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The Nature of Poverty as an Inhuman Condition

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Abstract In this article, part of a symposium devoted to Hennie Lötter's *Poverty, Ethics and Justice*, my aims are threefold. First, I present a careful reading of Lötter's original and compelling central conception of the nature of poverty as the inability to 'obtain adequate economic resources….to maintain physical health and engage in social activities distinctive of human beings in their respective societies'. After motivating this view, particularly in comparison to other salient accounts of poverty, I, second, raise some objections to it, regarding relativistic implications that it has. Third, I propose another, more universalist conception of the nature of poverty, which is inspired by some of Lötter's other remarks and which is all the stronger. According to this view, people are more poor, the less they can obtain adequate economic resources to pursue a wide array of finally valuable activities and states characteristic of human beings. I conclude by briefly pointing out how this view merits critical comparison with related views, such as Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach.

Keywords Health · Hennie Lötter · Human nature · Poverty · Respect for persons · Social exclusion

Introduction

While there are many philosophical books and articles devoted to the broad topics of distributive justice in the developed world, and some that address politico-socio-economic development in the developing world, there are few that focus specifically on poverty and wherever it may exist. That is what helps to make Hennie Lötter's

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book *Poverty, Ethics and Justice* (2011) of particular interest. It is a comprehensive and cohesive treatment of a number of issues about poverty, with thoughtful discussions about what it is, why it is an injustice, how serious an injustice it is, who is morally obligated to fight it, which strategies they should employ and related questions. In this article, I focus mainly on the first question, how to understand the nature of poverty, finding Lötter's answer to it to be both novel and prima facie promising.

As a catchphrase, Lötter conceives of poverty as essentially an inhuman condition. Although his view is much more fine-grained than that statement, it is already enough to see how Lötter's conception of poverty is part of a trend among political philosophers to take seriously alternatives to Kantian and utilitarian frameworks. Whereas a Kantian would be inclined to conceive of poverty in terms of a lack of (positive) freedom, and a utilitarian would likely think of it as a kind of suffering, the view that poverty is fundamentally inhuman is distinct and merits exploration as a viable alternative.

One salient view in the contemporary literature[1] to which Lötter's bears a close family resemblance is Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach, which conceives of poverty as 'capability failure….Poverty involves heterogeneous failures of opportunity' (2011, p. 143). Although that statement does not say anything explicit about poverty being inhuman, the relevant capabilities for Nussbaum are those to realize objectively valuable facets of a human life. Despite this similarity, Lötter's view and his defence of it are distinct from Nussbaum's and are compelling in their own right as a way of understanding of what an inhuman life due to a lack of economic resources is.

Although I deem Lötter's main theory of the nature of poverty to be original and worth addressing, I do raise some objections to it, particularly regarding relativistic facets of it that I show have counterintuitive implications. However, I find remarks in Lötter's book that suggest another, more universalist conception of poverty, which I develop into a fresh principle that is all the stronger, I argue.

I begin by spelling out Lötter's conception of poverty's essence, focusing on what it means for him to contend that poverty is inhuman and how he draws some useful and revealing distinctions on that basis. Then, I motivate Lötter's view, noting several advantages of it in terms of, e.g., naturally underwriting judgements of what makes poverty morally problematic, enabling one to distinguish poverty from the prima facie distinct issue of inequality, and capturing intuitions about who counts as poor and in virtue of what. In the following section, however, I raise three objections to the dominant expression of his view, all of which are a function of the fact that it considers someone poor in essential relation to what is currently available in her particular society. I believe that a stronger conception of poverty would be one enabling us to judge entire societies to be poor, which Lötter's main view cannot do with ease. Afterward, I develop such an alternative in light of additional remarks that Lötter makes in the book, hence intending my critical discussion to be a friendly amendment about how I think his ideas are best developed. I conclude by noting respects in which future research should adjudicate between Lötter's

[1] For an ancestor, see comments by the young Marx (1844a, b).

conception(s) of poverty and others such as Nussbaum's, supposing the broad view of it as something inhuman is indeed worth developing further.

The Nature of Poverty According to *Poverty, Ethics and Justice*

In this section I spell out precisely what Lötter means in the first instance by the claim that poverty is essentially an inhuman condition. My aim is not yet to appraise his view, but rather to present it in the best light I can.

As I read Lötter, there are two respects in which poverty is inhuman, biologically and socially. Here is one of his definitive statements:

> (P)eople are poor if they cannot obtain adequate economic resources, or do not have the requisite economic capacities to deal with resources fittingly to maintain physical health and engage in social activities distinctive of human beings in their respective societies (2011, p. 151).

I submit that the 'if' in this statement could fairly be replaced with an 'if and only if' or a 'just insofar as'; such would best capture Lötter's views, I believe, and would in any event present a theory worth serious consideration.

Note that with this statement, Lötter makes it clear that not just any sort of inhuman condition, say, being tortured for the fun of it, is one of poverty. Instead, poverty is an inhuman condition when it comes to either a lack of economic resources or the inability to make use of them (and from hereon if I mention one of these, I mean to include the other). And it is, moreover, a matter of not being able to use economic goods in order to avoid one of two conditions, biological stunting, on the one hand, and social exclusion, on the other.

Lötter calls 'extreme poverty' the inability to achieve and sustain biological wholeness, i.e., health, due to lack of economic capacity. Although he most often speaks of 'physical' health, as in the quote above, and usually highlights risks of bodily injury and disease, this should not be understood to exclude mental health, which he does mention on occasion (e.g., 2011, pp. 56, 64–65). So, extreme poverty is a lack of economic resources threatening not merely death, malnutrition and greater exposure and susceptibility to illnesses such as diarrhoea, malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and the like, but also stress, alcoholism, depression, poor self-image and related psychological conditions.

The second respect in which one can be poor, and 'intermediately' so for Lötter, is being unable to participate in what Lötter above calls 'social activities'. Now, I read Lötter as being ambiguous about what this means, with his book suggesting two different ways of understanding it. Sometimes Lötter appears to conceive of intermediate poverty as the inability to *engage in worthwhile social activities*, while, at other times, he characterizes it more broadly as the inability to participate in *characteristically human activities in ways that a particular society deems desirable*. Let me spell out how these are distinct.

For an example of the more narrow sense of intermediate poverty, as the inability to be social, consider this quotation:

> Intermediate poverty could thus be defined as a lack of sufficient economic capacities to engage in a set of basic, fundamental human social activities that defines what it means to live a life worthy of a human being in a particular time and place….(such as) fostering social cooperation and enhancing social solidarity, crucial for survival and prerequisites for achievement of a rich and diverse cultural life. Typical activities include governance of diverse aspects of the community's shared life to maintain social order, education to train and equip others to fulfil useful tasks, initiation ceremonies for welcoming new participants in diverse social practices, thanksgiving events for expressing gratitude for services rendered in smaller or larger contexts, celebration of significant events on smaller (family) and larger (society) scale and entertainment to amuse and amaze others through expressing rare individual and team talents and skills (2011, p. 36; see also 111, 151, 286).

These remarks suggest that the exclusionary dimension of poverty is one in which people cannot *relate to one another* in certain ways that their community appreciates. Such a view is 'narrow' in the sense that the range of these activities will be smaller than that of the other conception of intermediate poverty that Lötter appears to discuss.

According to the broader view, it is not merely the ability to *interact with other people* that matters when characterizing non-biological facets of poverty, but in principle any typically human activity that one's community appreciates, even if it is undertaken in isolation from other people. For an instance of this approach to exclusion, consider the following remarks:

> (I)ntermediate poverty….means that although people have adequate economic capacities to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, security and medical care to maintain their physical health, they cannot participate in any other activities regarded as indicative of being human in that society….People who are intermediately poor are excluded from living lives expressing their humanity in socially defined ways (2011, pp. 161–162; see also 38, 52, 59–60, 272, 273).

Whereas the narrow version of intermediate poverty suggests that *inhibited other-regard* is exhaustive of non-biological impoverishment, i.e., that to be poor beyond failing to meet one's biological necessities is strictly a function of being *unable to relate to other people* in particular ways (of which one's community approves), the broader instance does not. For the latter, one could also conceivably count as poor insofar as one could not engage in certain activities that one might undertake on one's own, such as being unable to: read, write, think, study, fantasize, paint, sculpt, draw, compose, meditate, collect, cultivate, care for animals and appreciate (natural) beauty.

I suspect that Lötter, in light of what he says about the goods of interacting with the natural environment (2011, pp. 83–90), would, if pressed to make a choice, favour the broader version of intermediate poverty, since it alone can account for the intuition that one is poor insofar as economic conditions prevent one from engaging in such potentially self-regarding activities such as appreciating wilderness or

experiencing the sublimity of an ocean, mountains or stars (albeit as approved by one's society).

Furthermore, regardless of Lötter's own final assessment, I submit that the broader version is more plausible, finding no good reason to think of non-health-related poverty in strictly relational terms. I therefore focus on it as representative of Lötter's conception of poverty. (Below I also question Lötter's suggestion that social approval is central to defining poverty, but that is a matter separate from the issue of which activities must be socially approved of, in order to count as excluded.)

Summing up, for Lötter, poverty is an inhuman way of life caused by a lack of economic resources (or inability to use them), where that can be manifest in two distinct ways, first, by stunting human development in the sense of people being unable to meet their biological needs (extreme poverty) and, second, by preventing people from engaging in activities that their community deems expressive of humanity (intermediate poverty). Note that it may not always be immediately clear how to classify some cases of poverty. For example, if poverty were to make an individual overly self-protective, tending to impose burdens unreasonably on others so as to avoid feeling inadequate or as though he is missing out, would that be an instance of extreme poverty, for being a form of mental illness, or intermediate poverty, for having difficulty expressing his humanity in ways that his society recognizes? Even though some instances might be hard to place, requiring, say, a fuller account of mental and physical health in order to judge, Lötter's biological versus social distinction is revealing, indicating sensible categories for theorists of poverty to employ. Or so I suggest in the next section.

Advantages of Lötter's Theory

Before I present some concerns about Lötter's conception of what it essentially is to be poor, I first want to motivate it, pointing out several respects in which it merits critical engagement.

First off, his theory of poverty is obviously more compelling from a philosophical standpoint than are policy-oriented conceptions such as being able to spend no more than two dollars a day, once popular with the United Nations (2006) and still used by the World Bank (2014a, b), even when that is adjusted for various economic contexts and conceived in terms of purchasing power. Lötter's view is far more basic and principled, and promises to enable one to judge the extent to which more practical measures such as this one are appropriate.

Second, Lötter's theory usefully distinguishes poverty from another, related condition of inequality. It is pretty standard these days, including among political philosophers (e.g., Singer 1993, p. 218; Grayling 2013) to distinguish between absolute and relative poverty, where the latter is a matter of those who are worst off in a particular society or those who are below the norm for it. Lötter rejects the latter concept as having to do with equality and not poverty, strictly speaking.[2] For him, it

[2] For additional critics of the notion of relative poverty, see Townsend (2006), Shaw (2008).

makes the most sense to contend that it is logically possible for there to be a society with no poverty but great inequality, which way of cutting up the issues is reasonable both descriptively and morally, even if it is true that social inequality, or at least perceptions of it, reliably cause poverty, properly conceived (e.g., Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). That is not to say that Lötter does not find serious problems with inequality, for he does (2011, pp. 49–55). It is just that these problems are in themselves (apart from what they might *cause* with regard to biological stunting and social exclusion) different from ones of poverty, in his view.

Third, Lötter's theory does a strong job of capturing the intuition that there are degrees of poverty, some worse than others. Plausibly, according to Lötter, poverty is more severe when it threatens one's life or liveliness (health), roughly when it affects one internally, and not merely one's ability to engage in certain outward behaviour, characteristically with others.

Fourth, his view is also on the face of it more attractive than common Kantian and utilitarian conceptions. For the Kantian, according to whom a person's dignity inheres in her ability to make reasoned choices, one is poor (or, perhaps, poverty is wrong), insofar as one's freedom to make a wide array of decisions is limited (e.g., Rawls 1999; Dworkin 2000).[3] Poverty is a lack of access to general-purpose means or what are often called 'resources' with which one could make a variety of choices. However, it is plausible think that a fairly specific *content* of the choices is relevant to determining whether a person is poor or not (or whether it is a moral problem). It is reasonable to maintain that one is poor, or objectionably so, insofar as one cannot choose *certain* items, viz., goods that would enable one to sustain one's health and to participate in certain projects. Similar remarks go for a preference-satisfaction version of utilitarianism.[4] While there are of course replies to be made on behalf of these theories, my point is that Lötter's easily avoids one straightforward objection to them.

Fifth, although Lötter ultimately maintains that poverty is morally objectionable, which I discuss next, he also, in the first instance, provides a value-neutral conception of it, one that, say, social scientists could use with profit, or philosophers could use when debating about whether poverty is indeed unjust. That is, Lötter's view naturally grounds certain moral judgements without intrinsically building them into his basic conception of poverty, which is appropriate, in that it is not logically contradictory to think of poverty in merely scientific terms, as per a sociologist. In addition, there is no conceptual confusion to reflect philosophically on poverty without committing oneself to any moral claims about it; a self-ownership theorist

[3] See Robeyns (2005) for someone who entertains the idea that poverty *is* a lack of resources, and not merely wrong insofar as it is.

[4] Although Peter Singer defines absolute poverty in terms of the inability to meet needs (1993, p. 220), it is not clear that he coherently can, given his adherence to preference utilitarianism. Or at the very least, he must think of the *wrongness* of poverty in terms of preference dissatisfaction. And against the hedonist instance of utilitarianism, surely one would count as poor if one died a painless death as a result of lacking economic resources. To be poor is not merely to suffer, even if suffering often accompanies poverty.

or egoist who denies any moral obligation to fight poverty is incorrect, but not abusing language when he makes such a statement.[5]

Sixth, when it comes to moral judgement, Lötter's conception of what poverty is naturally grounds two distinct criticisms of it as unjust, namely, that 'poverty inflicts on human beings….the loss of human dignity and a threat to one's health' (2011, p. 270; see also discussion of 'equal respect' on 110–112 and 'equal concern' on 112–113). *Usually* Lötter correlates a loss of dignity with intermediate poverty, and an absence of well-being (or presence of ill-health) with extreme poverty. For example, he says,

> In comparison to the case of people suffering from intermediate poverty rich people do not suffer a loss of human dignity due to a lack of economic capacities. In comparison to the case of people suffering from extreme poverty rich people do not have a serious threat to their personal health as suffered by people living in extreme poverty. Such serious harms, as loss of dignity and serious threats to their health, will thus not befall those are non-poor….(2011, p. 53).

However, it is reasonable to think of *both* extreme and intermediate poverty as *both* losses in terms of human flourishing and degradations of human nature. For one, if biological stunting of human nature is a loss of well-being, then why isn't the inability to engage in activities deemed to be characteristic of human nature also a loss of well-being? There are some occasions where Lötter in fact does suggest that both forms of poverty are 'harms' (2011, pp. 53, 57, 270, 271), which perhaps indicates a deprivation of welfare. For another, if the inability to engage in activities deemed to be characteristic of human nature is an indignity, then why isn't biological stunting of human nature also an indignity? There are indeed some occasions where Lötter suggests that both forms of poverty are an indignity (2011, pp. 59, 110).

Problems of Relativism

Despite the appeal of Lötter's conception of poverty as an inhuman condition, both descriptively and normatively, I suspect it could use some adjustment. In particular, the place where I am inclined to question his view concerns the way he construes intermediate poverty, specifically, the way he deems it essentially to be a function of whether one can participate in ways of life salient in one's particular community.[6] I believe that this introduces a relativist dimension to Lötter's view that has counterintuitive implications, of which I discuss three in this section.

[5] For just two examples of a moralized conception of poverty, see the 'ethical poverty line' of Edward (2006) and the view that poverty 'is, by definition, morally wrong' in Graf and Schweiger (2013, p. 7).

[6] For a similar view, although packaged under the heading of 'relative poverty', see Grayling (2013), EAPN (2014).

Smith, McArthur and Jenkins

First, consider Lötter's cases of Smith, McArthur and Jenkins, which he invokes to illustrate his view (2011, pp. 23–25). All three individuals have small families who live in underground chambers, have no access to electricity or appliances, have no access to fossil fuels, use only candlelight, fire and the sun for light and heat, own only a few items of clothing, grow their own food, have low standards of hygiene, and decorate with objects found nearby in the wild. However, Smith has a big bank account, electing to live this way, McArthur is unemployed and is forced to live this way, and, finally, Jenkins is a caveman from 5000 years ago.

Lötter reasonably contends that Smith is not poor, but further maintains that only McArthur is poor, saying that Jenkins 'cannot be judged to have been poor. In terms of his society's standard of what constitutes an appropriate lifestyle for human beings, Jenkins excelled' (2011, p. 25). However, I have the opposite intuition, that Jenkins is poor, at least compared to the life of a typical twenty-first century academic.

It would of course be much better to be Jenkins than McArthur, which intuition is probably a large part of what moves Lötter to suggest that the difference between them is that the latter is poor and the former is not. However, rival explanations are available.

For one, in McArthur's case, he could have had a different, better life, whereas Jenkins could not have. It is psychologically easier to live in an undesirable state when there is no alternative to it (or one sees no alternative to it), with such a state being much harder to bear when one thinks one could have, and should have, lived otherwise.

Another reason it would be preferable to be Jenkins is that McArthur likely feels abandoned by, or otherwise treated as unimportant by, his fellows, whereas Jenkins does not. In McArthur's case, it is not merely the case that he could have lived differently, but also that he could have done so had others in his society gone out of their way to help him, which they elected not to do.

In short, McArthur's life would be harder to bear, but not necessarily any more poor than Jenkins'. Such a construal coheres well with the widely accepted view among sociologists that poverty is not a reliable cause of social upheaval, which is rather poverty combined with seeing wealth in the hands of others, particularly a group that is discrete in terms of ethnicity or culture. It is when the poor sense that things could be different and that they are being treated as worth less than others that they become angry to the point of revolt. Although I submit that Jenkins is no less poor than McArthur, the latter's life would indeed be harder by virtue of frustrated expectations and feelings of inadequacy, where that is what accounts for Lötter's intuition, no doubt shared by most readers, that it would be better to be Jenkins.

Another consideration that is probably leading Lötter not to deem Jenkins to be poor is that Jenkins is not a good candidate to be considered a victim of injustice or to be owed a duty of aid, whereas McArthur is. Lötter is likely thinking that *whenever* someone is poor, he has a *pro tanto* legitimate complaint against his society or its political community. Such a judgement would help to explain why

McArthur is poor and why Smith is not, and it would of course lead to the conclusion that Jenkins also is not.

However, recall the point that at least Lötter's own initial and basic characterization of poverty is not essentially moralized;[7] it is one to which a social scientist could sensibly appeal or that ethicists disagreeing about whether poverty is unjust could also invoke. And that, I contended above, is welcome, for facilitating precisely those kinds of enquiry. An additional reason why it is welcome is that I think that not every case of poverty is one that is morally troublesome.

One might wonder at this point whether it is coherent for me to think of poverty as essentially inhuman, which I have admittedly found attractive about Lötter's view, but not as essentially an immoral condition. How can I maintain that poverty is inherently inhuman but not inherently unjust? Isn't Lötter correct when he says that 'poverty is an inhuman condition and must therefore be eradicated and not merely alleviated' (2011, p. 160; see also 161)?

The point is strong, and to rebut it probably requires me to reject Lötter's understanding of what it means to call something 'inhuman'. According to him,

> We call something inhuman when a condition or an act implies that human beings are treated in some or other way as beings of significantly lesser value or worth than their fellows, or live in conditions that devalue their status as human beings in meaningful ways….(P)overty is a distinctively human condition that denies human beings opportunities to live lives that express their humanity and thus forces them into lifestyles not worthy of their species (2011, p. 161; see also 48).

The quotation *suggests* that an inhuman condition is a state of affairs for which others are morally responsible, for having failed either to prevent or to correct.[8] I have two reasons to think that such a construal is too narrow.

First, it is logically possible for everyone in a society, or even in the world, to be poor, something Lötter himself apparently accepts at some points in the book (2011, pp. 37, 49). If so, then it is implausible to think that whenever poverty exists, someone is morally responsible for it.

Second, consider the following intuition. Note that a group of people starving on an isolated island are reasonably described as living in an inhuman way, even though drought is the reason for their lack of food and consequent ill-health and there is nothing anyone could have done to prevent the situation or can do to change it now.

Such a judgement is, I submit, essentially an *evaluative* one, not necessarily a *normative* or *moral* one. That is, to judge that a life is inhuman is best understood to connote that it is *bad* for human beings, or that it is not disposed towards the human good, but not necessarily that anyone has acted *wrongly* or has a reason to act differently. As an evaluative judgement, viewing a condition as inhuman is thicker

[7] Towards the end of the book Lötter does want a moralized conception of poverty (see, e.g., 2011, pp. 270–271), but I gather that he intends it to supplement (and not supplant) the initial, non-moralized conception.

[8] However, the phrase 'or live in conditions that devalue their status as human beings in meaningful ways' might open the door to a reading that squares with my non-moralized construal.

than what scientists normally do, but it is not yet essentially to criticize anyone's behaviour as warranting guilt, censure, punishment or even change of any sort.

Hence, I conclude that I can sensibly accept the point that poverty is essentially inhuman, while denying that it is *always* unjust or morally requires rectification, with Jenkins being a case in point. I instead draw the conclusion that poverty is an inhuman (undesirable) condition and must therefore be eradicated and not merely alleviated, *so far as that can be done with relative ease by others*.

The Duties of the Rich

I do not suppose that my characterizations of Jenkins will, or even necessarily should, convince all interlocutors. About that case, all I claim is that Lötter's judgements of it are not obviously the correct ones and that there is room for reasonable doubt about them. The next two reasons for doubting the implications of Lötter's conception of intermediate poverty are stronger, I think, or at least they help to build a more weighty comprehensive case against it.

Lötter naturally wants to conclude that the rich (although not only them[9]) have a duty to aid the poor in appropriate ways. Upon having described a poor society, he remarks, 'On visiting such a community, people from non-poor countries would typically exclaim: "This is not the way humans should live!"' (2011, p. 37; see also 54). However, his conception of poverty does not easily support such a conclusion, at least of the sort many of us hold at the global level.

To see why not, consider that there are many societies that live more or less the way that Jenkins does, particularly in rural sub-Saharan Africa. That is, there are places where people are decently fed and undertake characteristically human activities in socially approved, but extremely limited, ways, and so do not count as poor by Lötter's conception. If they are not poor, though, then they are not entitled to aid from those living in the wealthiest parts of the world.

However, I think that those in Western, by which I mean Euro-American countries and countries with lifestyles similar to them such as Australia and Japan, have a duty to offer aid to those in such societies (not to ram it down their throats, of course). If societies lack things such as electricity, technology, medicine, psychotherapy, anaesthetic, birth control, diverse kinds of aesthetic experiences (such as foods, music, dyes/inks and patterns), diverse kinds of employment (beyond farming, gathering), books the internet, and access to other cultures, then there is strong moral reason such things be made available to them, even if everyone within their societies lives without these things. However, since they do not count as poor by Lötter's account of poverty, which ties intermediate poverty essentially to what is on offer in one's particular society, he cannot draw that conclusion.

In reply, Lötter might contend that even though these societies are not poor, they are entitled to aid from the rich on some other basis. In particular, returning to the distinction between poverty and inequality, he might say that there are moral reasons to reduce inequality, but not poverty, in such cases.

[9] Lötter at some points suggests that virtually everyone, including the poor themselves, have a duty to fight poverty (see, e.g., 2011, p. 4).

> When inequality manifests as a distinction between people none of whom can be classified as being poor in any way, the moral significance of the inequality must be found in other reasons than a loss of dignity or a serious threat to one's health. Meaningful differentials in power and privilege that enable domination or make possible unfair starting places in life immediately spring to mind as examples.

It appears Lötter does have the resources to conclude that those in rich countries have some moral reason to aid those who are among the *worse off*, even if the latter are not *poor*. The reply is powerful.

The question therefore becomes what the precise reason is for aiding societies like those I have described, where there is no malnutrition and everyone is able to participate in socially approved activities, but these activities are nonetheless extraordinarily cramped, akin to those of Jenkins. I do not think that potentials for domination do much explanatory work, for one can imagine there being strong moral reason for the West to aid such societies even in the (hypothetical) case in which the West did not threaten to coerce, exploit or otherwise manipulate them.

It seems that a judgement of unfair starting places in life grounds a stronger reason for the rich to give than a concern to avoid domination. The idea is that it is unfair for one to be born into a wealthy society when others are born into poor ones, since one has done nothing to deserve or otherwise be entitled to live better than they. However, even here, I submit that it is not doing all the work.

To see why not, imagine a world in which there are solely those who are either Rich (roughly, those with several hundreds of thousands of dollars) or Super-Rich (those with several tens of millions), and that it is an accident of birth that determines which group one is in. The degree of unfairness in this scenario is no different than the degree in the initial scenario of the actual world, where one could be born into either a society that is 'just barely not poor by Lötter's definition' or a society that is middle class by Western European standards. My intuition, though, is that there is much greater moral reason for the rich to aid the 'just barely not poor by Lötter's definition' in the actual world than there would be for the Super-Rich to aid the Rich in the imaginary world. Hence, it cannot be the fact of unfair starting points that explains the extent of this greater moral reason.

Perhaps some other explanation is available beyond domination and unfairness.[10] However, relative at least to those, I submit that a better explanation of why there is such a weighty reason to aid the 'just barely not poor by Lötter's definition' is that they are, in fact, poor.

Judging Socially Approved Activities to Be Impoverished

Here is a third way to question certain relativist implications of Lötter's conception of intermediate poverty. For him, that sort of poverty is essentially a matter of lacking the economic resources required to participate in activities, or characteristically human ones, of which one's society approves. If this conception of poverty

[10] Perhaps it would be worth appealing to considerations of arbitrariness, rather than unfairness, on which see (Rawls 1999, pp. 63–65, 82–88, as interpreted by Metz 2000).

were sound, then it would be incoherent to judge the typically human activities of which society approves to be poor. However, that does seem coherent.

For a first case, consider that many in rural sub-Saharan societies whose biological needs are met and who are socially included would describe themselves as poor, and precisely by virtue of lacking the economic opportunities to be found in Western societies, e.g., access to electricity, quality medical treatments, painkiller, decent education, substantial information and so on. A motivation to avoid (perceived) poverty best explains why so many of these societies would readily take advantage of such opportunities if they were offered to them. Students from such societies, for example, would readily partake of the chance to study at a proper university in the US or the UK in the first instance in order to enable themselves, their families and their society to escape poverty (and not so much to help their society avoid domination by the West, or to correct for unfair starting points).

For a different example, one that is more revealing at this point, consider Amish children, who do not choose to live in a society that is fairly devoid of science/technology and that is full of hard, agricultural labour. Even though we may presume that all Amish children are by and large physically healthy and undertake characteristically human activities (entertainment, education, etc.) in socially approved ways, it is natural to say that they are economically poor. In fact, it would be sensible to maintain that Amish socially approved human activities are designed to *encourage economic poverty so as to foster religious community*. However, that sort judgement would make no sense, if Lötter's conception of intermediate poverty were true.

In making this objection, I recognize that non-Amish societies lack the right to interfere in order to offer, say, the internet to Amish teens. In addition, I acknowledge that adults who voluntarily live in Amish society might not be best described as poor, at least insofar as they, like Smith above, have the real opportunity to avoid it. My point is that those who do not freely live in Amish society, such as children the Amish have the right to rear as they have seen fit, seem aptly described as poor by outsiders, and that even insiders might well use such a description, *welcoming poverty as a way to prompt children to focus on things that truly matter*, such as God, togetherness and mutual aid. However, if poverty were relative to a given society's way of life, such a description would be inapt.

Of course, those inclined to call themselves or their children 'poor' could be incorrect; people's self-descriptions are not necessarily accurate. However, it is a staple of development studies these days to think that theorization ought to be somewhat informed by the perspectives of those who think of themselves as poor, where one would need a very good reason to deem incorrect those who think of themselves as poor.

Another Conception of the Inhuman: Universalism in Lötter

In the previous sections, I have argued that while Lötter's overall conception of poverty as essentially inhuman is attractive, his particular way of construing intermediate poverty is not, or at least not as much. I think Lötter makes several

revealing points in maintaining that poverty has both biological and social dimensions, that the former is a matter of ill-health due to lack of economic resources and that the latter is a kind of social exclusion, that the former is generally worse than the latter, that all forms of poverty are essentially inhuman and that they are (usually) plausibly viewed as morally objectionable for that reason. However, I have balked at Lötter's conception of social exclusion, *qua* the inability to participate in characteristically human activities as approved by one's particular society. Such a view makes it difficult to account for, among other things, people's understandings of themselves as poor and obligations of the global rich to aid those with low qualities of life, so I argued in the previous section.

If one is sympathetic to these criticisms, then it is worth keeping Lötter's general framework but seeking a more universalist conception of social exclusion, one that would neatly cohere with his universalist conception of extreme poverty as inability to meet physical and mental human needs. That is what I undertake in this section. In fact, I do so by drawing on additional remarks to be found in Lötter's book that suggest such an alternate approach.

On a few occasions, Lötter does speak of intermediate poverty in more species-based or universal terms. Consider the following quotations:

> Poverty as a lack of economic capacities causes its victims to live lives in which they cannot fully participate in the range of activities expressive of their nature as human beings (2011, p. 110).

> (P)overty is a distinctively human condition that denies human beings opportunities to live lives that express their humanity and thus forces them into lifestyles not worthy of their species….(P)eople are unable to afford participation in characteristic aspects of human life (2011, pp. 161–162).

> The more people have abundant riches of economic capacities, the more possibilities for their life chances are enriched and the better their options are for developing capacities and exercising power (2011, p. 54).

These statements suggest the following conception of poverty that is very close to the one that Lötter himself expresses, but avoids the relativist element that I have contended is questionable:

> People are more poor, the less they can obtain adequate economic resources (or the more they lack the requisite economic capacities to deal with resources fittingly) to pursue a wide array of finally valuable activities and states characteristic of human beings.

Whereas Lötter usually speaks of access to resources 'to maintain physical health and engage in social activities distinctive of human beings in their respective societies' (2011, p. 151), I have suggested replacing that with 'to pursue a wide array of finally valuable activities and states characteristic of human beings'. Supposing that human beings are themselves good for their own sake, or that health is a condition good in itself for them, the phrase 'finally valuable states characteristic of human beings' adequately captures the biological or extreme dimension of poverty. And then the phrase 'finally valuable activities characteristic

of human beings' is meant to account for the social or intermediate facet of poverty. Instead of non-biological poverty being a matter of merely being unable to participate in normal human activities as undertaken by one's society, it is a function of being unable to participate in a 'wide array' of characteristic human activities.

Such a conception of poverty, which has been inspired by Lötter's remarks, avoids (and also explains) all three objections that I made in the previous section to the dominant expression of his view. First, it easily entails that the caveman Jenkins is poor. Although Jenkins does well by his society's particular ways of expressing humanity, his society lacks the wealth and other resources to offer its members multifarious routes by which to do so. Second, it readily accounts for the intuition that the global rich currently have weighty duties to aid the worst off, e.g., below the Sahara desert, and to do on the specific grounds that they are poor, even if they are neither biologically stunted nor socially excluded in the sense of being unable to participate in their society's forms of human activities. Third, it makes sense of how societies such as the Amish could coherently describe themselves as poor, as seeking out economic poverty so as to enable other values to flourish. After all, there are some cultures that do not place higher-order value on finally valuable facets of human nature, and instead rate other things such as praying to God, paying homage to the king, enhancing racial purity, etc.

Another advantage of my friendly amendment to Lötter's conception of poverty is that it unifies to a greater degree the two facets of poverty that Lötter highlights. He has, as has been discussed, conceived of the biological and social dimensions of poverty as both forms of inhumanity. What I have suggested is going a step farther to conceive of the inhumanity in a certain, basic way, namely, as the inability of people to pursue a wide array of finally valuable activities and states characteristic of human beings. An inhuman condition is ultimately the incapacity to develop what is good for its own sake about human nature in a variety of ways, where poverty is the incapacity to do so for economic reasons.

Conclusion: Comparing with Related Views

In this article I have expounded, criticized and developed Hennie Lötter's conception of poverty as an inhuman condition, roughly, one in which either one's biological needs are unmet because of a lack economic resources or in which one cannot participate in characteristic human activities. I like to think that I have proffered the most defensible interpretation of his views, culminating in the principle that people are more poor, the less they can obtain adequate economic resources to pursue a wide array of finally valuable activities and states characteristic of human beings. If that is correct, then a major next step to take would be to evaluate this principle in light of its closest rivals, i.e., other non-utilitarian and non-Kantian philosophical accounts of poverty.

There are two that come to mind. First off, there is course Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach to human development, which, in one way, is intended to be much broader than merely an account of poverty, but which also, in another, is

meant to be narrower, applying only to modern societies accepting the equal dignity of human beings (2011, pp. 73–81, 89–93). Even so, it does entail a conception of poverty, at least for those societies, according to which it is 'best understood as capability failure' to be human along ten different dimensions (2011, p. 143). Her basic view is that there are several respects in which human nature is good for its own sake, which Western states should ensure that all citizens have the opportunities to realize, at least to a certain, minimal degree. For Nussbaum, the relevant capabilities are grounded on finally valuable facets of human nature, hence the sub-title of her latest book on the subject 'The Human Development Approach' (2011). For her, poverty, as one facet of low development in the West, is a condition in which one lacks abilities to develop one's humanness, as specified by her with the ten capabilities.[11]

Another view that is similar to Lötter's is what one might call the 'fundamentality theory' of poverty, according to which it is, roughly, a lack of access to conditions that are largely responsible for the course of a normal human life (Metz 2013, pp. 227–229). According to this perspective, the way that a human life is disposed to go is caused by certain key instrumental goods, where poverty is the inability, due to economic considerations, to access much of them. Concretely, reasoning and relationships are two things that substantially account for much of the life of a characteristic human being, so that poverty is a condition in which these are stunted by virtue of a lack of economic resources.

So, here are three versions of the broad perspective that poverty is essentially an inhuman condition. Do they entail differing particular judgements about who is poor, to what degree and the like? According to Lötter himself (2011, p. 286), his view differs from Nussbaum's mainly in that she includes 'individual capabilities', whereas his are strictly relational. However, I argued above that he should not restrict capacities in that way, and so the question becomes whether there are additional differences in outcome between those two theories as well as the other mentioned above. Chances are there will be, as Nussbaum's account of the human good is hardly uncontested, and is meant to apply only to certain societies, whereas Lötter seeks an account for all countries. If so, which entailments are intuitively most justified? In addition, does either theory provide a better explanation of who counts as poor and why? I submit that political philosophers, development theorists and even social activists have good reason to seek out answers to such questions in future work.

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[11] Note that Amartya Sen's (1999) version of capability theory, which has also been extremely influential, does not tie the relevant capacities to ones constitute of an objective human good.

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