, and thus anti-poverty policies can have wider ramifications. Ignoring this may undermine other important policies, and may exacerbate other severe problems. This is a familiar kind of problem: for example, agreement on the Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer was possible in part because new technologies were developed that did not include ozone-depleting substances. Unfortunately, some of these technologies released hydrofluorocarbons, which is an incredibly powerful greenhouse gas.⁵⁸ What is needed here is an integrated approach that does not focus just on one issue but examines the bigger picture.

In the cases presented above, seeking one goal clashes with the pursuit of another goal. In other cases it might be that there are win-win possibilities that will be overlooked if we focus simply on poverty in isolation from other issues. A policy of clean technology transfer, for example, has the potential both to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and yet also promote development.⁵⁹ Considering poverty in isolation will tend to lead one to overlook such positive opportunities and thereby fail Piii.

Interdisciplinarity. Having examined the implications of Pi and Piii, I note now an implication of Pii. To address the challenges posed by global poverty successfully often requires a deep grasp of many different disciplines. In light of this, my fourth suggestion is

⁵⁸ See Scott Barrett *Environment and Statecraft: The Strategy of Environmental Treaty-Making* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.222 footnote 3.

⁵⁹ International Council on Human Rights Policy *Beyond Technology Transfer: Protecting Human Rights in a Climate-Constrained World* (International Council on Human Rights Policy, Versoix, Switzerland, 2011) (available at: http://www.ichrp.org/files/reports/65/138_ichrp_climate_tech_transfer_report.pdf). Disclosure: I wrote a background paper for this report.

that anti-poverty initiatives should ideally have an interdisciplinary team of collaborators. It would be dangerous for people with expertise in one discipline to work on the basis of their own amateur views of the other dimensions. Successful policy interventions require, for example, a sure grasp of the root causes of poverty and the costs and benefits of different policy instruments (so economics, international political economy, and development studies are necessary), a deep understanding of the cultural norms in different communities in developing societies (so anthropology and sociology are vital), an understanding of the existing legal architecture and the political opportunities and constraints (so law and political science is integral), a grasp of how best to frame arguments and the kinds of cognitive and other biases to which individuals and institutions are prone and how best to overcome them (so psychology can play a valuable role). Additionally, historians can also play an important role by providing examples of how previous societies dealt with similar challenges; and experts in security studies can help provide advice on the conditions for peacemaking and peacekeeping – a vital role given the harmful effects of conflict on development. Given the breadth and depth of expertise that is required it would, then, be reckless for academics to go it alone and not draw on the necessary expertise from other disciplines.

Note that in making this suggestion I am not claiming either that experts are always right or that they always agree: I am claiming only that they are likely to be more reliable guides than others.⁶⁰

Epistemic Modesty, Uncertainty and Disagreement. The causes of poverty and the nature of the kinds of policies needed to address it are highly complex and still subject to much disagreement among experts.⁶¹ In light of this, and given the very great importance of

⁶⁰ On the fallibility of experts see Philip E. Tetlock *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁶¹ See, for example, the differences in the explanation of global poverty given by Jeff Sachs and those given by others like Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson or by Dani Rodrik. See, for example, John Luke Gallup and

eradicating poverty, academics (like all involved in combating poverty) are under an obligation to take seriously the limits of their knowledge. What is called for is “epistemic modesty”—by which I do not mean a refusal to take a stand and to abstain from action, but rather a commitment scrupulously to assess the relevant information and constantly monitor new sources of information, and to acknowledge one’s own fallibility and exhibit a willingness to learn from those critical of one’s policies. This attitude is required both to serve the goal of poverty eradication effectively (Pii) and also to assess its broader implications for justice (Piii).

Accountability. Pii and Piii have one further implication. Earlier I noted concerns that academic participation in attempts to alleviate poverty might have harmful effects. This concern needs to be taken seriously and addressed. If academics seek to make a positive difference, then there ought to be some system of accountability in place to ensure that the contributions are, in fact, positive and not harmful ones. To the extent that academics can make a difference then they—like other actors in this field—need to be held to account. In an insightful discussion, Devesh Kapur records the way in which some U.S. academics have been involved in the World Bank and IMF and how others have served as economic advisors in other capacities. He further notes how U.S. universities have been involved in creating drugs that have been employed in developing countries.⁶² In light of these facts, he argues that a system of accountability needs to be put in place and suggests three possible measures: first, a requirement that academics engaged in such projects declare any conflicts of interest; second, the creation of an independent body whose role is to assess and monitor the projects;

Jeffrey D. Sachs ‘The Economic Burden of Malaria’ *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, vol.64 no.1 supplement (2001), pp.85-96; Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty* (London: Profile Books, 2012); and Dani Rodrik *One Economics, Many Recipes: Globalization, Institutions, and Economic Growth* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp.184-192.

⁶² Devesh Kapur ‘Philanthropy, Self-Interest, and Accountability: American Universities and Developing Countries’ in *Giving Well* edited by Illingworth, Pogge and Wenar, pp.264-285.

and, third, promoting the expertise of academics in developing countries so that they are less reliant on outside advisors.⁶³ This represents a useful starting point that might be supplemented with other proposals. One might, for example, require that organizations involved in poverty eradication make public their knowledge of projects that they sponsored that did *not* succeed (for example, medical innovations or agricultural techniques that did not achieve their goals or had unanticipated malign effects).⁶⁴ By doing so we minimize the likelihood that similar mistakes will be repeated in the future.

Conclusion

In this article I hope to have achieved two things. First, I have sought to highlight the diversity of ways in which academics (working together and with others) might make a positive contribution to combating global poverty. As I noted at the start, one reason for doing this is to show how many academics – with different skills and kinds of expertise – can play a role. Academics who seek to work toward a fairer world do not, however, have carte blanche to pursue that worthy ideal however they choose. My second aim, therefore, has been to outline six proposals that, I suggest, should guide the ways in which academics join with others and seek to address the terrible poverty that destroys the lives of so many. This, I believe, is better than turning away “quite leisurely from the disaster.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Kapur ‘Philanthropy, Self-Interest, and Accountability’, p.281.

⁶⁴ I owe this point to Tim Kruger who made this suggestion in a different context (geoengineering research). It is embodied in Steve Rayner, Catherine Redgwell, Julian Savulescu, Nick Pidgeon, and Tim Kruger ‘Memorandum submitted by Tim Kruger (GEO 07): Draft Principles for the Conduct of Geoengineering Research’, Submitted to House of Commons Science and Technology Committee enquiry into ‘The Regulation of Geoengineering’, para 19 principle 3 (available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmsctech/221/10011315.htm>).

⁶⁵ I would like to thank Luis Cabrera for organizing the event in London on 17th October at which this paper was first presented and members of the audience at that event; the members of various NGOs, think tanks, international organizations, and trade unions (from whom I have learned a very great deal); and the ESRC for a Climate Change Leadership Fellowship on ‘Equity and Climate Change’, which enabled me to write this paper. For excellent written comments I am extremely grateful to Aveek Bhattacharya, James Christensen, Iason Gabriel and the two referees for this journal (who shed their anonymity and revealed themselves to be Robyn Eckersley and Leif Wenar).