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RESPONSE TO MY CRITICS

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I.

In *From Global Poverty to Global Equality* (hereafter *GPGE*)¹, I engage in a philosophical exploration of the moral desirability and the practical feasibility of implementing global principles of poverty relief and egalitarian distributive justice. In this exploration, *GPGE* provides novel ways to challenge three common dichotomies in political theory and practice. They concern the tensions between approaches to global justice based on negative and on positive duties, between associativist and strictly universal humanist perspectives on the scope of distributive requirements, and between “realistic” but normatively unambitious and normatively ambitious but highly “idealistic” moral outlooks. *GPGE* argues that the second component of each of these contrasts can be given a powerful rendering, and that we should in fact resist the alleged dilemmas. We can and should affirm both positive and negative duties, combine humanist and associativist considerations, and aim high with our principles while thinking lucidly about the feasibility of their practical implementation. Regarding the first point, *GPGE* develops an account of socioeconomic human rights and egalitarian distribution in which our responsibilities have a global scope, and are based on positive duties to support the achievement of a decent and flourishing life by all human beings, not only on negative duties not to deprive them of access to such a life. Regarding the second point, *GPGE* defends the plausibility of humanist global principles, and explores how their demands relate to associative considerations in distributive justice. The relation is shown to be complicated, but not always one of mutual exclusion. Regarding the third point, it is common in political theory and practice to challenge ambitious proposals by saying that although their fulfillment may be desirable, it is not really feasible. However, there has been close to no conceptual exploration of what feasibility is, and very little substantive inquiry into why and how it matters for thinking about justice. *GPGE* seeks to fill these gaps. It proposes one of the only available systematic analyses of the concept of feasibility, and one of the first systematic applications of it to the pursuit of the fulfillment of human rights and global equality. *GPGE* provides an exploration, not a complete theory of global justice. The contributions to this symposium by Patti Lenard, Robert Sparling, Christine Straehle, and Colin Macleod, for which I am very thankful, show that the exploration should be taken further.

II.

A significant challenge that any ambitious conception of global justice faces is that what it requires may be at odds with what some people are currently willing to do. A salient example of this difficulty concerns people's strong tendency to give great weight to what they see as their responsibility to those who are "near and dear" to them, to those with whom they share special relationships (of love, friendship, family, and, more controversially, co-nationality). Patti Lenard argues that *GPGE* fails to properly address this challenge in two respects.² The first charge is that *GPGE*'s "account of the motivational mechanisms that serve to secure aid to the global poor does not account for a key element of human moral psychology and it is that what we are willing to do for others, even as a matter of justice, is deeply connected with our sense of how much doing so will cost ... [I]t may be that people are indeed willing to 'sacrifice' some of their well-being in the name of improving the others' well-being, but they may not be willing to contribute in ways that are 'too much'." I find this charge puzzling because *GPGE* explicitly mentions, at several points, that costs to duty-bearers, including regarding the limitation of what they may do to cater for their special relationships, is significant for assessing both the desirability and feasibility of action to reduce global poverty and inequality. The contractualist framework of justification recommended by *GPGE* requires attention to the well-being of the duty-bearer, and attention to special relationships, as among the reasons that could weigh against purported duties of support to distant others. The interests of the latter are not the only relevant consideration. Schemes of distribution have to be justifiable to all concerned, including duty-bearers (p. 279). The perspective of duty-bearers is also explicitly considered to bear on the issue of feasibility. As Lenard acknowledges, *GPGE* considers three possible motivational mechanisms that might lead agents to take more seriously the plight of the globally worst-off: prudential considerations in which benefitting the worst-off would cause their own condition to be better, considerations of sympathy in which benefitting certain others directly constitutes an improvement of their own well-being, and a sense of justice in which a responsibility to cater for the well-being of others is part of what an impartial concern for the good of all requires. Lenard worries that the characterization of these three mechanisms is insufficient. She focuses on the third, after saying that *GPGE* takes it to be the "most powerful" one and that *GPGE* takes the other two to be significant only when it fails. This reconstruction is misleading. *GPGE* takes all three mechanisms to be significant simultaneously. It says that the third would be the most reliable one if it were to consistently operate in a strong way. It would be the most reliable because it would focus on *everyone's* well-being, not just on the well-being of those with whom the well-off are already intertwined through relations of mutual advantage and sympathy. But since a motivation to honor impartial justice is not always strongly operative, *GPGE* sees the other two mechanisms as necessary supplements. However, Lenard identifies an important issue regarding the third mechanism. Often, agents take their duties of justice to distant others to be constrained by their role within national associative frameworks, and this in two ways: (a) they think that what they should do for distant strangers depends on what other

co-nationals are doing (or failing to do), and (b) they think that supporting the poor in their country has priority over helping the poor in other countries (even if the latter are poorer). I think that these two points are often descriptively correct. But they do not defeat the feasibility of the eradication of global poverty. Conscientious agents can make efforts to fight global poverty unilaterally even if other co-nationals are not doing their fair share, and they can fulfill dynamic duties to change the institutions and policies of their country so that they compel their co-nationals to do their part (see pp. 55-58). For example, conscientious Canadians could campaign to make sure that the Canadian government fulfills its pledge under the Millennium Development Goals to give 0.7 percent of its GNP to fight global poverty (rather than around 0.3 as it normally does). Doing this is not incompatible with addressing the plight of the Canadian poor. A more likely possible tension might arise if we focus on securing global equality rather than eradicating severe global poverty. The former is a more demanding practical target and is thus arguably harder to achieve. But I have seen no compelling argument for taking that target to be morally inappropriate or infeasible. The nascent ethos of cosmopolitan solidarity could, and arguably should, over time, embrace it.

The second charge raised by Lenard is that *GPGE* fails to acknowledge that there is an “ineliminable tension” between special responsibilities and global egalitarianism. Lenard discusses three ways in which *GPGE* addresses the significance of special relationships within a cosmopolitan framework: (a) catering for special relationships may be instrumentally justified as part of a division of moral labor through which general duties are fulfilled efficiently, (b) some special responsibilities could be independently justified as being given rise to by certain types of special relationships that are amongst the basic goods that all human beings have reason to value, and finally (c) special responsibilities are valid only if their content does not violate the satisfaction of certain universal moral constraints. Lenard acknowledges that by articulating these cases *GPGE* gives room to special relationships, but complains that this does not succeed at “eliminating” the tension between special responsibilities and global egalitarianism. In response, I should say first that *GPGE* does not argue for the elimination of that tension. It explicitly accepts that in certain circumstances there is tension between *pro tanto* principles protecting special responsibilities (and personal projects) and *pro tanto* principles demanding certain (egalitarian or sufficientarian) distributions. (It does not say that the tension is “ineliminable”—how would one prove that?) What *GPGE* rejects is the view that there is a legitimate tension between special responsibilities and the more general cosmopolitan idea of moral equality (pp. 61-62). Cosmopolitan respect and concern includes attention to the importance of special relationships (given (a) and (b)), and calls for their limitation (given (c)). So the more specific demand of global egalitarian distribution would have to be weighted against the demands of respect and concern for special relationships. There is a question about how this balancing should proceed, but it would be addressing a tension internal to cosmopolitan egalitarianism. Now, although Lenard misses the status of the tension between special responsibilities and global distributive egalitarianism as characterized by *GPGE*,

she raises important points about its content. In particular, she raises the important issue of what renders a type of special relationship important enough to trigger protection under (b) and attention in the identification of moral constraints under (c). *GPGE* explicitly acknowledges that friendship and family fall under (b). It is agnostic (not outright dismissive) with respect to co-nationality (see pp. 202-204). This asymmetry seems reasonable, as it is much harder to imagine a fully decent, or even flourishing life, without the opportunity to form friendships and familial bonds than it is to imagine one without the opportunity to form national bonds. But even if the latter were crucial in a more limited, historical way, it is hard to see why national bonds have enough moral weight to insulate them from requirements of global (sufficientarian or egalitarian) distribution. Special relationships can be extensively pursued without having to rely on the use of disproportionate material resources. Furthermore, their value is agent-neutral besides agent-relative: the global poor should also have real opportunities to pursue *their* special relationships. Contributing to securing these opportunities, and, more generally, supporting their opportunities to live flourishing human lives, is not something one may simply ignore in the name of patriotism, at least not if one is to honor the more fundamental cosmopolitan idea of moral equality.

III.

One of the central claims of *GPGE* is that there are non-derived basic positive duties that are duties of justice rather than mere charity. In the context of discussion on human rights, these are duties to support the access of every human being to the objects of their basic needs, and they do not depend for their existence on previous voluntary commitments to provide what they demand or the violation of negative duties not to deprive others of the same objects. This thesis is rejected by many libertarians, and chapter 3 of *GPGE* critically addresses an example of such rejection pressed by Jan Narveson. Robert Sparling provides an illuminating discussion of this chapter of the book.³ I have learnt a great deal from his paper, especially from its exploration of the relation between *GPGE*'s defense of basic positive rights and duties and the modern tradition of natural right. In what follows I address three critical comments made by Sparling regarding the contemporary debates. As Sparling notes, *GPGE*'s discussion of Thomas Pogge's views is less confrontational than the discussion of Narveson's. Although Pogge builds his account of global justice on the basis of negative duties, he presents that account as noncommittal with respect to the issue whether there are non-derived basic positive duties of justice. He chooses to show that strong redistributive requirements emerge from evidence that the global rich have violated their negative duties not to harm the global poor by foreseeably and avoidably contributing to causing their destitution. Although I argue that Pogge's argument is insufficient for justifying all the practical steps that are needed to permanently eradicate global poverty, I think that his strategy is valuable, and in many respects successful. Sparling suggests that I should perhaps have presented my view in a less conciliatory way, concentrating only on advocating non-derived basic positive duties, thus helping us avoid "the rather difficult task of establishing precisely who caused what harms in the global economic order."

I think, however, that the empirical burden of proof generated by Pogge's program is worth taking. Although, as I explain in the book, I do not think that we can build a sufficiently satisfactory conception of the demand to eradicate severe global poverty only on the basis of negative duties of justice, I think that to the extent that it succeeds, Pogge's program is of great importance. It relies on the common beliefs that negative duties with respect to a certain object (e.g. the conditions necessary to avoid destitution) are normally weightier than positive duties with respect to the same object, and that the former may give rise to requirements of justice while the latter may only give rise to requirements of charity. Showing that much of global poverty is the result of the systematic violation of negative duties is, motivationally speaking, a powerful way to present the call for the eradication of global poverty. This line of argument should be pressed as far as it can go, even if this means engaging the "tedious and interminable debates about the attribution of blame for existing disparities" (Sparling).

Similarly complex empirical debates are in any case likely to arise when it comes to designing the best policies to discharge non-derived basic positive duties of justice. And in fact the complexity of the global economy is what gives rise to a second challenge by Sparling. He suggests that *GPGE*'s advocacy of "fair trade" as an alternative to Narveson's "free trade" fails to "engage sufficiently the serious challenges posed by the opponents of protectionism and foreign aid". For example, *GPGE* responds to the worry that foreign aid may cement the power of corrupt governments by suggesting that aid can be channeled to small businesses and organizations in civil society. But, Sparling says, this strategy is not without problems, as it may undermine central governments by propping up "thousands of well-meaning NGOs operating with even less legitimacy than a corrupt central government". I think that Sparling's challenge is entirely fair. It is not a central aim of my book to settle these kinds of policy issues (which lie beyond my competence as a philosopher), but I do not deny that a full account of the practice of global poverty eradication has to grapple with them. *GPGE* is sensitive to the importance of not circumventing, and of supporting, the political self-determination of the poor (pp. 40, 48-50, 53, 145-152, 209-211, 260-262). But how is this to be done when the central governments are deeply corrupt? Showering those governments with foreign aid cannot be the solution. But a possibility is that if the resources are to go to non-governmental organizations, there should be a strategy of supporting those who have amongst their goals the fostering of more responsive governmental institutions and policies.

A third, interesting challenge by Sparling consists in pushing further Narveson's worry that those pressing for enforceable policies of distribution are imposing their own intuitions or subjective tastes about distributive outcomes on those who do not approve of them. Sparling says that Narveson makes an important point that *GPGE* "glosses," and this is "the question of the liberty to decide what goods a country or community wishes to pursue." Sparling acknowledges that *GPGE* mentions the importance of democratic and discursive institutions and practices rendering distributive schemes accountable to contributors and recipients, but finds that discussion insufficient. I agree that much more could, and

should, be said. But I do not think that Narveson's position would gain any traction as a result of pursuing this discussion further. First, as *GPGE* explains (drawing on Larry Temkin), Narveson's approach is not devoid of invocation of intuitions (e.g. in the reliance on the Pareto principle for comparing alternative paths of action). No political philosophy can avoid appeal to intuitions all the way down. Any contractarian framework (even the one Narveson embraces) must be defended by appealing to some of them. Second, the contractualist procedure recommended by *GPGE* provides a disciplined and impartial way of testing the relative weight of different intuitive considerations. The liberty not to be taxed for distributive purposes (a favorite liberty in Narveson's own taste) seems obviously less morally weighty than the avoidance of premature death by destitute children who could be saved by using the money resulting from taxing the rich (Sparling mentions a similar example in the last section of his paper). Third, the foregoing evaluative comparison could not be ignored by insisting on excising evaluative considerations from deontological assessments of people's rights. The greater importance of the avoidance of destitution when compared to the liberty not to be taxed is significant within a conception of rights. To develop a theory of rights we need some account of the good (however thin and shareable). Property rights lie far downstream in a theory of justice, they are not fundamental premises in it. Why should we accept a characterization of property rights that does not limit them when that is necessary to secure the survival of the destitute? Even a view centered on the value of freedom has to recognize that not every freedom is of equal importance, and that the freedom not to be taxed is less important than (and does not ground a right when confronted with) avoiding the destitution that crushes the ability of some human beings to act as dignified and self-determining agents in their social life. A world shaped by the principles of justice that *GPGE* defends would be one in which empowerment is widespread, and not concentrated in the hands of those who have been benefitted by the contingency of existing, historically imposed institutions of property (including those with callous subjective tastes of the kind often displayed by some libertarians).

IV.

GPGE challenges the common view that the scope of principles of distributive justice must always be fixed by the boundaries of existing (national, state-based, economic, and other) associations. Some distributive principles may have a global scope even in the absence of global associations when there are humanist grounds that justify them. Such justifications invoke the importance of some goods for all human beings, and the cosmopolitan idea of moral equality according to which all human persons equally deserve our equal respect and concern. Humanist global principles can (inter alia) be sufficientarian or egalitarian. The former focus on distributions that give people enough to access a minimally decent life, and the latter focus on distributions that support people's equal access to a flourishing life, which involves higher levels of well-being and autonomy. Humanist global egalitarianism seems more controversial than humanist global sufficientarianism, and in her article, Christine Straehle focuses on this asymmetry.⁴ She challenges *GPGE*'s arguments against a view of the asymmetry based on the ideal of autonomy, and she shows puzzlement about a global

egalitarianism based on a construal of well-being in terms of capabilities. Straehle also worries, more generally, about *GPGE*'s lack of a systematic theory of autonomy and well-being. I agree that the outlook defended by *GPGE* would have been more informative if it had provided such a systematic theory, and that producing it is worthy in itself. But since I cannot provide the missing theory in this reply, I will focus on the two, more specific, charges mentioned.

GPGE challenges various arguments that take associative frameworks as necessary besides *prima facie* sufficient conditions for the moral appropriateness of the application of egalitarian, or more generally suprasufficientarian, principles of distributive justice. One such argument is based on a requirement of autonomy construed as including access to goods and circumstances enabling agents' selection and pursuit of plans of life in accordance with their conception of the good (pp. 171-4). Michael Blake sees this requirement as giving rise to egalitarian distributive demands in domestic contexts but only to sufficientarian distributive demands at the global level. Straehle takes *GPGE*'s criticisms of Blake's view to depend on *GPGE*'s holding of a premise that Blake rejects, viz. that providing for autonomy requires egalitarian distribution. But this is not true. In its discussion of Blake's argument, *GPGE* does not hold that premise. It proceeds, instead, internally to Blake's discussion, arguing (a) that it is not really clear why autonomy grounds, as *Blake* claims it does, egalitarian demands in the domestic context, and (b) that *if* autonomy supports egalitarian distribution in domestic contexts it is not clear why it does not also support egalitarian distribution in global contexts (given that Blake already accepts humanist global demands on the basis of autonomy—albeit only sufficientarian ones). If autonomy (as construed by Blake) requires a set of adequate rather than maximal options for pursuing a good life, then it is not clear why the fact of state coercion at the domestic level grounds the duty to secure more than adequate options. That state coercion limits autonomy does not by itself imply that the state must compensate for this limitation through the increase in material resources available to those coerced. The appropriate response may instead involve granting democratic political rights to those coerced. And if state coercion does justify more expansive economic options, this must be because agents have reason to press for more (either on the basis of a *new, wider* view of what autonomy requires or on the basis of requirements concerning *well-being*) than sufficientarian conditions. But since arguably all human agents have reason to ask for more, we still have to consider whether they are entitled to ask for suprasufficientarian conditions beyond state-boundaries, a question Blake does not really explore, thus begging the question against the humanist global egalitarian view. Coercion might be a *prima facie* sufficient condition, without also being a necessary condition, for suprasufficientarian distributive concern.

The second challenge is not unconnected with the first, as it raises the issue that since conditions for autonomy or well-being may be determined contextually, a humanist global egalitarian view would be problematic. Focusing on well-being, Straehle says that if *GPGE* were to embrace the capability approach proposed by Sen and Nussbaum, it would actually yield global demands that are suffi-

cientarian, not egalitarian. I disagree. To begin with, *GPGE* does not claim that all egalitarian principles should be conceived in a humanist way and be seen as having global scope. Some focus on the distribution of advantages whose value is dependent on fairly specific associative contexts. However, *GPGE* does claim that *some* egalitarian demands, concerning for example access to certain types of education and health care, can be extended globally on humanist grounds. It argues (p. 213) that these goods may be linked up with important capabilities in Nussbaum's list. Although Nussbaum has not argued for egalitarian besides sufficientarian distributions, some forms of the former can meaningfully be claimed to have universal significance. For example, it is clear that human beings around the world have reason to value access to sophisticated medical care concerning cancer treatment and heart surgery. It seems unfair that some human beings have much lower life expectancy than others as a result of having been born in a poorer country. Straehle worries that this egalitarian and universal pursuit of some well-being capabilities would clash with Sen's recent complaints "against what he calls 'transcendental principles of global justice' because he believes that they divert us from the kind of contextual interpretation those concerned with individual well-being need to employ when describing our duties of global justice." But a recommendation of contextual interpretation need not conflict with appeal to global humanist principles. As I explain in the book (pp. 62-63, 211-216), the latter may identify abstract goods that can be specified in different, but equivalent, ways in different contexts. This point can be articulated within the capability approach to human rights.⁵ It can be extended to more ambitious discussions of global equality. As I explain in a recent paper, Sen has not succeeded in showing that there is a real dilemma between ambitious ("transcendental") and more modest ("comparative") approaches to justice, either domestically or globally.⁶

V.

GPGE claims that the eradication of severe global poverty and the achievement of global equality are genuine demands of justice. These claims are sometimes challenged on grounds of feasibility. Chapters 4 and 7 of *GPGE* address these challenges, concluding that they fail. *En route*, *GPGE* provides an interpretation of the very concept of feasibility (which is often used in political theory and practice but rarely explained). Colin Macleod agrees that the eradication of severe global poverty and the achievement of global equality are genuine requirements, finds the conceptual exploration of feasibility valuable, and shares my skepticism about the alleged infeasibility of the fulfillment of the genuine requirements of global justice.⁷ However, he argues that the discussion of the feasibility of global justice in *GPGE* suffers from some ambiguities and imprecisions. In what follows, I address what I take to be Macleod's two main challenges.

The first challenge pressed by Macleod is that when *GPGE* claims that the achievement of global equality would be more demanding than the eradication of severe global poverty towards the globally better off it fails to distinguish between "mere sacrifices" and "real moral sacrifices." If the globally worst off are entitled to an equal share, then those who have more than it are not entitled to the surplus, and distributing from latter to the former would not impose real

moral sacrifices, but mere sacrifices that are actually morally justified. In the absence of such distribution, it is the globally worst off that incur real moral sacrifices. I agree that we must distinguish between perceived moral costs and real moral costs. Some reasons concerning personal prerogatives, political autonomy, and special relationships (discussed above in section II) are candidates for identifying real moral costs. Since these are valid considerations of justice, our overall judgments must weigh them against claims of distributive justice. But I do not take claims to resources to which the globally better off are not entitled as such candidates. This is the view I defend in the book, which explicitly calls into question existing property regimes, domestically and globally. When it comes to the moral justification of distribution what are crucial are indeed only the real moral costs. The merely perceived ones affect feasibility, and they are treated as such. Thus I do not think there is a real disagreement between Macleod and *GPGE* on this score. The only point at which it seems to me that *GPGE* may give the impression that Macleod's worries apply is when it discusses (in chapters 6 and 8) the possibility that the coercive imposition of egalitarian distributions may be all things considered outweighed by other considerations. But I think that my point there has to do with costs not in terms of distributive entitlements but in terms of disruption of special relationships and personal and political autonomy. These may outweigh the coercive imposition of some egalitarian distributive transfers, but even then I insist that they do not mute their status as justified *pro tanto* demands of justice.

The second challenge pressed by Macleod is more troubling. It is that *GPGE* sometimes “equivocates between issues of *moral justification* and issues of *strategic justification*.” For example, when it takes the justifiability of some human rights to be contingent on current levels of social influenceability, or on answering the question of what is to be placed at the forefront of our political agenda (pp. 135-136), or when it entertains the objection that it is not reasonable to advocate schemes of global justice which are not currently supported by a strong ethos of cosmopolitan solidarity (pp. 141-142), *GPGE* fails to notice that “it is important to distinguish between the question of whether feasibility considerations show an ideal to be *unjustified* as a claim about justice and the question of whether feasibility considerations affect the political goals and strategies we should adopt in pursuit of an ideal of justice.”

Macleod is right to puzzle about how *GPGE* relates to this distinction. In what follows, I will defend aspects of my formulations in the book, while acknowledging the need to make some amendments regarding other aspects, which are effectively probed by Macleod. I should note, first, that *GPGE* makes a distinction between the kinds of feasibility considerations that affect principles of justice and the ones that affect transformative action and plans (pp. 122-125, 244-248, 278). I am much less permissive regarding the former than regarding the latter. This should accommodate some of Macleod's worries: when I am more concessive, I really focus on what should be targeted for immediate action. And even there, I emphasize the importance of *dynamic duties* to change current feasible sets to make ambitious ideals of justice (more) practicable. Thus, I do

not take principles (or, for that matter, even political advocacy) of global justice to be defeated by the current absence of a sufficiently strong ethos of cosmopolitan solidarity. Instead, I take that absence as triggering dynamic duties to reshape our political culture by cultivating cosmopolitan solidarity. Second, I build into my account of the levels of “social influenceability” needed to render the fulfillment of human rights feasible reference to what can be achieved in the long-term, thus again making room for dynamic duties to change current dispositions and circumstances that block their fulfillment in the short-term. Hence, I reject the motivational challenge to demanding principles of global justice (even in the improved version of them formulated by Macleod) and do not make human rights claims hostage to the contingent vagaries of the status quo. However, Macleod is probably right that I could have made these points clearer in the text. He is also right that the last clause in my account of the feasibility test for human rights might better be demoted to a consideration of strategy of implementation rather than be taken as a condition on the justifiability of a human right. Even though that account considers what is influenceable in the foreseeable future not just in the immediate future, the clause confuses the justifiability of a human right with the reasonability of placing it in the forefront of our current political agenda.

Second, *GPGE* makes a distinction between evaluative demands that hold only *pro tanto*, and all things considered, prescriptive demands involving conclusive reasons to act in certain ways in certain circumstances (see, e.g. 238-239, 243, 263, 268 n.12). This distinction seems to me important in that all things considered prescriptions must factor in feasibility considerations of the scalar besides the categorical kind on which Macleod focuses (thus, e.g. we should incorporate cultural besides logical and nomological parameters). Why? Because we should make our political choices with an ethical sense of responsibility for what we produce or fail to avert. Probabilities matter here, and they matter morally. So the justification of what Colin calls “strategic” choices is also a moral justification. To make the strategically mistaken choice may sometimes be to make the morally wrong choice. This applies to the example that Macleod uses as an “intuition pump” in his paper, which concerns the campaign to end slavery during the American civil war (and its failure to achieve full political equality at the time). Thus, (as powerfully depicted in the recent film *Lincoln* (2012)) Thaddeus Stevens, a Republican member of Congress, has a choice. The Thirteenth Amendment holding slavery to be unconstitutional is on the floor for a vote. If passed, it will end slavery. But the measure is limited, not granting the full palette of rights to African Americans (such as political equality). Stevens has campaigned for full equality. But if he presses with that agenda now, the coalition formed to vote for the Amendment may collapse. So he decides to desist from pressing for more now. The Amendment passes. It includes, however, the provision that Congress has the power to introduce appropriate legislation to enforce the command that slavery and involuntary servitude do not exist, thus potentially opening the door for further reforms.

I think that Stevens made the right decision. I do not thereby deny that the racists who blocked the agenda of political equality had the duty to secure political equality. It helps here to index our considerations to the relevant agents. The racists did have an all things considered duty to go for full equality. But when they chose not to fulfill that duty, the reformers facing them had to take this choice as imposing a parameter for the short (although not the long) term and were right to decide to center their parliamentary strategy on the end of slavery but not on political equality (in the short term). This “strategic” choice was justified on moral grounds. If the campaigners hadn’t lowered their immediate demands, the most likely outcome would have been that neither of the two moral goals (end of slavery and full political equality) were achieved. Note that this limited choice for the short term was coupled with a lucid dynamic move to include the provision that Congress could introduce legislation regarding slavery and involuntary servitude, thus potentially enabling future parliamentary action to target political inequality. Normative political judgment often involves this kind of reasoning. It even operates, more controversially, when an agent considers her own psychological choices and dispositions. A political leader A may have all things considered reason to step down from their position of leadership if they think that they run a serious risk of becoming corrupt. A may have all things considered reason to let another person B become leader if B is significantly less likely to become corrupt, even if B is less politically talented and would be somewhat less effective in the task of promoting justice when compared to A when acting without corruption. (A’s dynamic duties to seek personal changes and institutional reforms that disincentivize corruption of political leaders can, and should, also be recognized in this case.)

The general difficult question that Macleod’s challenge forces us to think about, and which I hope to address more fully in my future work on feasibility and normative political judgment is this: How does strategy relate to moral obligation? The case of Thaddeus Stevens suggests that they may be interestingly related. The hard question is: How exactly? Should we say that it would be right sometimes to choose what is “strategically” best even if it is at odds with what is morally best? If so, do we then think expediency trumps morality? That seems odd, as moral prescriptions are normally conclusive when they conflict with other kinds of considerations. The alternative, which intuitively I favor, is to explore the point that morality carries with it a sense of responsibility for likely outcomes. Morality requires that our all things considered judgments factor in strategic considerations because responsible choice must be sensitive to feasibility. The relevant feasibility considerations are not reduced to binary distinctions about what is strictly infeasible or feasible, but include also scalar considerations about degrees of feasibility. Low feasibility does not, like strict infeasibility, automatically defeat alleged prescriptions, but it may make a dent in them when there are alternatives that (even if they may be less intrinsically desirable) are much more feasible. How scalar feasibility bears on normative judgment is itself a moral question. *GPGE* discusses only briefly the distinction between binary and scalar feasibility (e.g. pp. 263-236). I have said more about it in another text.⁸ But I hope to explore these issues further in future work, and I thank Macleod for stimulating me to do so.

NOTES

- ¹ Pablo Gilabert, *From Global Poverty to Global Equality. A Philosophical Exploration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- ² Patti Lenard, "Special Relationships, Motivation, and the Pursuit of Global Egalitarianism," *Les Ateliers de l'éthique/The Ethics Forum* 8.2 (2013), pp. 74-83.
- ³ Robert Sparling, "Justice and Charity: Positive Duties and the Right of Necessity in Pablo Gilabert," *Les Ateliers de l'éthique/The Ethics Forum* 8.2 (2013), pp. 84-96.
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