



Libraries and Learning Services

University of Auckland Research Repository, ResearchSpace

Version

This is the Accepted Manuscript version. This version is defined in the NISO recommended practice RP-8-2008 <http://www.niso.org/publications/rp/>

Suggested Reference

Brock, G. (2016). How Should We Discharge Our Responsibilities to Eradicate Poverty? *Res Publica*, 22(3), 301-315. doi: [10.1007/s11158-016-9328-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11158-016-9328-z)

Copyright

Items in ResearchSpace are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise indicated. Previously published items are made available in accordance with the copyright policy of the publisher.

The final publication is available at Springer via <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11158-016-9328-z>

For more information, see [General copyright](#), [Publisher copyright](#), [SHERPA/RoMEO](#).

How should we discharge our responsibilities to eradicate poverty?

Not the final version

The final version is available in Res Publica at Springer via

DOI: 10.1007/s11158-016-9328-z

1. Introduction

In his tremendously impressive book, *Poverty, Ethics and Justice*, Hennie Lötter aims to offer a comprehensive treatment of poverty as a moral issue along with an analysis of the moral ways to eradicate poverty. He hopes thereby to “contribute to the struggle to eradicate poverty everywhere” (Lötter 2011: 1). He presents an account of poverty as a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon which violates a number of ethical values (including undermining human dignity, self-respect, and health). This analysis, he believes, is necessary to highlight salient issues “for moral evaluation as a prelude for aid and action” (Lötter 2011: 2).

There is much to like about this ambitious project. Lötter carefully details the negative impacts of poverty on human beings. He argues that poverty which occurs anywhere should be of concern to every human being everywhere. He recognizes that complete eradication of poverty requires a diverse set of individual and collective actions aimed at appropriate aid and empowerment. “Aid for full eradication must include a suite of diverse human interventions that must meaningfully involve everyone: rich and poor, scientific expert and layperson, political leaders and their followers, global institutions and local street committees, highly organized groups and

lone individuals, aid givers and aid receivers” (Lötter 2011: 2). He convincingly indicates why eradicating poverty evades simple solutions. And he argues that in a just society there would be no non-voluntary poverty.

All of this is cogently argued and convincing.¹ So I turn next to parts of his book that I found to be weaker and that I will draw on in my subsequent critical engagement. First, Lötter apparently recognizes that our obligations can vary with the levels of interaction, impact, participation and spheres of decision making that vary among individuals. This suggests that his account could be applied at a more global level, but the central focus of his analysis is invariably the society in which someone is situated. The state enjoys a privileged status in the analysis and proposed solutions to poverty. Indeed, poverty is something members of that society can fix if they have the will to do so. For instance, he says: “The continued, unabated existence of poverty reflects that non-poor citizens do not care enough about the victims of poverty to change the social order to prevent, ameliorate or eradicate poverty. It is really as simple as that” (Lötter 2011: 214). I do not believe it really is as simple as that and I will explain why shortly.

A second area I found to be weaker was his account of what we are obligated to do about poverty. Lötter makes the following claims. He says: “It is not good enough to merely depict in detail why it is so deeply objectionable for humans to live in poverty. The important question is what guidance our ethical values provide for appropriately, humanely and effectively helping people trapped and engulfed by poverty” (Lötter 2011: 3). Given that tackling poverty turns out to be something we are all obligated to do, I expected more guidance would be offered as to how we ought to help effectively. However, some of the advice seems impossible or nearly impossible to follow! Lötter very thoroughly establishes the ways in which poverty is

a harmful and inhuman condition that must be eradicated. He rightly points out that restoring and developing human agency is a crucial step in the effective eradication of poverty. He also notes that “aid must be based on an integrated and multi-faceted approach to transform both individuals and human communities” (Lötter 2011: 160). He further claims that “aid givers have a responsibility to correctly and reliably identify the causes and effects of poverty through the use of the best possible scientific know-how and by engaging in dialogue with poor people. I will first present an argument that defends the claim that despite poverty’s similar appearance everywhere, its origins and contributory factors can come from a diversity of sources. If this claim is true, then I can argue for the thesis that aid givers have a moral responsibility to accurately identify the origins and causes of poverty *in every case before they give aid to poor people...*” (Lötter 2011: 163-164).²

The latter requirement strikes me as much too demanding and also to show a sometimes limited understanding of what needs to change and therefore what our obligations are to one another. In order to make these points I present some additional facts about poverty that show that effective assistance can be rendered without having to engage in individual dialogues with those who are intended beneficiaries of assistance to gain their insights about their condition and how to alleviate it. While it may be desirable in some cases to engage in such dialogue it is not always necessary or indeed possible in order to render effective aid.³

Note also that there are heavy epistemic demands placed on those who assist. “Aid givers will have to use reason to determine which state-of-the-art knowledge and research findings apply in cases where they are involved. Aid givers will have to reason about the best options for investing limited funds to make the biggest impact in the eradication of poverty. There is no self-evident set of priorities for investing

limited funds to eradicate poverty, other than perhaps that emergency relief has a prima facie claim to be considered first” (Lötter 2011: 173-174). So, here we see that there are large epistemic responsibilities for would-be helpers to weigh state of the art knowledge on the best poverty eradicating assistance they can offer. What constitutes state of the art knowledge on the topic is, of course, also deeply contested. So these demands will weigh even more heavily on us. I also agree that there are no self-evident priorities here. However, we should turn our attention to developing some guidelines, in my view. This is a further important project that philosophers should undertake.

Undoubtedly, if a society were fully just, poverty would not exist. But how do we bring about such societies or transition towards them? How can we best help societies on that path? These are key orienting questions in this paper.

I turn next to outline the structure of this paper. I present four kinds of challenges for Lötter’s views. The first criticism takes issue with Lötter’s focus on social rather than global justice. Though he seems to be concerned with poverty everywhere, he takes social rather than global justice as the primary unit of analysis and this leads to a certain blindness to the ways in which discharging duties to the poor is a global not just society or state level project. My alternative perspective also gives us more insights into the nature of our duties to one another and can accommodate a wider range of duties. So, I will sketch some of the main features of my alternative theoretical framework in Section II and show how it provides a more comprehensive framework for dealing with our many duties. I believe Lötter will have difficulty acknowledging and making room for global justice duties, having started with a more state-centric view. In my own theorizing I prefer to start with a

model of global justice and embed an account of domestic or social justice within that model. The two are complementary and are necessary to sustain each other.

A second set of concerns revolves around what we must do to discharge our duties to the poor and what we need to know to help effectively, according to Lötter. Lötter requires us to undertake extensive analysis before we act to help the poor. But there are difficulties with what he believes we are required to do. In order to discharge our duties to the poor we will have to undertake the following steps:

- (1) Dialogue with the target poor people to understand their particular situation.
- (2) We have an obligation not to act until we have undertaken a fairly rigorous analysis involving assessing the state of the art knowledge relevant to helping these particular people.
- (3) There are difficulties with assessing the state of the art knowledge that is often replete with contradictory accounts, contested theories, and often infected by political agendas.
- (4) Decide on appropriate ways of assisting the poor, in light of (1)-(3).
- (5) But, such assessment is often beyond the typical capacities and resources of ordinary citizens.

We come to appreciate that helping effectively is no easy matter and supplying more guidance would be helpful. In Section 3 I discuss some relevant empirical research and in the light of this research, the kinds of initiatives that deserve support that can act as rough guidelines for would-be assisters. These more simplified guidelines do not place such heavy epistemic demands on people. In Section 4 I explore whether we can offer some more guidelines for knowing which of many plausible policy initiatives we should support, given that there are many good

ideas and limited resources. I offer one guideline for choosing among what appear to be plausible policies to support. Section 5 offers concluding thoughts.

2. What does global justice require? An outline of the nature of our obligations to one another and the role of the state in discharging these.

My starting point is the insight, now well-established in political philosophy, that the fundamental institutions that we collectively uphold structure and importantly influence how our lives will go. Rawls makes this a focal point of his theory. The basic structure of society – which includes all the main political, economic, legal and social institutions – is the core focus for theorising about justice because its effects are pervasive, profound, and present from birth. Whether or not we endorse Rawls’s particular claim about the impact of institutions, we must at least recognize a version of it: the institutions that govern our lives -- whether at state-level or international ones -- have an important role to play in structuring our life prospects and so it is important that we ensure these aim to approximate just ones.

My next presumptively uncontroversial point is to acknowledge the importance of the “Moral Equality Imperative” -- we all must acknowledge the moral equality of all human beings. No matter where people reside they deserve to be treated as human beings that have equal value to other human beings, *ceteris paribus*. All human beings’ needs and interests deserve equal consideration, *ceteris paribus*.

What should commitment to the Moral Equality Imperative mean for how we ought to structure the institutions we collectively uphold? In my view, it minimally entails that we should ensure everyone is well positioned to enjoy the prospects for a decent life and I elaborate on this via four central components (Brock 2009). First, one

should be enabled to meet one's basic needs. Second, one must have adequate protection for one's basic liberties. Third, fair terms of cooperation must govern one's collective endeavours. And fourth, one must have background conditions (especially social and political arrangements) that support these core ingredients of a decent life. There are various ways to make the point that these four components are important ingredients for a decent life.⁴ Like human rights approaches, we might start with the individual human person and consider what she needs to live a life of dignity, fleshing out opportunities, protections, resources, and the like, that are central for such a life, taking account of a wide sweep of variation in human living arrangements. That will get us some distance, but we quickly realise that on such reflection, how that person stands in relation to others is also a key part of enjoying a life of dignity. Is she subject to domination, exploitation, or oppression? Must she endure highly coercive terms of cooperation? If her relationships with others are characterized by marked inequality, this may interfere with the ideal of a life worthy of human dignity. And so we arrive at the necessity of including relational components in our account of what global justice requires, such as fair terms of co-operation. The details of my account of global justice need not concern us for the purposes of this presentation.⁵ For our purposes, we need only note a few key points. First, global justice requires that we must be concerned with everyone's prospects for a decent life in designing and sustaining just institutions. Second, we all have duties to one another to ensure that we are well positioned to enjoy prospects for a decent life. Third, governments frequently can act as efficient co-ordinators and dischargers of these responsibilities. As this view suggests, governments then have an important role to play in discharging global justice duties.

Let us consider next the relevance of states in my account of global justice. On my view, rather than having little importance (as some cosmopolitan global justice theorists maintain), states are highly relevant for several reasons.

First, states matter to people. People are, for the most part, attached to their fellow citizens and care greatly about their states' standing and achievements in the world, and this can have an important bearing on individual's well-being. Of course, this attachment is socially constructed and is subject to modification, though the mechanisms for modification require careful treatment, including managing rather than suppressing identities, at least over a reasonably long time frame (Brock and Atkinson 2008). At any rate, there are good reasons to make space in an account of global justice for *defensible forms* of such attachments, citizens' commitments to states and, indeed, flourishing forms of civic nationalism, that enhance rather than undermine support for key elements of global justice. States are likely to be a core feature of our world order for many years to come and so to ignore the role they can and should play in transitioning to a more just world is not only myopic but a missed opportunity to further key global justice goals. Even in an ideal world, however, there are reasons to think states might be a robust part of the global institutional architecture and that a world state would be less desirable. The obvious concerns surround the concentration of power and its possible abuse. Multiple centers of power might provide better protection from potential abuse and global institutional derailment.

Second, there are many state-level institutions, policies and practices that should be of concern in ensuring the Moral Equality Imperative is implemented satisfactorily in state-wide institutions. State-level institutions are still highly significant in promoting or retarding human beings' prospects for flourishing lives and constitute an important site of co-operation that ought to aspire to fairness.

Third, in the world we live in, much responsibility for ensuring core ingredients necessary for a good life are devolved to states. They are an important vehicle through which many key ingredients of global justice are secured and protected.

Fourth, as an empirical matter, in our current world *effective* states are undeniably important for beneficial development. One of the largest scale global injustices we currently face is the massive extent of poverty. Two billion people currently live below the \$2 (US) per day poverty line (IDS 2012). Many of these poor people live in developing countries (or countries that are classified as low-income or middle-income ones) and those countries especially need effective states that can actively manage the development process and economic growth in beneficial ways. There are many reasons why states that are effective are indispensable to beneficial development. States ensure the availability of key goods including healthcare, education, water, sanitation, infrastructure, security, the rule of law, and at least a minimum level of social and economic stability, all of which are necessary precursors in building a dynamic economy capable of beneficial growth. States are also in a unique position to regulate and develop the economy in beneficial ways.⁶

To what extent are global and special duties to co-members of states and nations reconcilable? On my account, these duties are not only quite compatible, but in fact there are important synergies between them. We need to attend to global duties in order to meet our obligations to compatriots. Without a number of institutions that can ensure (say) fairness in international institutions, our abilities to ensure citizens are enabled to meet needs will prove highly challenging. And in order to discharge global commitments and secure global justice goals, we often must advance local institutions that can realise the means for all to enjoy prospects for a decent life. For instance, to ensure people can enjoy the conditions necessary for their

autonomy, to meet other core human needs, or to realize fair terms of co-operation, they need to be able to participate in local as well as global political processes which aim at self-determination. Furthermore, there is an important range of cases where there are good synergies between the two, such that we can discharge our duties to both compatriots and non-compatriots by attending to certain matters that will advance the interests of both. Promoting one set of duties often promotes, rather than is in tension with the other.⁷

In our current world we are very far away from a situation in which all are able to live decent lives. How do we transition towards an improved state of affairs? In order to fulfill our duties to transition to a less unjust world, we need to rely on empirical research and multi-disciplinary analysis. We gain some appreciation of this in the next section.

3. Fulfilling obligations to the poor: what should we know?

For all our philosophical arguments concerning *why* we ought to assist the global poor, there is not enough attention on *how* we ought to help the poor effectively so that we are indeed assisting in useful ways. In advocating policy on how to help, we need to rely on multi-disciplinary analysis. Indeed, Lötter himself insists that our recommendations must be well informed by empirical evidence. Because we must be attentive to “state-of-the-art knowledge” on poverty eradication (Lötter 2011: 173-4), important and influential research on poverty that suggests we may sometimes be focusing inadvertently on some of the wrong objects in our attempted assistance efforts deserves consideration.

How can aid bring about the kind of transformations often necessary to lift people out of poverty on a wide scale and in a sustained fashion? Skeptics and

sympathizes tend to worry about distortions that can be introduced by aid, along with incentive, corruptive or other effects, that may worsen poverty over a period of time or undermine our well-intentioned efforts. I think these are serious issues that do call for closer examination. I offer some further reflections on this below.

i. Some significant research on poverty reviewed

As many in the literature observe, poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon and that has important implications for those hoping to assist poor people and communities (Alkire and Santos 2010; Riddell 2012). Worryingly, direct assistance to meet even a wide range of needs has in very few cases led to a permanent end to poverty for the majority of beneficiaries who were the target of the intervention (Riddell 2012: 221). Programs that focus on direct assistance must be supplemented with efforts that target conditions that sustain poverty. Sustained and genuine eradication of poverty requires a range of approaches which have as their focus not just assisting poor people directly but instead target “changing the structures, processes, and development paths that keep people poor and marginalized” (Riddell 2012: 239). So, we need to understand some of these structures, processes, and other factors that keep people poor and marginalized, and shortly we make a start on such understanding.

It is widely acknowledged that gainful employment can be a reliable path out of poverty and one of the most reliable guarantees for transforming the situation of those in poverty (ILO 2003). In the developing world, this means that the number of jobs must increase as there is huge unemployment in the world. At least 600 million productive jobs need to be created over the next decade, to produce opportunities consonant with demographics – more than double the number the economy is on course to produce (ILO 2012). Even if this target were reached, 900 million workers

would still live below the poverty line (ILO 2012). The figures concerning youth unemployment are particularly concerning. In some countries youth unemployment reaches over 40% or even 50% of the youth population (World Bank 2012). Growing the number of jobs typically requires growing the economy. Indeed, those countries that have reduced poverty have almost invariably done so through growth. (Reducing deprivation requires much more than economic growth, of course. Here I simply note that the right kind of growth *can* have an important role to play. For many people, especially indigenous and other marginalized ones, attending to social and political exclusion and vulnerabilities to risks may be far more important than promoting growth.)

Managing economic growth is important for beneficial development because, properly managed, growth can not only create decent jobs, but also increase income, increase the tax take, and enable states to enhance effectiveness through investments in pre-conditions necessary for its citizens to flourish, such as building schools, health care facilities, universities, and other infrastructure. But growth must be managed carefully, as there are several pitfalls that can accompany it. For instance, growth that leads to increasing inequalities -- especially when disproportionate gains accrue for the rich over the poor -- can be detrimental as this can result in policies that lead to further inequalities, as the rich and powerful seek to advance their position (Fosu 2011; Stewart 2002).

Much research confirms that processes that exacerbate intra-societal inequality can undermine the situation of the poor and marginalized, as this enables richer and more powerful citizens to modify the “rules of the game” to further entrench their position (Te Lintelo 2011). There seems to be growing awareness that effective poverty reduction relies on attention to *dynamics within societies* such as those that

sustain or increase inequalities, with a consequent shift in emphasis towards interventions aimed at empowering the poor along with measures that address the key political, institutional, and structural problems that hamper poverty eradication (Green 2008: 221). Further, addressing problems such as weak governance, institutions or the rule of law, along with weak local democratic processes, often increases the probability of faster poverty eradication (Collier 2010; Sen 1999). In many countries, especially middle-income countries where most of the world's poor citizens reside, assistance that targets the strengthening of civil society and democratic processes, is an especially appropriate focus for aid (Riddell 2012: 235).

There is no single formula for promoting development and many approaches have been tried with successful outcomes. Nevertheless, there are some discernible common patterns that can be usefully collected for those looking for guidance on how to promote development. Effective states play a crucial role. Successful development often combines a focus on effective states and empowered citizens (Green 2008; Green 2012). Indeed, the combination of active citizens and effective states may be one of the most reliable and powerful ways to pursue beneficial and multi-faceted forms of development. So we briefly explore these two ideas and their interaction next, starting with arguably the most important ingredient – effective states.

There are many reasons why states that are effective are important for beneficial development. Effective states, after all, underwrite or ensure the availability of a range of key goods including water, sanitation, infrastructure, security, reasonably reliable rule of law, education and at least a minimum level of social and economic stability. Ensuring these kinds of goods are widely available are necessary precursors to building a dynamic economy capable of beneficial growth. Furthermore, states are in a unique position to regulate and develop the economy in

beneficial ways. Social movements and the private sector cannot fully replace all the necessary functions of a state.

In addition, there are important connections between effective states and legitimate ones, to which I need to refer briefly. The state's effective provision of public goods and services is essential to securing its legitimacy. Effective states need to be, and to be perceived to be, legitimate, as their perceived legitimacy can increase their effectiveness. The reverse also applies: perceived illegitimacy undermines effectiveness. For better or worse, there is a widely held view in the development literature that there is a social contract between the state and its citizens, and that each side has a part to play in maintaining the social contract. By providing core goods and securing basic rights, the state's legitimacy is enhanced and citizens can have reasonable confidence in their state's ability to be effective. When states are unable to discharge their core responsibilities to underwrite core goods and rights, trust in the state is not well-placed. This social contract has many implications for the rights and responsibilities of citizens. For instance, the state's responsibilities to provide for public welfare makes the right to tax its citizens to sustain this capacity reasonable. And the state's delivering on these responsibilities makes it reasonable for citizens to comply with tax obligations.

Three important tests of a state's effectiveness and legitimacy are a state's ability to manage an impartial system of justice, a state's ability to raise taxes fairly, and a state's ability to spend revenue wisely (Green 2008: 97). Civic participation can be an important part of ensuring that states are held to account in delivering in these three areas and so active citizenship can be an important part of creating and sustaining effective states.

Collective action and self-organization has an important role to play in helping marginalized and vulnerable groups to gain standing in society. Efforts to reduce poverty and vulnerability can often be very effective when they strengthen or support the self-organization of poor people. What can better organization achieve? Quite a lot, at least some evidence suggests. As just some illustrations, better organization allowed the so-called “rag-pickers” of Nashik in India who picked through rubbish for scraps to sell, to create additional employment opportunities as they mobilized to take over some of the refuse collection jobs in residential areas. This enabled them to enjoy more job security, income and safety (MacAuslan 2007; Dey et al. 2006). Also, consider the successful campaign for a national rural employment guarantee in India. Drought and rural distress led to activists submitting a petition to the Supreme Court in 2001 on the ‘Right to Food’ which resulted in a bill and eventually a law, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, such that citizens of rural India are now guaranteed employment (MacAuslan 2007; Dey et al. 2006). Within 15 days of making a valid application, the government is legally obligated to provide one hundred days of work per year. Much of the work is on public works programs which also serve to reduce vulnerability. Examples include reforesting land and building irrigation canals to marginalized, poor villages (MacAuslan 2007; Dey et al. 2006).

Obviously, there is much more to say about ways to address poverty, but in closing this discussion of some significant research on poverty, I underscore some key points that are salient to our analysis. First, effective states are important for beneficial development. Second, efforts to reduce poverty and vulnerability can often be very effective when they strengthen or support the self-organization of poor people. Third, successfully addressing poverty requires attention to domestically

driven processes such as those that widen intra-societal inequalities in wealth and power or sustain vulnerability and marginalization. Fourth, since key actors in relieving poverty in developing countries are governments in developing countries and their citizens, poverty eradication cannot be solved entirely by those who live outside particular poor countries. While Lötter may agree with me on the importance of all these points, as we will soon see, we may well disagree on what kinds of policies to support in light of different weightings we perhaps place on these and other facts.

ii. What policies should we support in light of such research?

Poor men and women and their governments are key actors in relieving poverty in poor, developing countries. However, they can be assisted or hampered in these efforts by a variety of actions, institutions, practices, and other factors that are under the control of many actors, including those in developed countries. Developed world actors can be either part of the problem or part of the solution: they can assist in building effective, accountable states and an active, engaged citizenry, or their actions can undermine these goals. Outlining the myriad ways in which powerful countries, organizations, and individuals can undermine weaker ones and how improvements should be made is an important project, though obviously I cannot embark on this here. However, we should discuss at least one example to illustrate what I have in mind as the kind of policy we should support. The example also illustrates how there are already plenty of good initiatives already developed – but which could do with more support to fortify their effects -- which are good examples of strengthening effective government and empowering citizens, and do well in meeting other desiderata for good assistance. I consider the Extractive Industries Transparency

Initiative as one such example. It aims to address an enormous problem of lost revenue that arises from natural resource sales that are not adequately transparent or accountable. Approximately 3.5 billion people live in countries rich in resources, yet all too often many poor citizens see little benefit from the extraction of their resources.⁸ On the contrary, these resources often undermine effective states and the empowerment of citizens. Let us review.

In many cases, the revenue that poor, developing countries could obtain from resource sales would be more than enough to finance reforms necessary to address poverty, that is to say, if the revenue were actually received and appropriately disbursed. Citizens, governments and multinationals (both from within and outside the country) could play a very important role in assisting countries to receive such revenue (this could also help build trans-national solidarity as we unite to keep our governments more accountable). Currently, many resource sales occur through non-transparent processes where prices and amounts sold are not disclosed, thus providing ample opportunities for private gain and corruption, not to mention extensive damage (McFerson 2009). Losses from resource sales decrease the money available for development spending. In addition, corrupt resource sales are also strongly linked to severe restrictions on political and civil rights, as governments (and individuals within governments) who stand to gain from corrupt deals are apt to take extreme measures to retain their position (McFerson 2009).

Citizens could be considerably assisted in keeping their governments accountable for resource sales through international measures, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) that promotes transparency of revenue flows at the local level.⁹ On this program, companies disclose their tax and royalty payments for resources to governments. Governments disclose what they receive in

payments. The tax and royalty payments are then independently verified and made public in a process overseen by several key stakeholders including representatives from governments, companies, and civil society. This initiative allows for consensus-building development, helps create trust, stability, coherence, good governance, confidence in judicious revenue collection and disbursement. The initiative provides mechanisms for relevant information gathering, such that citizens and the private sector in those countries can help improve governance conducive to promoting effective and legitimate states.¹⁰ Citizens of countries in the developed world can assist poor citizens in resource-rich, developing countries by mobilizing to make participation in the EITI mandatory when operating in key organizations under their jurisdiction. For instance, they could require that all multinationals that list on developed world stock exchanges comply with transparency practices such as those outlined by the EITI. They could make membership of EITI mandatory for participation in desirable opportunities such as being involved in contracting agreements with government.

4. Are there any guidelines that can help us decide among policy options?

What guidelines should we use when considering which of a number of good policy options we ought to pursue? Here is one proposal.

A guideline for choosing among plausible policy options in fulfilling our obligations to the poor:

Ceteris paribus, we should concentrate our policy recommendations on poverty reduction efforts that have (1) large expected payoffs when they have (2) low

transition costs. If two or more policies have large expected payoffs with low transition costs, we should support that policy recommendation that has the largest expected payoff with lowest transition cost, if we cannot support all good policy options. ((1) and (2) are explained further below.)

(1) A payoff is large when the proposal (a) successfully addresses the most fundamental factors hampering poverty reduction efforts (*fundamentality*) and (b) the proposal can reasonably be expected to have significant potential to transform the situation of nearly all who are in poverty in that country, including the most marginalized and vulnerable (*large scale*) and (c) the proposal also reliably produces excellent consequences for other aspects of beneficial development (*positively accelerating features*).

(2) There are low transition costs when an initiative is already established, or is partially established and already enjoys high levels of support. An initiative can also be considered as having low transition costs when no complex “buy-in” (negotiation and agreement) phase is required to begin implementing the initiative, there are few costs to joining in, and operating expenses and other associated costs are low.

I believe the EITI meets these criteria well. Briefly, the EITI has the potential to transform societies to bring about effective states and empowered citizens, and so on this “fundamentality” criterion is highly promising (and is already showing notable gains). This initiative provides resources and other measures that can reasonably be expected to address the condition of a large number of people who are in poverty.

Since this initiative enables consensus-building development, helps create trust, stability, coherence, good governance, confidence in judicious revenue collection and disbursement, and effective and legitimate states, it is plausible to say that the initiative has significant potential to transform the situation of nearly all who are in poverty in that country. Similar considerations illustrate why the proposal clearly satisfies the “accelerating features” criterion, as all of these expected consequences accelerate the possibilities for creating the kind of environment conducive to poverty elimination. Transition costs are low as the EITI is already established.

We do not always have to choose among policies: sometimes we can support many policies unproblematically. However, sometimes choices must be made when resources, especially time, are scarce and in those cases, some guidelines will be useful. An important next step in understanding and discharging our obligations to the poor might be to develop further guidance on how to mediate among plausible policy proposals in this domain.

5. Conclusions

While Lötter believes that “the most important thing is that everybody should do something about poverty” (2011: 281), that claim is in some tension with others he makes where he emphasizes that we should only act after a detailed assessment of the specific causes of poverty in particular cases. And because, as Lötter notes, “citizens have a moral responsibility to do something to eradicate poverty in their society” (2001: 281), we need to know more to help effectively. There are epistemic and other limitations to gaining all the information we need. In those cases some proxies and guidelines would help. The issue of how to help effectively needs more attention.

Lötter might complain that this is an unfair criticism. After all, we cannot expect philosophers to be on top of the kind of empirical information necessary to make such judgments. I would respond that I do not think this is an unfair criticism because Lötter has in fact required us to be in possession of this kind of knowledge before we assist others and to act only after we have carefully considered state-of-the-art knowledge on this topic. So in the context of what he has proposed, I think the criticism does have some bite.

So, in the end, while the work has breathtaking scope and covers a vast array of topics linked with poverty, ethics and justice, in some ways, it does not go far enough, given the framework Lötter presents. I do not think this is in itself a criticism of the book – one can, after all, only do so much in the scope of one 300 odd page book. But it is an invitation for him to develop his views in certain kinds of directions so that he can offer more guidance to those hoping to discharge their obligations to the poor in effective ways.¹¹

References

Alkire, Sabina and Maria Emma Santos. 2010. *Multidimensional Poverty Index: A New Approach to Global Poverty*. Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. <http://www.un.org/en/ga/second/65/docs/foster.pdf>.

Blake, Michael and Gillian Brock. Forthcoming in 2014. *Debating the Ethics of Brain Drain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brock, Gillian. 2009. *Global Justice: A Cosmopolitan Account*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brock, Gillian. 2014. Forthcoming in 2014. Global poverty, decent work, and remedial responsibilities: What the developed world owes to the developing world and why. In *Poverty Coercion, and Human Rights*, ed. Diana Meyers. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brock, Gillian and Quentin D. Atkinson. 2008. What Can Examining the Psychology of Nationalism tell us about our Prospects for aiming at the Cosmopolitan Vision? *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 11: 165-179.

Chen, Marty. 2006. *Empowerment of Informal Workers: Legal and Other Interventions*. Paper prepared for the United Nations Commission of Legal Empowerment of the Poor. Available at <http://www.wiego.org/publications/>.

Collier, Paul. 2010. *Conflict, Political Accountability and Aid*. London: Routledge.

Dey, Nikhil, Jean Dreze, and others. 2006. *Employment Guarantee Act: A Primer*. New Delhi: National Bank Trust.

Fosu, Augustin. 2011. Growth, Inequality and Poverty Reduction in Developing Countries: Recent Global Evidence. UNU-WIDER Working Paper 2011/01. Available at: http://www.wider.unu.edu/publications/working-papers/2011/en_GB/wp2011-001/

Gallin, D., 2004. Organizing in the Global Informal Economy. Paper presented at Bogazici University Social Policy Forum: Changing Role of Unions in the Contemporary World of Labor.

Green, Duncan. 2008. *From Poverty to Power: How active citizens and effective states can change the world*. Oxford: Oxfam International.

Green, Duncan. 2012. *From Poverty to Power: How active citizens and effective states can change the world*. 2nd ed. Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing.

ILO. 2001. *Reducing the Decent Work Deficit: A Global Challenge*. Report of the Director General, International Labor Conference 89th Session. Geneva: ILO.

ILO. 2003. *Working Out of Poverty*. Geneva: International Labour Office.

ILO. 2012. *Global Employment Trends*. Geneva. ILO.

Institute of Development Studies. 2012. *IDS in Focus Policy Briefing 26*. <http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/InFocus26-Final2.pdf>.

Lötter, Hennie. 2011. *Poverty, Ethics and Justice*. Cardiff. University of Wales Press.

MacAuslan, Ian. 2007. India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act: A Case Study for How Change Happens. Oxfam International. Available at: <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/indias-national-rural-employment-guarantee-act-a-case-study-for-how-change-happ-112481>.

McFerson, Hazel. 2009. Governance and Hyper-Corruption in Resource-rich African Countries. *Third World Quarterly* 30: 1529-1549.

Penrose-Buckley, Chris. 2007. *Producer Organizations: A Guide to Developing Collective Rural Enterprises*. Oxford: Oxfam, GB.

Riddell, Roger. 2012. Navigating Between Extremes: Academics Helping to Eradicate Global Poverty. *Ethics and International Affairs* 26: 217-243.

Sen, Amartya. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stewart, Francis. 2002. Horizontal Inequalities: A Neglected Dimension of Development. *QEH Working Paper Series* No. 81.
<http://www3.qeh.ox.ac.uk/pdf/qehwp/qehwps81.pdf>.

Te Lintelo, Dolf. 2011. Inequality and Social Justice Roundtable Consultation. Institute of Development Studies. Available at:
<http://www.ids.ac.uk/publication/inequality-and-social-justice-roundtable-consultation>.

World Bank. 2008. *World Development Report 2008*. Washington DC: World Bank.

World Bank. 2012. *World Development Report: Jobs*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

¹ Other strong parts of the analysis include his argument that “justice is a cluster concept with a core meaning that unfolds into a kaleidoscope of dimensions like the facets of a finely cut diamond” (Lötter 2011: 190). The facets of the diamond he identifies are: “justice as recognition, justice as reciprocity, justice as enablement, justice as distribution, justice as accountability and justice as transformation” (Lötter 2011: 190).

In Chapter 11 Lötter also uses a good thought experiment effectively to highlight core functions of legitimate governments, including these five: ordered security, enablement, protection and mediation of liberties, protection of equality, and the state should also establish life-sustaining cooperation. This highlights the fundamental interests we have and that they should be protected by a set of basic rights embodied in a Bill of Rights. If a society is governed in accordance with these goals, poverty “will be prevented” (Lötter 2011: 249).

² These claims are elaborated on and emphasized also by Lötter on page 165.

³ There is a slightly more sophisticated awareness of these issues on pages 278-279.

⁴ We can argue that these define the minimum that we can reasonably expect of one another, and we can go on to elaborate these ideas of reasonable expectation by harnessing the power of normative thought experiments, as I do in Brock (2009, Chapter 3), for instance.

⁵ Though the interested reader might see Brock (2009), especially Chapter 12.

⁶ Clearly, I cannot elaborate on all these vast themes here, but the interested reader might consult Green (2008 and 2012) and Brock (2013 and 2014).

⁷ For some examples, see Brock, 2009, Chapter 11.

⁸ See the EITI website at <http://eiti.org>

⁹ See the EITI website at <http://eiti.org>

¹⁰ See the EITI website at <http://eiti.org>

¹¹ Furthermore, in future work it seems there is another difficult question he might like to address and that is: How should we distribute responsibilities for helping effectively?