

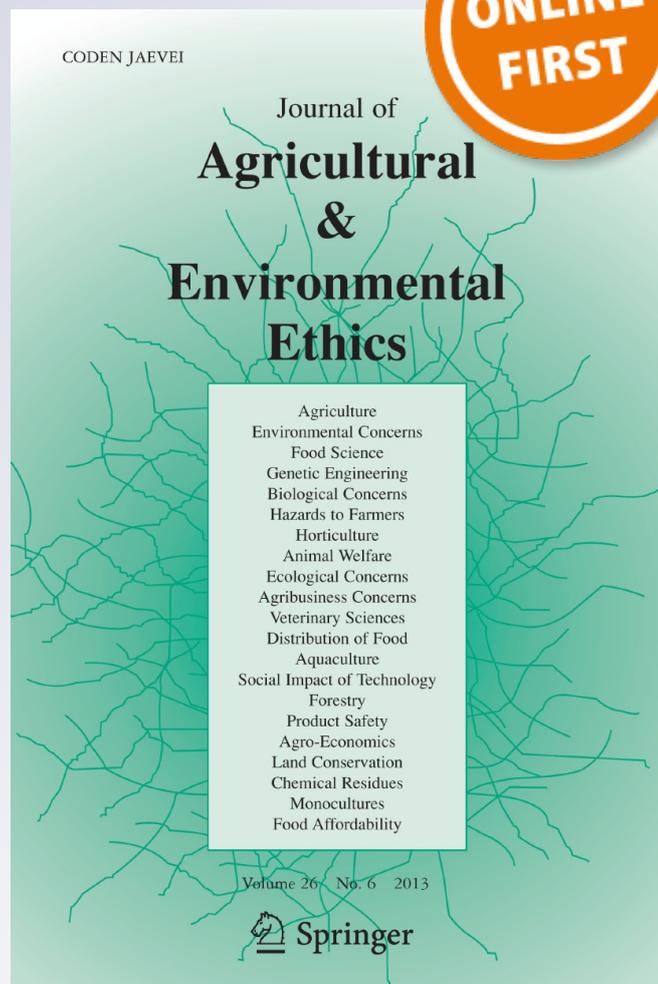
Local Food and International Ethics

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Abstract Many advocate practices of ‘local food’ or ‘locavorism’ as a partial solution to the injustices and unsustainability of contemporary food systems. I think that there is much to be said in favor of local food movements, but these virtues are insufficient to immunize locavorism from criticism. In particular, three duties of international ethics—beneficence, repair and fairness—may provide reasons for constraining the developed world’s permissible pursuit of local food. A complete account of why (and how) the fulfillment of these duties constrains locavorism will require extensive empirical evidence about the relationship between agricultural demand-led industrialization, international trade (rules), and local food practices. In this paper I can only gesture at some of this evidence and, for that reason, my policy prescriptions are merely provisional. Instead, the upshot of this paper is that advocates of locavorism ought to be attentive to the empirical-dependence of the moral permissibility of their projects. As local food ‘scales up’—and comes to be embraced as a goal of political communities—these concerns should receive even greater attention.

Keywords Global justice · Local food · Beneficence · Repair · Fairness

Introduction

‘Local food’, or ‘locavorism’, names a family of practices and associated social movements that aim at a world in which all people are able to eat fresh and nutrient-rich locally grown foods (see e.g. Berry 2009; Bittman 2008; Halweil 2004; Kingsolver et al. 2008; Pollan 2007; Rosset 2006). In *developed* societies, locavorism may take the shape of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA),

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farmers markets, food cooperatives, and (urban) collective farming.¹ Public and private institutions within affluent societies may facilitate locavorism by promoting institutional purchases of local food (e.g. for schools, hospitals and prisons), or by working against 'distant food' (e.g. through trade barriers and subsidies for domestic agriculture). In *developing* societies, locavorism is more often associated with resistance against the institutions and practices of the international economic order. Here, the rallying cry for local food is often 'food sovereignty'—the idea that peoples have a fundamental right to control their agricultural sectors in an effort to protect themselves from the destructive tendencies of globalization. In this paper, I focus mostly upon locavorism in the developed world, though at the end of the paper I take up some questions surrounding the developing world's putative right to food sovereignty.

There is much to commend locavorism, but advocates of local food often overstate its moral importance. I agree with those who have argued that eating locally is not a moral obligation (Engler 2012; Peterson 2013). But my thesis goes further: I argue that it may sometimes be morally wrong for developed societies (or for their members) to promote or to participate in local food practices.² In particular, I argue that three duties of international ethics—beneficence, repair and fairness—may provide reasons for constraining the developed world's permissible pursuit of local food.³ A complete account of why (and how) the fulfillment of these duties constrains locavorism will require extensive empirical evidence about the relationship between agricultural demand-led industrialization (ADLI), international trade (rules), and local food practices. In this paper I can only gesture at some of this evidence and, for that reason, my policy prescriptions are merely provisional. Instead, the upshot of this paper is that advocates of locavorism ought to be attentive to the empirical-dependence of the moral permissibility of their projects. As local food 'scales up'—and comes to be embraced as a goal of political communities—these concerns should receive even greater attention.

Beneficence

A duty of beneficence provides a reason for one agent to assist another agent, just in case the first agent is able to assist another agent. Other moral duties—including duties of repair and fairness—emerge in response to facts about current or past relationships. What makes a duty of beneficence distinct is that it emerges merely

¹ For a helpful taxonomy of local food practices and movements, see Werkheiser and Noll (2013).

² Of course, duties of international ethics are not the only source of constraints upon the permissible pursuit of local food. For example, my duty to provide for my child's basic needs prohibits me from spending hundreds of dollars on locally grown vine-ripened heirloom tomatoes if doing so would leave me unable to purchase her school supplies.

³ I leave aside questions about international egalitarianism, i.e. whether the existence of transnational inequalities (of wealth, income, etc.) is evidence of injustice. Even if international inequality is not unjust in itself, non-egalitarian international ethical duties may generate significant constraints on the permissible pursuit of local food.

from the fact that at least one agent is in need and that at least one other agent is capable of providing assistance.⁴

A duty of international beneficence may be at cross-purposes with the promotion of local food if purchasing foods from developing societies can help to alleviate global poverty. Peter Singer and Jim Mason observe:

If farmers near San Francisco need extra income to send their children to good colleges, and farmers in developing nations need extra income in order to be able to afford basic health care or a few years of elementary school for their children, we will, other things being equal, do better to support the farmers in developing countries (Singer and Mason 2007, 141).

Singer and Mason call our attention to the possibility that it may do more to alleviate serious suffering for (members of) developed societies to buy food from developing societies than for them to buy local food. To be clear, they think that other considerations (e.g. environmental costs) should also inform the decision whether to choose local or distant food. However, Singer and Mason think that members of developed societies have a moral reason to choose imported food when choosing imported food does more to alleviate serious suffering than does buying local food. Here, Singer and Mason focus upon the duties of individual persons, but their point applies *mutatis mutandis*, to societies. Even if a developed society's local food practices promote valuable social goods, a duty of international beneficence provides this society with a reason to import agricultural products from the developing world whenever doing so would help to alleviate severe poverty.

So far, I think that there is nothing objectionable about the position to which Singer and Mason seem to be committed. If one act does much more to prevent seriously bad outcomes than does another act, then there is a moral reason (of beneficence) to choose the first act. However, by itself, this claim does little to ground constraints on the permissible pursuit of local food within developed societies. First, we need to satisfy the antecedent of the conditional that Singer and Mason endorse: We need evidence that a particular choice (or policy) to prioritize imported food will do more good (e.g. prevent more suffering) than will a particular choice or policy to prioritize local food. Otherwise, we lack a reason for thinking that a duty of international beneficence counts in favor of moral constraints on local food. Second, we need good reason to think that a duty of international beneficence is stringent enough to defeat reasons in favor of choosing local food. Otherwise, beneficence-based reasons in favor of constraining local food may be defeated by reasons in favor of locavorism. I take up these two topics in turn.

First, we must inquire whether purchasing agricultural products from developing societies is likely to contribute to the alleviation of global poverty. In economic theory we may find reasons for believing that (agricultural) trade can contribute to economic growth in poorer societies, and that this economic growth can reduce poverty. David Ricardo famously argued that societies can realize gains from trade by focusing on sectors in which they have a comparative advantage, even if they

⁴ Of course, historical and ongoing relationships help to determine which parties one is most able to assist.

lack an absolute advantage in those sectors.⁵ So, even if the agricultural sectors of developing societies are relatively inefficient compared to the agricultural sectors of developed societies, agricultural trade may contribute to the economic growth of (both developed and) developing societies. In a classic paper, Johnston and Mellor (1961) argued that increasing agricultural exports from developing societies generates higher wages for agricultural workers, which creates greater demand for domestic industrial goods, which generates broader economic growth and poverty reduction.⁶ Irma Adelman (1984) coined the term 'ADLI' to describe this desired result of growth in the developing world's agricultural sectors.

While economic theory provides reason to hope that agricultural trade will help developing societies to escape poverty, empirical work may lead to a more pessimistic conclusion: ADLI may not be possible in all developing societies. For example, ADLI seems more likely to succeed in societies whose economies have remained primarily agricultural (World Bank 2007; Dethier and Effenberger 2012). Developing societies whose industrial sectors are more efficient than their agricultural sectors may do better to *import* food, and to focus their efforts on growing the industrial sectors of their economies (Dercon 2009). Of course, even when developing societies have better options for economic growth, (members of) developed societies may still contribute to some great good by prioritizing purchases of foods imported from the developing world. To return to Singer and Mason, (consumers in) the developed world may do better to purchase foods imported from developing societies than to purchase local food, even if ADLI is not always an optimal strategy for economic growth.

A more significant worry about ADLI and the duty of beneficence is whether the economic benefits ADLI generates reach the global poor. Indeed, there is evidence that the benefits that the world's poorest members receive from ADLI vary between societies (Hayashikawa 2009). For example, Pauw and Thurlow (2011) have found that increasing agricultural exports does little to alleviate the worst forms of poverty in Tanzania, since that country's agricultural exports come from large-scale farms, and since Tanzanians involved in large-scale farming tend not to be among their society's poorest members. Here, we may return to the defense of suboptimal beneficence I made above: Even if purchasing Tanzanian agricultural exports does not do as much to alleviate the worst forms of poverty in Tanzania as would other efforts, it likely does some good for some (relatively poor) Tanzanians, and beneficence counts in favor of promoting this good. More generally, the developed world's contributions to ADLI may have significant moral worth, and may be required by a duty of beneficence, even if they do not always contribute to the alleviation of the world's worst forms of poverty.

But what if prioritizing food imported from the developing world would implicate the (members of the) developed world in worsening (or forestalling the improvement of) the conditions of humanity's worst-off members? Economic globalization may be disastrous for some members of the global poor, even if it is

⁵ On the economics of international trade, see Krugman et al (2012); Hoekman and Kostecki (2009).

⁶ To be clear, ADLI is a transitional strategy. It makes it possible for developing societies to develop more diverse (and stable) economies.

beneficial in the aggregate.⁷ For example, increasing agricultural exports may undermine the subsistence farming in which poor peasants have traditionally engaged, and it may pressure the world's worst off into industrial agriculture or compel them to move to overcrowded urban areas in search of work. Large-scale export-directed agriculture may cause forms of ecological damage and environmental pollution whose harms disproportionately affect the poor. The economic growth that ADLI causes may also drive up the prices of basic goods and services on which the poor rely. And a developing society's dependence upon international commodity markets may subject its economy to instabilities (e.g. caused by price fluctuations) that can devastate its poorest members. Indeed, it may seem perverse to *advocate* global agricultural trade as a means of alleviating global poverty, since the global food trade may seem to *harm* the global poor.

This is a powerful objection. To overcome it, we need evidence that particular acts (or policies) of prioritizing food imports from the developing world will alleviate the hardships faced by the world's poorest members. Some have argued that the Fair Trade movement provides such assurance. For example, Fairtrade International (FLO), along with the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO), has created a certification system to help consumers identify agricultural products whose purchase will benefit the farmers and other workers who have contributed to the production of these products (Fairtrade International 2013; Jaffee et al. 2004). These 'Certified Fair Trade' products are made by workers in small democratic cooperatives, or in larger organizations where they receive good wages and where their labor rights are protected. Other benefits include guaranteed prices to producers and contributions to community improvement initiatives. If Fair Trade products deliver what they promise, then a duty of beneficence counts in favor of choosing them over comparable locally grown foods. Some have argued, though, that Fair Trade is a suboptimal development strategy, since it may encourage people to specialize in inefficient economic activities that are not in their long-term interests (Kurjanska and Risse 2008; Engler 2012; Patel 2008).⁸ But this objection seems to make the perfect the enemy of the good, as Nicole Hassoun (2011) argues. After all, there is abundant evidence that Fair Trade often *improves* conditions for poor farmers (Castaldo et al. 2009; Valkila and Nygren 2010; Ruben et al. 2009). Therefore, a duty of beneficence may provide a reason for (members of) a developed society to prioritize Fair Trade over local foods. Of course, there can be reasonable disagreement about how much empirical work needs to be done before we can conclude that beneficence provides a reason for (members of) affluent societies to purchase Fair Trade goods. However, I hope to have made some progress in the direction of justifying that conclusion. For now, though, it may be worthwhile to transition away from discussing empirical issues related to beneficence-based prioritization of distant food, and to look towards an important moral question: How *stringent* is the duty of international beneficence?

⁷ For some discussion of this point, and of what follows, see Wade (2004); Vos (2012).

⁸ Note, though, that Kurjanska and Risse (2008, 48–9) admit that Fair Trade may sometimes be a sensible development strategy, and that we often cannot know when it will (or will not be) a sensible strategy.

Whether a duty of beneficence obligates constraints on the pursuit of local food depends upon whether a duty of beneficence is stringent enough to demand that persons prioritize international beneficence over locavorism. So far, I have shown (at most) that beneficence provides *a reason* to purchase distant food. But there are good reasons to buy local food, too. And so a second question is whether a duty of beneficence is stringent enough to defeat the reasons in favor of local food.

Recall Singer's claim that we may do better to buy distant (rather than local) food. Let us suppose that he is right, and that sufficient empirical evidence for this claim can be found. By itself, this conclusion does not entail that (members of) developed societies have an obligation to prioritize distant food. However, I suspect that Singer thinks they do have such an obligation, since he has long claimed that a commitment to the moral equality of persons requires (members of) the world's developed societies to undertake great sacrifices for the sake of the global poor (Singer 1972, 2002). Singer has said that "if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it" (Singer 1972, 231). From a moral point of view, very little is comparable to escaping abject poverty. It follows that a duty of beneficence can obligate (members of) developed societies to sacrifice a great deal in order to help members of developing societies to escape abject poverty. For example, Singer says that we are not morally permitted to purchase clothes in order to look "well-dressed," if less expensive clothes can keep us warm, and if we can spend the excess money to mitigate the suffering and death of the world's poor (Singer 1972, 235).

I assume that local food practices may promote private and public goods that are of greater moral importance than being well-dressed. However, these goods do not seem comparable in moral worth to the goods that can be promoted through ADLI. (Of course this assumes a favorable resolution to the contested empirical questions I discuss above.) Consider the example Singer and Mason introduce: When members of developed societies buy local food they may help local farmers send their children to college, but when they buy (some) foods imported from (some) developing societies, they may help farmers in those societies access basic health care. Certainly, a college education has moral worth, but its moral importance does not seem comparable to that of basic health care. Suppose that the contrast between distant and local food generalizes in the way that this example suggests. Suppose that the set of goods which are created by the developed world's farmers markets, CSAs, and urban farming practices are not nearly as important from a moral point of view as are the benefits of ADLI.⁹ It would follow, from Singer's conception of the

⁹ One way to resist the conclusions that I draw from Singer's account of beneficence is to assert that *at least some* of the developed world's local food practices produce goods that are morally comparable to the goods produced through ADLI. For example, consider the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN) (<http://detroitblackfoodsecurity.org>). The mission of this group is "to build self-reliance, food security and food justice in Detroit's Black community by influencing public policy, engaging in urban agriculture, promoting healthy eating, encouraging co-operative buying, and directing youth towards careers in food-related fields." In the context of the broader public's abandonment of inner-city Detroit, and in the absence of healthy food options for the people of the city, the goods that the DBCFSN pursues seem to be of 'comparable moral importance' to the alleviation of \$2/day poverty in other countries.

demands of beneficence, that developed societies (and their members) have a moral obligation to promote distant food, even at significant cost to local food projects. Benito Müller expresses something of this idea, when he says that “[e]ating Kenyan strawberries at Christmas, in other words, is not a guilty pleasure, it is (part of) a moral obligation!” (2007, p 5). But if Singer is right, we should do much more than eat Kenyan strawberries at Christmas. Developed societies ought to promote the consumption of distant food whenever doing so will contribute to the alleviation of global poverty, even if this means that they must entirely surrender their commitments to local food practices.

Singer (and Mason and Müller?) endorses an especially stringent conception of beneficence, one which many have rejected. One reason to reject Singer’s conception of beneficence is that one may not need to sacrifice especially valued pursuits in order to show equal respect for persons, even if doing so would prevent very bad outcomes. For example Richard Miller says, “[i]n general, in order to respect others, one need not be prepared to do violence to who one is, radically changing one’s worthwhile goals in order to be a more productive satisfier of others’ urgent needs” (Miller 2004, p 359). Miller argues that a duty of beneficence may place significant demands upon us, but that it does not demand that I “end the continuing presence of my current personality in my own life” (2004, 359). On Miller’s view, a person (or a society) need not become an instrument for meeting the needs of others, even if doing so will prevent very bad outcomes.

Is locavorism an especially valued personal project for those who participate in it? Many people seem to value locavorism. They may enjoy meeting their neighbors and longtime food producers at the farmers market, or participating in food cooperatives that bring together local farmers, restaurants, and individual consumers. Locavorism may be even more central to the personalities of persons who pursue local food practices for explicitly political aims, e.g. those who engage in urban farming as a strategy of resistance against society’s abandonment of poor city-dwellers. However, it seems unlikely that local food is central to the identities of more than a small number of people. Among other reasons, this is because many of the valuable activities that most people engage in are unlikely to be central to their personalities, at least on any plausible account of what it means for an activity to be central to one’s personality. So, even on Miller’s view beneficence may require that most (members of) developed societies prioritize purchases of distant food, even when doing so compromises their pursuit of locavorism. Furthermore, even persons for whom locavorism is a central part of their personalities may *sometimes* be required by beneficence to choose distant over local food, since they may sometimes be able to do so without jeopardizing their attachment to locavorism.

So, on either Singer or Miller’s account of the stringency of beneficence, most people have an obligation to choose distant food whenever doing so will contribute to global poverty alleviation. Furthermore, if either Singer or Miller are correct, and if purchasing Fair Trade food products (or other imported food products) will contribute to the alleviation of global poverty, then (members of) developed societies have an obligation to buy those particular food products, rather than local food. Of course, one may be committed to less stringent conceptions of international

beneficence, according to which its demands upon us are minimal, perhaps because we have wide latitude in deciding how to discharge them (e.g. O'Neill 2000); or according to which beneficence places no demands upon us at all (e.g. Narveson 2003). On these accounts of international beneficence, this duty is likely to be insufficiently stringent to ground significant constraints upon the developed world's permissible pursuit of locavorism, regardless of the empirical facts about ADLI.

Beneficence is not the only duty of international ethics. And other duties—of repair and fairness—are often thought to be more stringent than beneficence. These duties may generate even more significant constraints on the permissible pursuit of local food.

Repair

A duty of repair is a duty to compensate those who one has harmed. A duty of repair may resemble a duty of beneficence, since both duties generate reasons for providing support to others. However, a duty of repair is grounded in the fact that one is morally responsible for harming another, unlike a duty of beneficence, which is grounded in the fact that one is able to assist another. To focus the contrast: We may say that beneficence offers assistance-based moral reasons for alleviating global poverty, while repair offers contribution-based moral reasons for doing so.¹⁰

One advantage of turning to a duty of repair to attempt to ground moral constraints on locavorism is that a duty of repair is often thought to be more stringent than a duty of beneficence. Even people who think that beneficence demands few (if any) sacrifices may believe that a duty of repair can require much more. For example, political libertarians who (believe themselves to) have principled reasons for rejecting *positive* duties to assist the global poor (e.g. Narveson 2003) may be persuaded to think that *negative* duties not to harm the global poor provide reasons to alleviate the poverty to which we have contributed. For example, much of Pogge's recent work (e.g. 2004, 2005, 2008) has attempted to ground international duties of poverty relief in the fact that members of the developed world have violated duties not to contribute to the harms experienced by the global poor.

I take for granted that developed societies have caused or contributed to much of contemporary global poverty. I assume, for example, that histories of colonialism and (threats of) military coups are (partially) responsible for at least some of the serious harms experienced by the world's worst off (see e.g. Miller 2010, chap. 5–7). It follows from this assumption that the developed world has a duty of repair to help alleviate (at least some) global poverty. But by itself, this conclusion cannot ground constraints on the developed world's permissible pursuit of local food. This further conclusion requires that there be a conflict between locavorism and the developed world's discharge of its duties of international repair. But general claims about the contemporary consequences of the developed world's historical wrongs are insufficient for this purpose.

¹⁰ I take these terms from Barry and Øverland (2012).

What about the popular claim that the developed world's agricultural subsidies contribute to global poverty? Cline (2004) claims that the developed world's agricultural subsidies cost the developing world over \$200 billion every year. Watkins and Fowler (2002) write for Oxfam International that the developed world's agricultural subsidies allow affluent societies to reap great benefits from international trade while forcing asymmetrical market vulnerabilities on poorer societies. The magnitudes of agricultural subsidies are certainly immense—and it seems clear enough that subsidies do (or could) benefit the developed world's local food practices. For example, consider that the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy will dedicate €363 billion to agricultural subsidies from 2014 to 2020 and that the United States is planning to spend around \$955 billion on agricultural subsidies from 2014 to 2023 (Dunmore 2013; Nixon 2013). A significant portion of these funds will provide direct and indirect price support to the agricultural industries of these societies, with the result that the developing world's imports will be less competitive in the developed world's markets.

There are three reasons why such policies do (or could) support the developed world's locavorism. First, on a broad definition of 'local food', where this term refers to the mere geographic proximity of the source of one's food, protectionist policies surely promote the competitiveness of much 'local' food. ConAgra's soybeans and Smithfield's pigs may be grown near you. Second, even on a narrower reading of 'local food', where this term denotes (among other things) small-scale or sustainable agricultural practices, agricultural subsidies still place imports at a competitive disadvantage. If the people who consider purchasing local food are not always only also considering domestic non-local food (but are sometimes also considering imported food), then subsidies may assist local food. This is because the market for local food depends in part on the magnitude of its price premium (Grebitus et al. 2013), and because protectionist policies affect the price premium of local food. Third, some locavores have argued that developed societies should re-focus their agricultural subsidies towards local food. For example, Bittman (2011) has argued that the developed world should prioritize agricultural subsidies for small producers of healthy and local foods. These efforts would be blocked by a broader drive to end agricultural subsidies.

There are good reasons for thinking that agricultural subsidies may promote locavorism (or at least that reducing agricultural subsidies may diminish locavorism). But it does not follow from this premise that a duty not to harm the global poor obligates reductions in the developed world's agricultural subsidies. This conclusion requires that we have some reason to believe that subsidies *contribute to the harms* of global poverty, i.e. that a duty of repair demands that developed societies end these subsidies. In political philosophy, Thomas Pogge has been the loudest voice in favor of the claim that agricultural subsidies contribute to the harms experienced by the world's worst off members. On Pogge's view:

[W]e are *harming* the global poor if and insofar as we collaborate in imposing an *unjust* global institutional order upon them. And this institutional order is definitely unjust if and insofar as it foreseeably perpetuates large-scale human

rights deficits that would be reasonably avoidable through feasible institutional modifications (2005, 60, emphasis in original).

Pogge's views on the developed world's obligation to end agricultural subsidies (and on its duty of repair, more generally) are sophisticated, but for my purposes it is sufficient to gloss them in the following manner. For Pogge, the developed world collaborates in imposing of a global economic order upon developing societies. One part of this global economic order is the set of subsidies that developed societies use to protect their domestic agricultural sectors. These subsidies (are supposed to) have the effect of preventing developing societies from engaging in ADLI, by making their imports uncompetitive in the developed world's markets. Since some members of the developing world would be subject to fewer human rights violations (e.g. abject poverty) if these subsidies did not exist, and since it would be feasible for the developed world to end these subsidies, it follows that the developed world has contributed to the harms from which the global poor suffer. This generates a duty (of repair) to contribute to global poverty alleviation. For my purposes, I need to draw only a narrower conclusion from Pogge's premises: A duty not to harm grounds a duty for developed societies not to engage in (harmful) agricultural subsidies. If, as I have argued above, it is also true that ending agricultural subsidies would compromise the developed world's local food practices, then it follows from Pogge's conception of international harm that discharging a duty to avoid harming the global poor could compromise the developed world's local food practices.

Many critics take issue with Pogge's account of international harm (Patten 2005; Risse 2005; Satz 2005). They argue that Pogge's conception of 'harm' is so broad as to characterize a 'failure to assist' as a harm. That is, a failure to implement feasible alternative institutions that could result in less global poverty seems like a failure to *assist* in the alleviation of poverty, rather than a contribution to poverty. On this objection, Pogge collapses the distinction between assistance-based and contribution-based duties that is central to his argument. If these critics are right, then Pogge's (supposed) contribution-based duty of repair is no more stringent than an assistance-based duty of beneficence, since the account of 'contribution' on which he relies is little more than a 'failure to assist'. (Recall that what was supposed to be original about Pogge's position is that it could appeal to those who were unmoved by appeals to positive duties (i.e. of assistance) to the global poor.) Barry and Øverland (2012) have recently argued that there are important intermediate positions between 'failing to assist' and 'causing harm', and that these intermediate positions could provide grounds for duties of international poverty relief that are more stringent than beneficence, and that also support Pogge's position.¹¹ However, it may be worthwhile to look elsewhere (i.e. somewhere other than a duty of repair) to find more stringent moral constraints upon local food than a duty of beneficence can offer.

¹¹ Another worry is that agricultural subsidies may *improve* the conditions of the poorest members of food-importing societies, e.g. by making imported food cheaper. See e.g. Kurjanska and Risse (2008). However, even if some of the world's poor are made better off by the developed world's protectionism, there is good evidence that tariffs, subsidies, and other protectionist trade policies are bad for the global poor in the aggregate.

Fairness

Perhaps a duty of fair play grounds stringent reasons to constrain the developed world's pursuit of locavorism. Here, I am interested in a duty of fairness that cannot be reduced to either of the two duties I have already discussed—beneficence (“[Beneficence](#)” section) or repair (“[Repair](#)” section). (Of course, if no such duty exists, then what is true in the remainder of this section may be placed under the heading of one or both of the other two duties.)

A duty of fair play aims neither at assisting others nor at avoiding harms, but at impartial rules for cooperation. Fairness is distinct from beneficence because it is owed only to one's fellow participants in cooperation, rather than to everyone in need; and because its object is only the rules which govern a particular cooperative activity, rather than broader disadvantages. Fairness is distinct from harm avoidance because terms of cooperation may be unfair even if they do not cause (or contribute to) harms, and because harms need not always be unfair.¹² There is much more that could be said to characterize the difference between a duty of fairness and duties to assist or to avoid (contributing to) harm. However, in order to move forward, I close this discussion of the conceptual space of fairness by observing that others who are writing about global justice often take the idea of fairness to be a source of distinct claims of global concern (e.g. James 2012; Risse 2012).¹³

A duty of fairness would constrain the permissible pursuit of locavorism in the developed world if the developed world used unfair means to promote locavorism. Here, we can reintroduce the claim that the developed world's agricultural subsidies promote the developed world's locavorism. So, the question at hand is whether these agricultural subsidies are unfair. If they are, then discharging a duty of fairness would constrain the developed world's locavorism.

First, it may help to place the developed world's agricultural subsidies in the context of other rules regarding protectionism, so we can assess the fairness of this broader set of rules. The World Trade Organization (WTO) permits agricultural subsidies. At the same time, the WTO prohibits many other forms of protectionism, like import tariffs. That is, the WTO prohibits forms of protectionism that the developing world can afford (e.g. import tariffs; these can be self-financing), at the same time that it permits forms of protectionism that the developing world cannot afford (e.g. large agricultural subsidies). There is something asymmetrical about these trade rules, but are they unfair?

¹² If Pogge is right, then some forms of institutional unfairness can be described as (contributions to) harms. But there are two reasons why this possibility presents no problem for my views. First, if Pogge is correct, then the broader goal of this section has already been accomplished: One should acknowledge that there are stringent duties (of repair, and not fairness) whose discharge would curtail the developed world's pursuit of local food, even if one does not think that a duty of beneficence is stringent. Second, there may be other forms of unfairness beyond those that Pogge characterizes in terms of (contributions to) harms.

¹³ For example, Øverland (2013) argues that Pogge's claim that affluent societies contribute to global poverty can best be understood as the claim that the affluent *exploit* the global poor (and not that they *harm* the global poor). One way in which one may exploit another is to benefit from unfair (but non-harmful) terms of cooperation.

Notice that current international trade rules are perfectly general: Both developed and developing societies are prohibited from placing tariffs on imports and they are both permitted to subsidize their agricultural sectors. Certainly, the generality of rules counts in favor of their fairness, but is insufficient to establish that a set of rules is fair. One reason to think that the rules are not fair is that, in practice, these (general) rules allow affluent societies to engage in significantly more protectionism than they allow developing societies to participate in. If protectionism benefits those who are protected (as we may suppose it does), then there may be reason to think that current international trade rules regarding protectionism are unfair because they fail to provide 'equal benefit' to all whose trade is governed by those rules.¹⁴ I think that this is likely true, but getting clearer about the truth of this conclusion will require some resolution to empirical questions about the benefits of protectionism, i.e. that are related to the empirical questions I discuss in the earlier sections. So, we may have reason to look for a principle of fairness that allows us to make a less empirically dependent argument about the fairness of current rules regarding protectionism.

We may find another reason to think that current international trade rules regarding protectionism are unfair by turning to the idea of the social contract. According to T.M. Scanlon's contractualism, an act is wrong if it would be disallowed by a rule which no one could reasonably reject (1998). I do not think that parties to international trade could reasonably reject a rule that prohibits drafting trade rules in ways that permit only asymmetric protectionism. Stated at this level of generality, i.e. where one does not know the details of the trade rules that would generate practices of asymmetrical protectionism, no society would have a good reason to reject this rule. If I am right, then asymmetrical permissible protectionism would be unfair (Scanlon would say it was 'wrong'). This is because asymmetrical permissible protectionism would be disallowed by a rule that no one could reasonably reject. Notice that this claim is not as sensitive to empirical claims about protectionism as is the claim that current rules regulating protectionism fail to provide 'equal benefit' to all who are governed by them. Even if current trade rules do not place developing societies at a material disadvantage, and even if it would not be in developing societies' interest to engage in forms of protectionism which are currently prohibited or unavailable, we may still conclude that the current rules are insufficiently impartial (and that the deviations from impartiality are insufficiently justified) when they would be disallowed by a rule that no one could reasonably reject.

Suppose that one (or both) of the above arguments succeeds, and that international rules regarding protectionism are unfair. It does not yet follow, from the fact that current rules regarding protectionism are unfair, that developed societies ought to end their agricultural subsidies. Consider that one way to make trade rules fairer would be for the WTO to rescind all of its prohibitions on protectionist policies. If it did so, then both the developed and the developing world would be able to protect their domestic agricultural sectors as much as they wished. Such a change would allow both developed and developing societies to benefit from

¹⁴ On the 'equal benefit' test for fairness in trade, see James (2012).

protectionism. This change may also ensure that trade rules are not disallowed by a rule (i.e. against asymmetrical permissible protectionism) that could not be reasonably rejected. But notice that such a change is unlikely to do much to constrain local food in the developed world. Instead, it would permit the developed world to engage in even greater protectionism to promote local food.

But expanding permissible protectionism (by making it more symmetrical) is not the only way to make trade rules regarding protectionism fairer. Another way to promote greater fairness in international trade rules regarding protectionism would be to prohibit all societies from subsidizing their agricultural industries. Notice that this method of making rules regarding protectionism fairer *would* have the consequence of constraining the developed world's permissible pursuit of local food, since it would prohibit agricultural subsidies. But why should we choose this goal of reform over one that promotes greater protectionism? One reason for supporting the latter option—the one that would lead to restrictions on permissible locavorism—is that doing so would likely do more to promote the goal of ADLI. (Recall that a duty of beneficence may give us good reasons to promote ADLI.) Of two options for making a set of rules more fair, the fact that one option also realizes another significant good (e.g. it promotes the ends at which beneficence aims) counts in favor of that option. Of course, we can invoke this principle to defend prohibitions on agricultural subsidies only if the empirical case in favor of ADLI succeeds (per my discussion in “[Beneficence](#)” section).

To summarize, fairness seems to count in favor of changing international rules surrounding protectionist policies in one of two ways. One option is to expand the developing world's opportunities to protect their economies. Another option is to restrict the developed world's opportunities to protect their economies. Beneficence seems to count in favor of the second option. However, restricting the developed world's opportunities to engage in protectionism may curtail (growth in) their local food practices. Here, then, fairness (along with beneficence) provides another way in which international ethics may constrain the developed world's locavorism.

Food Sovereignty

I have so far focused on the ways in which duties of international ethics may constrain the *developed* world's permissible pursuit of locavorism. I have argued that international duties of beneficence, repair, and fairness may provide stringent reasons for (members of) developed societies to act in ways that will undermine (growth in) their local food practices. Here, I turn to the topic of locavorism in developing societies and, specifically, the putative right to ‘food sovereignty’ that activists in the developing world often claim on behalf of their peoples.

At the core of food sovereignty is an idea of community control over the production of food, and a rejection of those aspects of the international food trade that have degraded local agricultural practices (Schanbacher 2010; Pimbert 2009; Rosset 2006). Given the recent history of the international food trade, it is no accident that calls for food sovereignty have emerged primarily from the developing world (see e.g. Campesina 1996, Campesina 2001; Nyéléni Food

Sovereignty Forum 2007; Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010). Members of the developing world have invoked the ideal of food sovereignty as a strategy for escaping poverty and for resisting harms from international economic institutions. It is important to note that most advocates of food sovereignty do not object to international food trade, per se, nor do they embrace food autarky. Instead, they reject some aspects of the contemporary international food trade as unfair, harmful, or insufficiently attentive to the abject poverty from which the developing world suffers. For example, the authors of the Nyéléni Declaration write that they oppose “[t]he dumping of food at prices below the cost of production in the international economy,” the “domination of our food and food producing systems by corporations,” and “[f]ood aid that ... creates new colonialism patterns” (2007, 3). La Vía Campesina has demanded that international trade agreements not force privatization of “health, education, energy distribution, water, and other basic human services” (Campesina 2001). The Tlaxcala Declaration denounces “the neo-liberal activities of the World Bank and the IMF whose structural adjustment policies continue to exact an unacceptably high price on the poor and rural people in many of our countries” (1996). There is a recurring refrain at the core of the complaints that motivate the developing world’s demands for food sovereignty: The current international institutional order is unfair and it harms the developing world. This is not a rejection of trade, but an insistence that international food trade be both fair and helpful to developing societies.

In earlier sections of this paper I argued that duties of international ethics constrain the *developed* world’s permissible pursuit of local food. Here, notice that representatives of the *developing* world invoke these same duties—of beneficence, repair, and fairness—in defense of a right to a form of locavorism. If they are right, then the same duties that count in favor of opening the developed world’s markets to the developing world’s imports will also count in favor of limiting the developed world’s access to the developing world’s markets. This should not be too surprising, since the asymmetrical position of the developed and developing worlds with respect to the demands of international ethics means that the developing world is in a position to make demands that the developed world must meet.

Consider, for example, that the developing world’s food sovereignty is sometimes thought to include a right to asymmetrical trading relationships between developed and developing societies, i.e. protectionism for developing societies, but open markets in the developed world. On this point, La Vía Campesina writes that

[s]pecial and differential rights for third world countries must be recognized, expanded, and operationalized in the world trading system. This is to take into account the weak position of third world countries in the international trading system. Without the enforcement of special and differential rights, there can be no possibility of third world countries benefiting from world trade (2001).

I argued earlier that a duty of fairness counts against asymmetrical prohibitions on protectionism that disproportionately benefit developed societies (or that would be disallowed by a rule that could not be reasonably rejected). Here, it may seem that

duties of beneficence and repair count in favor of asymmetrical protectionist policies that benefit developing societies.¹⁵ In short, some aspects of the developing world's moral claim to food sovereignty can be understood as demands for the developed world to fulfill the requirements of international ethics, even when these same duties of international ethics count against the putative right of developed societies to protect their local food practices.¹⁶

Climate Change

One may object that global climate change is a moral emergency, and that our obligation to prevent its most catastrophic consequences trumps the (other) demands of international ethics. In particular, a duty to respond to climate change may seem to trump the duties of international ethics that may constrain the developed world's permissible pursuit of local food. This is because local food is supposed to emit less CO₂ than distant food, and because we can mitigate climate change (and its harms) through a worldwide reduction of CO₂ emissions (Pollan 2007; McKibben 2008). This objection need not deny that international duties of beneficence, repair and fairness provide reasons to constrain the permissible pursuit of local food within developed societies. It asserts only that these duties of international ethics are defeated by a moral imperative to prevent the worst outcomes of global climate change, and that this moral imperative requires us to pursue local food practices within all societies.

I have two critical responses to this objection. First, it is committed to a questionable factual claim, since distant food may sometimes emit less CO₂ than local food (Saunders and Barber 2006; Weber and Matthews 2008). For example, when hundreds of persons drive their own vehicles twenty miles to a local farm, they may generate more CO₂ than is generated when large container ships transport produce from hundreds of miles away. Similarly, a farmer in the global north who uses fossil fuels to heat his greenhouse may emit more CO₂ than is emitted when sun-ripened foods are shipped from the global south. Second, this objection is committed to an objectionable ethical claim. Implicit in the objection is the idea that responsibility for addressing climate change ought to be shared equally between developing and developed societies. But this is unfair. First, developing societies need to be able to maintain (and increase) their emissions if they are to have any chance of escaping severe poverty (Shue 1993). In contrast, developed societies will be able to maintain a relatively high quality of life for their members, even if they make dramatic cuts to their emissions. Second, developed societies have caused climate change; they have emitted the vast majority of excess environmental CO₂. Therefore, if one follows a 'polluter pays' model of responsibility for climate

¹⁵ For further argument in favor of 'better than fair' terms of trade for developing societies see Stiglitz and Charlton (2006).

¹⁶ For example, consider the efforts made by local communities within the states of Vermont and Maine to demand food sovereignty (<http://vermontfoodsovereignty.net/>; <http://www.farmfoodfreedom.org/updates/maine-town-declares-food-sovereignty>). Similar efforts have been made in some European countries (<http://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1825>; <http://foodsovereigntynow.org.uk/>).

change costs, very few of the costs should fall upon the poorest developing societies (Caney 2006; Shue 1999). The same conclusion follows if one endorses a model of 'beneficiary of pollution pays', since today's developed societies have received most of the benefits of the CO₂ emissions caused by previous generations.

Individual Responsibilities and Institutional Failure

I have focused my discussion on the ways in which duties of international ethics may constrain developed societies' permissible promotion of local food practices. I have assumed that duties of international ethics apply most directly to societies, considered as collective moral agents (see e.g. Rawls (1999a)). This is not an uncontroversial assumption and there are reasons for thinking that other moral agents, for example, global institutions, are also bound directly by duties of international ethics (see, e.g. Cohen and Sabel (2006)). However, I think that many of my arguments still go through, even if societies are not the only (or primary) moral agents bound by duties of international ethics. Unfortunately, I lack the space to pursue these thoughts further in this paper. Instead, I want to address a different question about the agents of international moral responsibility: Should duties of international ethics directly constrain the behavior of individual members of developed societies, when their public institutions are not appropriately responsive to the demands of these duties? I assume that developed societies are not (yet) fulfilling the demands of international beneficence, fairness, and repair. Accordingly, this question has practical upshot for the members of today's developed societies.

First, consider a duty of international beneficence. It is in the nature of this duty that it applies to moral agents without regard to their institutional entanglements or historical relationships. Accordingly, I think it is reasonable to believe that individual members of developed societies have a duty of beneficence to promote the ADLI of developing societies, that is, whenever their societies' institutions fail to discharge this duty on their behalf.¹⁷ For example, a duty of international beneficence provides a moral reason for individuals to purchase imported food products when they have good reason for believing that doing so will contribute to the alleviation of severe poverty within developing societies. Of course, how much an international duty of beneficence constrains individual participation in locavorism depends both upon empirical evidence and the stringency of beneficence, i.e. the issues I discuss in "Beneficence" section.

In contrast, it is not so clear how to characterize individual responsibility for international repair and fairness, under conditions of institutional moral failure. Consider that a duty of international fairness demands that relationships between societies be governed by norms of impartiality. However, individuals and associations cannot unilaterally renegotiate international trade agreements or rewrite the rules that govern global institutions. Furthermore, individual members

¹⁷ Here, I need not take a side on the issue of whether beneficence ever requires one to do more than her fair share. Even if it does, questions about the further stringency of beneficence remain unanswered.

of developed societies are also unable to approximate the results of international fairness through their personal choices.¹⁸ (They also lack the ability to approximate the results of international repair through their personal choices.) Instead, individual members of developed societies have a duty to promote reforms to their societies' public institutions, so that those institutions will better fulfill the demands of international fairness. And, a duty to promote just institutions may require citizens to sacrifice their time and money, but it need not directly constrain their engagement with especially valued pursuits, like local food (see e.g. Rawls 1999b, 96–100). That is, even though duties of international repair and fairness may constrain a *society's* permissible pursuit of local food projects, these duties may not directly constrain *individuals'* permissible pursuit of local food, though they may provide reasons for individuals to promote just institutions within their society.

Looking Forward: A Hybrid Food Economy

Locavorism promotes many values and it represents an important alternative to the developed world's contemporary food practices. Accordingly, we may hope that international ethics does not require developed societies to do too much to constrain their pursuit of local food. For example, we may hope that one consequence of the developed world's prioritization of the developing world's food imports—and the removal of its agricultural subsidies—would be the decreased prominence of domestic factory farms and large-scale agribusinesses, along with the continued viability of small-scale local food producers. One means by which to realize this hope would be for developed societies to introduce legal prohibitions on the environmentally destructive and otherwise unsustainable farming methods in which today's industrial agribusinesses often engage. Our hope, then, will be in the reasonable possibility of a hybrid food economy—a mixture of local food and food imported from the world's poorest societies. Moving to this kind of food economy may both undermine the power of the developed world's corporate agricultural interests and promote the ADLI of the world's poorest societies. Even the most fervent advocates of local food should admit that this world would be a significant improvement over our own.

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¹⁸ Consider the following passage from John Rawls's *Political Liberalism*: "Individuals and associations cannot comprehend the ramifications of their particular actions viewed collectively, nor can they be expected to foresee future circumstances that shape and transform present tendencies" (Rawls 1993, 268). See also, Thomas Pogge, from *Freedom from Poverty as Human Right*: "[T]he effects of my economic decision intermingle with the effects of billions of decisions made by others, and it is impossible to try to disentangle, even *ex post*, the impact of my decision from this vast traffic by trying to figure out how things would have gone had I acted differently" (Pogge 2007, 17, emphasis in original).

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