Although the world food situation raises serious problems of distributive justice, the problem of the general problem of global economic inequality is a more profound and complex issue. It addresses not only the issue of how to distribute food, but also the broader question of how to address the root causes of global inequality. This is not to say that the problem of food distribution is unimportant, but rather that it is a symptom of a deeper, more systemic issue. To address the problem of global economic inequality, we must look beyond the immediate issue of food distribution and consider the larger question of how to create a system that promotes justice and equality for all. This involves not only addressing the issue of food distribution, but also the broader question of how to create a system that promotes justice and equality for all.
money economy, anything can be exchanged for anything else, and the issue of the distribution of food is inseparable from that of the distribution of transistors or power plants.

Nevertheless, there is a reason for thinking about the larger question in terms of food. Food is basic. It is the last thing an individual can afford to give up, if he can afford nothing else, and this means that in the current world situation we are not dealing with an abstract problem of inequality, but with something more specific and acute. If everyone in the world had at least a minimally adequate standard of living, there would still be ethical problems about the justice of big differences in wealth above that minimum— as there are, for example, about the distribution of wealth within the United States. But whatever may be said about this general problem, the inequalities that appear in the distribution of food on a world scale are of a very different kind, and raise a different issue. They are, to be sure, inequality in wealth; but they also rise to a point where the question of food is more than an abstract problem of distribution, since food is basic and the issue is no longer a question of redressing an inequality but of ensuring that there is enough food for all.

I shall use the term “radical inequality” to describe this situation. A radical inequality exists when the bottom level is one of direst need, the top level one of great comfort or even luxury, and the total supply is large enough to raise the bottom above the level of extreme need without bringing significant deprivation to those above—it would therefore be possible to feed everyone adequately without significant deprivation to those below—except for the fact that the supply would not be sufficient to go much farther in raising the living standard of those who are already well off. Whether this may be desirable, or seems important to someone, it is beyond the scope of this paper. The point I wish to make here is that the concept of a radical inequality is incomparable with the concept of a general inequality, since in the one case the bottom level is so low that no one can be said to be adequate, and in the other the top level is so high that no one is in dire need.

It is important, therefore, to distinguish clearly between the two situations. In the one case, the problem of food is a matter of distribution, and there is nothing that can be done about it but provide more food. In the other case, the problem is one of production, and there is a clearer sense in which it can be said that we are dealing with a moral issue. The point is that we cannot simply provide more food, but must also consider what kind of society we are living in and how we can best use our resources to provide for the needs of all.
development, the U.S., the USSR, Europe, and Japan become wealthy enough so that India and other poor countries can afford grain but there is no moral objection to this outcome because no one has done anything wrong. The position I want to defend is that permits this outcome to be morally objectionable even if it doesn't involve anyone's doing anything wrong. The position I want to defend is that permits this outcome to be morally objectionable even if it doesn't involve anyone's doing anything wrong.

It may seem that the natural suggestion to make at this point is that the worst effects of market inequity should be dealt with by charity: charity of the rich, nation to nation. I think this is a familiar remedy, and it seems particularly appropriate when the inequality of wealth in such circumstances the only motive available for parting the wealthy from their possessions is generosity. But perhaps appeal can also be made to something stronger, a duty of charity which comes into force when one can help others in serious distress without excessive cost to oneself. Certain most people would acknowledge without hesitation to throw a life preserver to a drowning man, even if they wouldn't risk their lives for someone else. Wherein between these extremes does the duty of aid to others give out is not clear. Peter Singer has advocated rectifying inequality along these lines. Governments and individuals are sometimes motivated to engage in charitable aid and such policies are worth encouraging.

Nevertheless, I think it is important to reject charity as a satisfactory solution to the problem. It is important to reject it in this context not only because of the limits on what it can achieve but because of what it presupposes. Until recently voluntary charity was almost the only instrument of redistribution within countries and it still is. It does not question their basic entitlement to what they are asked to donate. The way in which they are making for others has not threatened their ownership and it still is the advocate of the property of those who are well-off enough to give. It is left to them to determine when the sacrifice they are making for others has reached the point at which it is too much. It is important to reject it in this context not only because of its limits on what it can achieve but because of what it presupposes.

The central claim I want to make is that any system of property, national or international, is an institution with moral characteristics. Moral characteristics are not like the results of natural catastrophes, when the system of political and economic institutions is examined critically. An appeal to the legitimacy of the system for its operation, with its implied refusal to challenge the legitimacy of the system of property under which the donors of charity hold title to their possessions, tends to obscure the moral importance of the fact that someone has, loses, or acquires title to something because it appropriates the wealth of others.

The possibility of such criticism is not limited to any particular point of view. A welfare state will be found illegitimate by those who are not satisfied with the way in which transfers are determined. They may say that the mechanisms of distribution are not just. Moral criticism of the system of property is not limited to any particular point of view. A welfare state will be found illegitimate by those who are not satisfied with the way in which transfers are determined. They may say that the mechanisms of distribution are not just. Moral criticism of the system of property is not limited to any particular point of view. A welfare state will be found illegitimate by those who are not satisfied with the way in which transfers are determined. They may say that the mechanisms of distribution are not just. Moral criticism of the system of property is not limited to any particular point of view. A welfare state will be found illegitimate by those who are not satisfied with the way in which transfers are determined. They may say that the mechanisms of distribution are not just. Moral criticism of the system of property is not limited to any particular point of view. A welfare state will be found illegitimate by those who are not satisfied with the way in which transfers are determined. They may say that the mechanisms of distribution are not just.

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Radical economic inequalities, however, are not like the results of natural catastrophes. When they persist and tend to reproduce themselves over generations, then the system of political and economic institutions is examined critically. An appeal to the legitimacy of the system for its operation, with its implied refusal to challenge the legitimacy of the system of property. The donors of charity in this case are not to blame for the position of those who have not suffered a comparable calamity. The most that can be said is that charity cannot therefore be constructed as an implicit criticism of the legitimacy of economic wealth. The central claim I want to make is that any system of property, national or international, is an institution with moral characteristics. Moral criticisms are not like the results of natural catastrophes. When they persist and tend to reproduce themselves over generations, then the system of political and economic institutions is examined critically. An appeal to the legitimacy of the system of property under which the donors of charity hold title to their possessions, tends to obscure the moral importance of the fact that someone has, loses, or acquires title to something because it appropriates the wealth of others.

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exerts powerful negative influence on people’s lives in the absence of such a policy. For this reason a procedurally orderly system in which no one cheats, coerces, or steals from anyone else can still remain morally objectionable because of radical inequalities that systematically arise under it, caused in part by morally arbitrary differences between people in natural endowments, family influence, or access to sources. A society that fails to combat these influences permits the existence of an illegitimate system of property whose legal conditions of entitlement are morally questionable. The appropriate remedy is not an exhortation to charity; but a revision of the system of property right to remove its objectionable features. There are more and less radical ways of accomplishing this, but some form of redistributive social welfare is generally accepted as a built-in feature of the operation of modern national economies. It then does redefine new conditions for legitimate ownership, acquisition, and exchange.

A redistributive tax may be regarded by some libertarians as a form of enforced charity (others would call it theft.) But from the point of view, I am advocating is an attempt to build into the conditions of exchange, accumulation, and possession certain safeguards that prevent them from being unjust. Within the United States, for example, a system that permitted one-fourth of the population to starve while the rest were well-off would be regarded as unacceptable even if this result arose without coercion or the theft, by non-fraudulent economic transactions. The possibility of such a result would generally be seen as undermining the legitimacy of the system and directly the legitimacy of possession. But any other way were morally legitimate. Property does not of possession hold under it. It is doubtful whether the legitimacy of the system and therefore the legitimacy of property would be undermined, no matter how internally applied. The purist’s recourse is to appeal to a more general prohibition of the sort of property right, whose legal conditions of origin are not in any way set to prevent the existence of the system and therefore the legitimacy of ownership.

Despite the vast differences in scale and in the political form of the problem, these considerations can be applied to the assessment of the international economic order as well. The condition of origin set to prevent the existence of the system and therefore the legitimacy of property are not in any way set to prevent the existence of the system and therefore the legitimacy of ownership.
The assumption that economic policies can address the issue of global justice is a common one. However, it is important to recognize that economic policies can have unintended consequences, especially when they are implemented in a way that is not sensitive to the needs of the poor.

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One consequence of the view that radical inequality is an injustice arising from the economic system is that aid should be truly humanitarian. By this I mean that it should be directed at people purely in virtue of their humanity, and not in virtue of their special relation to the donor. Everyone at the bottom deserves help. Perhaps some forms of aid are appropriately influenced by such factors. But aid that simply flips people off the absolute bottom and helps them to a minimally adequate diet addresses a need so general and basic that it is an inappropriate vehicle for the expression of political preference. The problem is that the effects of aid policies are often political, and it is important to recognize that economic policies can have unintended consequences, especially when they are implemented in a way that is not sensitive to the needs of the poor.

One question that arises in support of what he calls the "lifeboat ethic." Here guest that food aid to the poor countries because it is a different form of aid. But even if we are moved by the plight of the poor, we cannot ignore the fact that the problem is that the effects of aid policies are often political, and it is important to recognize that economic policies can have unintended consequences, especially when they are implemented in a way that is not sensitive to the needs of the poor.

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GLOBAL JUSTICE: SEMINAL ESSAYS

THOMAS NAGEL

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while foreign aid is not the best method of dealing with radioactivity—it is comparable to private charity on the domestic scene—it may be the only method now available. It does not require a strongly egalitarian moral position to feel that the U.S., with a gross national product of a trillion dollars and a defense budget which is 9 percent of that, should be spending more than its current two-fifths of 1 percent of GNP on nonmilitary aid. Funds are not available for a national program of radiation education and a desperateudge which is 9 percent of the GNP, and it is not difficult to imagine that the funds available are not enough to implement the program. The problem is one of survival, and it is not clear how much of the world the United States can expect to save.

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