

Pablo Gilabert. *From Global Poverty to Global Equality: A Philosophical Exploration.* Oxford University Press, 2012. 345 pp. \$105.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780199639717).

Since Thomas Pogge's *World Poverty and Human Rights*, much of the debate on global justice has centered on negative duties and institutional schemes. Pogge and others argue that affluent individuals in the West primarily have negative duties to refrain from harming poor persons in developing nations, rather than positive duties to provide aid. Given that global economic institutions cause harm to the poor in a myriad of ways (according to Pogge), individual citizens have a negative duty to stop such harms by reforming these institutions.

It is toward these issues that Pablo Gilabert situates his book *From Global Poverty to Global Equality*. While he agrees with the central place accorded institutions (as opposed to individuals), Gilabert works instead to argue in favor of an account of positive duties of global justice. Part of his rationale is to move beyond a concern for providing a sufficient basic level of goods for all, and to work toward establishing a world wherein everyone has equal access to them. The book therefore has two major aims: to develop and defend positive duties to aid the global poor as duties of justice (rather than as humanitarian goals), and to put forth a global egalitarianism that is both feasible and reasonable, even if it cannot be realized in the short term. Reflecting these two ostensibly separate aims, the book is divided into two parts. While these two parts may seem disparate at first blush, Gilabert does well to tie them together as a coherent project, while at the same time acknowledging that for pragmatic reasons the sufficientarian concerns should take precedence to the global egalitarian ones (255-6).

In the first part, 'Beyond Global Poverty', Gilabert grounds basic positive duties of justice in a version of sufficientarianism, wherein our duties are to 'pursue social arrangements in which everyone has enough access to certain important advantages, thus avoiding absolute deprivation' (4). Criticizing Pogge, Gilabert claims that refraining from harming the global poor may in fact do little to meet either their rights or our duties of justice toward them; positive duties are thus necessitated (96). Furthermore, these duties must be at least partially feasible and politically articulated, to provide some practical detail to the ways in which institutions can be structured so as to allow for individuals to fulfill their obligations.

To defend his view, Gilabert relies on moral contractualist reasoning, the view that we ought to follow principles that no one could reasonably reject. Incorporating Pogge's focus on institutions, Gilabert claims that sufficientarian demands place upon us a positive duty to contribute to an institutional scheme that promotes basic global economic justice. Such a focus lifts much of the burdens that individual actors may bear, making these duties plausible on contractualist grounds. Furthermore, our duties function as perfect duties of justice, rather than imperfect humanitarian duties (89-90).

One of the most interesting sections of the book, and the most important for any account of positive duties, comes in Chapter three, where Gilabert confronts the libertarian position that acknowledges only negative duties of non-interference. Here he again relies on contractualist reasoning, asking: 'Is the interest of the Rich in not being taxed weightier than the interest of the Destitute in there being public institutions securing assistance to those in dire need? It seems fairly obvious, from an impartial perspective, that the concerns of the Destitute have more weight than those of the Rich' (46). It is true that enforcing positive duties would in a minor way curtail the

liberty of choice of the rich, but Gilabert claims this is not ‘sufficient grounds for rejecting a principle on whose observance the survival of millions of people depends’ (46).

Harkening back to Rawls, Gilabert scores a victory in showing that positions of power are not to be overlooked. If we allow individuals full epistemic access to the circumstances of their lives, a person who is powerful in a society may reasonably claim even negative rights are not to his advantage. Thus by securing impartial contractualist reasoning, claims Gilabert, ‘some positive duties will be seen as worthy of enforcement’ (89). The problem here, however, is that Gilabert has moved too quickly. Despite the fact that he has provided some convincing reasons to show positive duties *could* be generated via impartial contractualist reasoning, he has not necessarily shown that they *are*, or that basic socioeconomic duties (tied to institutions) are of this ilk. He appears to rely on some moral intuition that we already accept strong positive duties to aid others in domestic cases (98-100), and thus we should accept a broadening of these duties internationally. Even cases wherein one could provide aid to another at little cost despite not being the cause of their hardship are treated as obviously acceptable to all under contractualist reasoning (98). Yet to readers of the book, and especially to libertarians, such is not necessarily the case.

The crucial feature of Gilabert’s attempt to defend basic positive duties of justice is his discussion of feasibility, which he rightly notes has received too little attention to date. Even if we accept an institutional scheme of positive duties of justice, can we actually discharge our duties? Thomas Nagel, for instance, says no. Positive duties would require the existence of a global state, and since such a state does not exist, positive duties cannot exist either. Gilabert admits that Nagel is partially correct; no effective and sufficiently empowered global institution currently exists that could provide a locus for discharging our positive duties. And yet, their current lack of existence does not, on his view, defeat the positive duties argument.

Incorporating the idea of feasibility, Gilabert works to develop duties of justice as ‘dynamic duties’, wherein we have an obligation to expand the set of political actions or institutional arrangements that are in fact feasible in our world (117, 138). Empirically, he also appeals to what he calls the ‘Fact of Globalization’, the claim that there is a ‘tendency toward ever-greater economic and political integration across national borders’ (9). From this fact, he draws strength to claim that we should adopt a ‘transitional standpoint’ on our current world. As the interconnectedness of our lives and world develops over time, so the limits of what is feasible are similarly flexible and developing (145-52). Accordingly, the view that duties of justice must be perfect and negative is jettisoned for a concept of feasibility in degrees, which belies the possibility of a non-ideal theory of basic positive duties of justice.

The second part of the book, ‘Toward Global Equality’, makes a more radical move to argue that our positive duties of justice should extend beyond sufficientarianism to global egalitarian distribution. Here we must ‘pursue social arrangements in which everyone has equal access to certain important advantages, thus avoiding relative deprivation’ (4). In doing so, Gilabert takes up the question of scope: to whom and between who do global principles of justice apply? He considers two possible responses, from the associativist and the humanist. The associativist holds that A has an enforceable duty of justice with respect to B if and only if A and B are connected by or share in some relevant political/social association. In contrast, the humanist claims that A has an enforceable duty of justice toward B solely in virtue of their both being human beings, regardless of any associativist frameworks.

Identifying certain important advantages that all humans have reason to value having access to and coupling them with a cosmopolitan ideal of the moral equality of all persons, Gilabert sides with the humanist to say that we have *prima facie* reasons for claiming that egalitarianism is a basic moral duty with global scope. While he takes up more versions of associativism than can be discussed here, he broadly concludes that ‘humanist grounds can yield egalitarian principles with global scope without having to appeal to associativist considerations. At the fundamental level this is the case as long as the realization of global egalitarian principles is feasible at reasonable cost at some point in the future’ (219).

Throughout the book, the discussion of feasibility stands out as essential. Gilabert uses the concepts of feasibility and dynamic duties to constantly push the boundaries of the politically possible. If there is a morally desirable state of the world that is not accessible from here and now (but is both feasible and desirable), our duty consists in working toward it. He accurately asserts that many theories of global justice seem to take a static standpoint to institutions and levels of global interconnectivity, rather than a transitional standpoint that considers our expanding potential to create or further develop necessary institutions to help us achieve global equality.

One weakness of the book is its reliance on empirical evidence to provide some pragmatic hope in the feasibility of global sufficientarianism and egalitarianism. While Gilabert seems to be optimistic with respect to the U.N. and European Union as potential institutions, there is no shortage of skeptics of such optimism. That being said, this is an ambitious book that makes an important contribution to debates on global justice, and Gilabert gives good reasons for us to think that we at least ought to be trying to wage this battle. He may (hopefully) be correct that another world is possible.

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