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# Book Review of Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right: Who Owes What to the Very Poor?

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*Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right: Who Owes What to the Very Poor?*  
Edited by THOMAS POGGE. [Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2007. xiii and  
406 pp. Paperback £16.00. ISBN 978-0-19-922618-4.]

CO-PUBLISHED WITH UNESCO, this volume presents selected papers from a series of philosophy seminars on poverty. The workshops were organized by

Professor Thomas Pogge, an academic at the forefront of advancing the claim that human rights obligations mandate global eradication of severe poverty, and the editor of this collection. The book contains fifteen essays that examine, from diverse philosophical perspectives the issues of if, why, and to what extent international human rights duties extend to very impoverished persons. The authors achieve fundamental consensus by concluding that the free market economy and its schema have created worldwide inequalities and that there is a corresponding human right to be free of the attendant reduction in human capability that such violations create. They diverge, however, as to the origin, scope, and implications of that right.

After inductive remarks ("Introduction") laying out the volume's contents, Pogge's opening essay ("Severe Poverty as a Human Rights Violation") establishes the tone for what follows by characterizing freedom from acute poverty as being central among human interests. Next, the plight of the world's poorest persons is demonstrated by empirical evidence: about half of all people live on less than \$2/day, more than two billion cannot access basic medicine or sanitation, and some fifty thousand individuals die every day due to poverty-related causes. All told, these conditions of deprivation amount to "arguably the largest such violation ever committed in human history" (p.52). Because wealthier nations created a global institutional order that has spawned massive and avoidable inequality, and also continue to benefit from this circumstance, Pogge asserts that well-off States must remedy that harm.

Alvaro de Vita ("Inequality and Poverty in Global Perspective") reaches a similar conclusion to Pogge as to international duties to eradicate extreme impoverishment, but from a social justice perspective. He defends distributive principles on the ground that international economic arrangements are central to global inequity. Marc Fleurbaey's essay ("Poverty as a Form of Oppression") addresses the way severe poverty strips the capacity of individuals by coercing expedient choices they might not otherwise elect. Consequently, poverty violates individual dignity by removing their agency. The late Alan Gewirth, to whom the volume is dedicated, similarly avers ("Duties to fulfil the Human Rights of the Poor") that the absence of subsistence compromises moral agency by removing the means through which to make choices. Accordingly, poverty eradication should target all within that vulnerable category regardless of other nationality or other group identity.

By contrast, Tom Campbell ("Poverty as a Violation of Human Rights: Inhumanity or Injustice?") holds that the issue of causation relative to poverty is not as significant as the fact that States can readily remedy its affects. Accordingly, he advocates for a global redistribution scheme to be administered by an international organization such as the United Nations. Along the same lines, Simon Caney ("Global Poverty and Human Rights: The Case for Positive Duties") avoids causation issues by developing a human rights theory of poverty eradication based on capacity. Because poverty is viewed as a fundamentally unjust circumstance, there exists a concurrent and universal right to its elimination.

Arjun Sengupta ("Poverty Eradication and Human Rights") and Osvaldo Guariglia ("Enforcing Economic and Social Human Rights") view the causation qua duty issue from another angle by maintaining that individual States should primarily alleviate poverty, with international obligations comprising secondary duties. Roberto Gargarella ("The Right of Resistance in Situations of Severe Deprivation") departs from other contributors by viewing severely deprived individuals as entitled to resist the laws and structures of their own

States in the event those governments contributed to their extreme impoverishment.

Each essay in this volume is well-written and informative. Collectively, the book provides multiple, sometimes conflicting, perspectives on why (but not whether) international responsibility exists for severe poverty reduction. The reader is left with the pleasant intellectual sensation of having attended a high level discussion by leading academics on an issue of crucial practical importance.

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