

Richard W. Miller

Globalizing Justice: The Ethics of Poverty and Power.

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In his *Globalizing Justice: The Ethics of Poverty and Power* Richard Miller establishes a thesis about global justice that should have been obvious for a long time. Miller doesn't approach issues of global justice from the Shallow Pond case, but instead from the historical realities of how cultures, societies, and now global society work. The Shallow Pond case is this: Suppose, as you're walking to a not too important meeting, that you notice a child drowning in a shallow pond. You quickly realize that if you do nothing, the child will die, but if you do try to save the child, you'll be successful and yet ruin some of your clothes and be late to your meeting, costing you some extra money. Many offer the case as a way of arguing for stringent obligations to the world's poor. Although Miller does not rely on such an analysis, his book's very rich historical and sociological analysis comes to a somewhat similar conclusion concerning obligations to the world's poor. Any budding philosopher can only hope to strive for such important interdisciplinary research in forming philosophical positions.

I take Miller's thesis to be two-fold, and something like this: 1) There are stringent, unmet moral responsibilities to those in developing countries, and such responsibilities are possessed by individuals, organizations, and the major overseeing political entities of developed countries, in particular the U.S. 2) Such obligations to the impoverished in developing countries is not due to the bases provided by either i) Peter Singer and allies in their beneficence and sacrifice models of justice, or ii) Thomas Pogge and his allies in their no-harm due to economic interdependency model of justice. Instead, as Miller advances, individuals in developing countries are owed reparations in virtue of the fact that they have been taken advantage of by developed countries. Furthermore, as individuals in any developed country, we have the obligation to make sure that we treat those in developing countries in such a way that we do not take advantage of them. More specifically, we have the obligation not to exploit them.

In terms of the first thesis, that we have largely unmet moral obligations to those in developing countries, it is via his argument for the second thesis that this is established. Now, some might object that a separate argument for this first thesis should be given, independent of argument for the second thesis. But this would be a mistake. Suppose that the only way to argue for a metaethical thesis was by arguing for an ethical theory. For example, one argued for some form of ethical realism by arguing for utilitarianism. Then, such arguments for utilitarianism would also be arguments for ethical realism. Now, in terms of his second thesis, Miller argues that Singer and company as well as Pogge and company do not provide the correct basis for unmet obligations to the world's poor. I believe he is correct here. For example, Singer does not allow for deviation of projects that are not aligned with aid. Just think of what we do with

our money and time for those close to us that is out of proportion with helping and just being with those close to us; according to Singer, this kind of action would be morally prohibited. But of course it is not, nor should it be. In terms of Pogge and company, Miller focuses on their reliance to ground moral obligations of individuals of developed nations based on their economic interdependency with individuals of developing nations. However, as Miller argues, such economic interdependency lacks a way to ground such obligations. Miller reminds us that such obligations are moral, and as such, the basis for them needs to be moral as well. This can be highlighted by the fact that multinational enterprises can actually raise, just slightly, the level of income of individuals in developing countries, and yet in doing so still exploit them.

Despite the very important critical work on Miller's behalf, I think that there is a fundamental methodological problem with it. In making his case, Miller argues for what he calls 'The Principle of Sympathy'. Miller doesn't think that by itself this principle will get the result of stringent, unmet responsibilities to the global poor. Instead, he thinks that i) it is the correct contrast to what he calls 'The Principle of Sacrifice' as offered by Singer, and ii) it shows that if there are such things as stringent, unmet obligations to the global poor, it has to do with our fundamental moral (not economic) interactions with them. Now, Singer's Principle of Sacrifice would easily ground stringent obligations to the global poor, as making such sacrifices on our part would easily make things much easier for them. Miller's Principle of Sympathy, on the surface of it, would not require as much sacrifice. Yet, as Miller argues (although not very explicitly), such a principle does require more sacrifice on our part than we would initially think. Here is where the methodological worry comes in: For Miller, the Principle of Sympathy does not require sacrifice per se, nor does it require equal concern, but it does require equal respect. While this sounds great, it is far from clear what, in principle, equal respect requires. It may be obvious that a multinational enterprise paying \$1.80/hr in a country with average wage of \$.60/hr is not disrespecting persons, especially when the working times are no more than 10 hrs/day and the work is not health-threatening. But it is more contentious when it is \$1.00/hr for 12 hrs/day for 16 years olds in *possibly* health-threatening conditions in a country whose average wage is \$.60/hr. Miller doesn't discuss the possible differences between these two cases.

Now, this might be due to his reliance on the veil of ignorance. He should not be singled out for this fault. No one published I know of has used the veil of ignorance in such a way that does more than propose vague principles. Couldn't it be used for specific cases instead? In fact, if there were a 'Part 2' to Miller's book, this could be just the subject for it to address. How, behind a veil of ignorance, would affected parties—or perhaps, all parties?—come to an agreement concerning specific cases involving global issues of morality? And what would their agreement, if any, be? These are important questions. Merely appealing to the veil of ignorance does not do the required explanatory work. Instead, studying the veil of ignorance itself is required, so that we can know what can and cannot be 'deduced' from the veil. We know at least so far that there is still an unresolved tension between how Harsanyi intended the veil of ignorance and Rawls' use of it. Thus, I think that further work in understanding the veil of ignorance would be interesting and perhaps even be fruitful in making Miller's case more decisive.

Despite my criticisms, I want to emphasize the importance of Miller's work. Among other things, through his extensive study of the research done on the Iraq War, the reader will see how the U.S., the paradigm controlling developed country, has done things to maintain its power, things considerably out of proportion with the demands of global justice. Thank you Richard Miller for articulating this point with empirical and conceptual power!

I conclude by emphasizing again the importance of what could be accomplished at the theoretical level using a veil of ignorance. The veil is frequently mentioned by Miller but is never expanded upon. Given the current state of the world and my ignorance of my own position and identity in it, what would I choose? This seems to be a fruitful way of basing moral obligations of the global rich to the global poor. There are many economic and sociological facts and 'laws' that would have to be known for one to responsibly employ the veil. I suspect that use of such a veil would garner the same very stringent, unmet obligations Miller strives for. With Miller, we need to move beyond mere analogous appeals to Shallow Pond, and look toward our world with deeper understanding of our social and political relationships. But if the veil of ignorance is the methodological tool by which to make such progress, then is a methodological tool that requires further investigation.

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