

# Chapter 11

## Justifying Aid: Reconstructing and Assessing Political Justifications for Development Aid Spending in Contemporary British Public Discourse

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### Abstract

Foreign aid generates furious public discussion. Significant amounts of British public money are spent on aid, and citizens rightly want to know why. Unfortunately, the public discourse surrounding the justification of aid spending is shrouded in foggy ideas and cloudy arguments. I contend that this has been the case for a considerable time, and demonstrate that both a moral and rational argument for aid can be reconstructed for aid spending from existing discussions. Having given what I consider to be the strongest articulations of these arguments drawn from discourse, I suggest that both arguments have considerable flaws and suggest ways in which politicians could engage on the subject to help keep the fog at bay.

### 1 Introduction

The British Government spent 0.7% of GNP on aid this year<sup>1</sup>, and people want to know why. This question creates furious public discourse between presidents, politicians and the press alike. Whilst it has been raised since the dawn of aid, the answers to it are often short and incomplete. At the 2010 British General Election, the Liberal Democrat Party's manifesto argued the following in favour of aid:

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Tran, "George Osborne declares 'historic moment' on UK aid target," *The Guardian*, March 20, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/mar/20/george-osborne-historic-moment-aid>.

We believe in freedom, justice, prosperity and human rights for all and will do all we can to work towards a world where these hopes become reality.<sup>2</sup>

This is simply too ambiguous to mean anything substantive. Would a politician ever claim that they are against freedom, justice or prosperity? Depending upon interpretation, these ideals could support arguments both in favour of and against aid spending. Speaking at the United Nations, David Cameron said that:

[... ]It is not only a moral obligation that the better-off countries have to tackle poverty in our world when we still have over a billion people living on less than a dollar a day, but it's also in our interests.<sup>3</sup>

Cameron claims that both moral and rational reasons justify aid spending, but this leaves many questions behind. According to what idea of morality is aid a 'moral obligation'? How exactly is aid in 'our interests'? In an attempt to lift some fog from this debate, I use the tools of Analytical Discourse Evaluation to reconstruct, elucidate and evaluate the arguments for aid.

Discourse was collected from contemporary British public discourse concerning aid spending. British parliamentary debates from the present coalition's time in office form the most significant part of the discourse selected. In addition, relevant government speeches, press articles, party manifestoes and policy papers have all been included as part of the discourse where appropriate. Much of the British Parliamentary debate in recent years has focused on the reforms and arguments presented by former International Development Secretary of State Andrew Mitchell MP, and the arguments presented here feature in some way in his debates and papers.

Whilst many different lines of reasoning can be found in political discourse to support aid, I reconstruct two core arguments. The first argument is a moral argument using compassionate priority as a theory of social justice, and the second is a rational argument based on the concept of national self-interest. A quantitative analysis of around four hundred categorised text fragments revealed these two to be the most commonly used arguments in support of aid.

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2 Liberal Democrats, *Your World, Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2010* (London: Liberal Democrats, 2010), 57.

3 BBC News, "David Cameron reaffirms UK aid pledge at United Nations," *BBC*, September 26, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-19709321>.

A successful argument for aid must demonstrate the reasons for giving aid and explain why the state is the appropriate institution for putting those ideas into practice. I critique the arguments based on their ability to make these cases convincingly. Ultimately, I contend that both of the arguments have significant flaws, and for each suggest ways in which the public discourse should engage on this subject.

Some contemporary political voices suggest that the idea of a rational justification for aid is a new idea, or one which has not permeated deeply into political discourse. For example, a recent publication by Andrew Mitchell MP claims that:

Britain's international development policies are not about soft-hearted altruism. They are a clear and hard-headed approach to our own security and prosperity. But they are also morally right.<sup>4</sup>

However, aid argumentation is interesting in that, perhaps unlike other areas, similar arguments are found in very different contexts. It should perhaps be no surprise that both rational and moral reasons have been offered for giving aid. They are, after all, the only two types of justification for doing anything.<sup>5</sup> Sifting through Data revealed that neither rational nor moral justifications for aid are new ideas, or are confined to British public discourse, or that of a single political orientation. In 1961 Lord Craigmyle contended that:

We have a duty towards underdeveloped countries in terms of justice, because justice demands that the goods of the world should be available for all God's people; we have a duty to the underdeveloped countries in terms of charity, because we who enjoy life in an affluent society cannot in charity shut up our bowels of compassion from the people who live at or below a starvation level; and we have a duty to the underdeveloped countries in terms of prudence[...], because the appalling disparity between our standard of living and the standards in (sic) the underdeveloped countries provokes just those thoughts which lead to hatred and to war.<sup>6</sup>

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4 Andrew Mitchell MP, *A Safer and More Prosperous World: Why Aid Really Matters in an Age of Austerity* (London: Legatum Institute, 2013), 5.

5 Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

6 Lord Craigmyle, "Aid for Underdeveloped Countries, House of Lords of the United Kingdom," *Hansard Debate*, February 22, 1961, vol 228, col. 1077.

In both the Labour<sup>7</sup> and Conservative Party<sup>8</sup> manifestoes of the 2010 election, the sections about aid combine arguments from self-interest and global justice. In The Netherlands, the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA) contends that:

The fair distribution of knowledge, power and incomes forms the core of social democracy. The Netherlands also benefits from development aid. Investing in worldwide stability, safety and economic growth is good for trade, employment, and the Dutch economy.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the fact that similar arguments are used by politicians to justify aid across political groups, time and distance, the public controversiality of aid has been especially pronounced in the political context of fiscal austerity and financial crisis. The fact that the same government which proudly announces reductions in public spending<sup>10</sup> is significantly increasing aid spending<sup>11</sup> raises significant questions.

An argument must be carefully fashioned to justify simultaneously domestic welfare cuts and significant increases in development aid spending. Simply appealing to equality will not do. Some politicians speak of equality as the key ideal, but such a conception of justice could not also justify welfare cuts. It is also not immediately obvious why it would be rational to reduce the overall budget but increase the share of that budget spent on aid. These questions present puzzles at the heart of contemporary political discourse. The proceeding sections aim is to expose the nature of these puzzles and help develop solutions to them.

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7 The Labour Party, "The global poverty emergency: our moral duty, our common interest," *The Labour Party Manifesto 2010* (London: The Labour Party, 2010), 10.6.

8 The Conservative Party, *An Invitation to Join the Government of Great Britain: One World Conservatism* (London: The Conservative Party, 2010), 117-118.

9 PvdA, *Standpunten Ontwikkelingssamenwerking* (PvdA Website), Standpunten section ("Het eerlijk delen van kennis, macht en inkomen vormt de kern van de sociaaldemocratie. En Nederland heeft ook zelf baat bij ontwikkelingssamenwerking. Investeren in wereldwijde stabiliteit, veiligheid, en economische groei is goed voor de Nederlandse economie, handel en werkgelegenheid") (Translation mine).

10 Nicholas Watt, "George Osborne unveils tough benefits curbs in £11.5bn spending cuts package," *The Guardian*, June 26, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/jun/26/george-osborne-benefits-spending-review-cuts>.

11 Tran, "George Osborne".

## 2 Reconstructing the Moral Argument: Compassionate Priority

Allusions to a wide range of moral arguments are offered in political discourse, almost all of which concern some principle of social justice. When thinking about aid, perhaps the first idea that comes to mind is inequality. However, a government seeking to reduce spending on welfare cannot appeal to equality as a distributive ideal on pain of contradiction. In the discourse analysed, two ideas were often alluded to as moral ideals which could show strong concern for the absolutely poor, but not necessarily the relatively poor. These ideas are the principles of sufficiency and priority, and have been discussed in philosophical literatures by, among others, Frankfurt<sup>12</sup> and Raz<sup>13</sup> respectively.

The first popular moral ideal, sufficiency, suggests that there is some level at which an individual has 'enough', and that states have a collective responsibility to guarantee that to citizens as a human right. This conception of social justice suffers from a considerable number of problems in defining exactly what 'enough' constitutes, as well as in establishing a delicate and questionable view of international relations and the responsibilities of states to each other. Due to these problems, this argument is not discussed any further here given the quality constraint involved in Analytical Discourse Evaluation. However, these considerations will play a role later in this section.

The second popular moral argument, which is the focus of this section, instead concentrates on the desperate condition of the poor, the homeless, the sick and those without education. At the heart of the argument is the idea that those in a highly concerning condition of poverty should be given special priority in receiving resources in order to reduce their burden. For these reasons I have called this argument the 'Compassionate Priority' argument.

A recent policy pamphlet seeking to justify aid spending written by former Secretary of State for International Development Andrew Mitchell and economist Paul Collier claims that:

Britain's finest traditions demand that we respond compassionately to the tragedy of persistent and acute poverty in the midst of global prosperity.<sup>14</sup>

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12 Harry Frankfurt, *Equality as a Moral Ideal in Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

13 Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

14 Paul Collier and Andrew Mitchell MP, *A Safer and More Prosperous World: Why Aid Really Matters in an Age of Austerity* (London: Legatum Institute, 2013), 24.

This runs closely to Collier's argument for controlling world food prices; that the effects of mismanagement of global resources on individuals' livelihoods will be so alarming that something must be done about it.<sup>15</sup> This line of reasoning has been used in aid debates for some time. Lord Lucan commented in a House of Lords debate that:

There is [...] a moral argument: that the consciences of those in the prosperous countries cannot be clear unless they are doing all that they can to relieve the misery in which all these millions of our fellow human beings are living.<sup>16</sup>

These excerpts follow closely the ideas of Raz<sup>17</sup> and who argues for a priority based conception of social justice.

### The Basic Argument

The fundamental idea in the argument is that the suffering of those in poverty is so alarming that we cannot help but be moved by compassion to help alleviate their condition. In order to help, those in poverty should be given priority in receiving material resources. The more a person suffers, the stronger priority they have in getting these resources. This is described here as 'compassionate priority' since it is not a general theory of justice based on priority; the idea is not that the worst off in any society at any time should be given resources, but rather that only those cases where the desire to give to an individual or group is motivated by compassion; an emotion experienced by a better off party felt about a worse off party.

Whereas a general 'priority to the worst off' conception of justice might apply across political boundaries, a crucial difference is that in the context of aid debates, compassionate priority refers to the poor in poor countries; compassion is not provoked towards the poor in wealthier states. These thoughts can be formulated into a central argumentative fragment thus:

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15 Paul Collier, *The Plundered Planet: Why We Must-and How We Can-Manage Nature for Global Prosperity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

16 Lord Lucan, "Aid for Underdeveloped Countries, House of Lords of the United Kingdom," *Hansard Debate*, February 22, 1961, vol 228, col. 1018.

17 Raz, *Morality*.

[Data]	Compassionate priority of resources should be given to those in poverty.
[Warrant]	If compassionate priority of resources should be given to those in poverty, then aid should be given to poor countries.
[Claim]	Aid should be given to poor countries.

As with the sufficiency argument, the Data requires Backing which further details the principles of distributive justice at work, and the Warrant should explain the role of the state in giving aid and fulfilling those principles of justice. The Data of the Backing is considered first.

### Backing the Data: Principles of Compassionate Priority

Whereas sufficiency is merely concerned with who is or is not above the poverty line, priority adds more detail to the picture, treating justice as continuous rather than categorical. It is therefore important how much someone is impoverished as to how strongly they are prioritised. On this argument, this is because they are in a condition which is considered to warrant compassion. Such conditions include hunger, sickness and financial desperation. It is clear that these conditions can be experienced to various extents; whilst I am often hungry, my hunger is not nearly as intense as someone in a famine in a developing country. Crucially, such conditions diminish when cared for; my hunger diminishes with the consumption of food.

This forms the basis for Raz's view of distributive justice. He describes it as a 'diminishing principle'; the more intensely someone is in need of something, the stronger their priority is in receiving resources.<sup>18</sup> As Raz puts it:

What makes us care about various inequalities is not the inequality but the underlying principle. It is the hunger of the hungry, the need of the needy, the suffering of the ill, and so on. [...] Its relevance is in showing that their hunger is greater, their need more pressing, their suffering more hurtful, and therefore our concern for the hungry, the needy, the suffering not our concern for equality is what makes us give them priority.<sup>19</sup>

There are, however, many diminishing principles to which compassionate priority does not apply. Those conditions which are diminishing but insatiable are irrelevant. For instance, happiness is not satiable; someone can always have more pleasure, and so

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 240.

pleasure does not apply. Furthermore, only those needs which provoke compassion by being particularly concerning are of relevance. The condition of poverty as it is used in most aid debates reduces in large part to the issues identified by Raz; hunger, sickness and financial need.

Putting these together, the conception of priority which best fits the discourse is one which applies to conditions which are concerning, satiable and diminishing. This can be put into the Toulmin structure as follows:

[Data\Data]	Compassionate priority applies to concerning satiable diminishing conditions.
[Data\Warrant]	If compassionate priority applies to concerning satiable diminishing conditions, then compassionate priority of resources should be given to those in poverty.
[Data\Claim]	Compassionate priority of resources should be given to those in poverty.

The final link to establish is to say that poverty is indeed such a condition. Esther McVey claimed in the Global Poverty Debate that poverty is:

[...] about not being able to go to school to learn and make friends, about being sick but not having a doctor and about living in fear. Most of all, poverty is about living with no hope and dying with no one caring. According to UNICEF, 24,000 children die that way each day, and 10.6 million children die before the age of five [...]. I believe in the goodness of human beings and the thread of humanity that touches the core of every one of us. It is here in this Chamber, on all sides of the House[...] All of us come here with the desire to help others[...].<sup>20</sup>

McVey clearly views poverty as diminishing, satiable and concerning in the context of an argument which runs on the lines of compassion. This can be used to form the Backing to the Data\Warrant:

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<sup>20</sup> Esther McVey MP, "Global Poverty: House of Commons of the United Kingdom," *Hansard Debate*, July 1, 2010, col. 1049.

[Data\Warrant\Data]	Poverty is a concerning satiable diminishing condition.
[Data\Warrant\Warrant]	If poverty is a concerning satiable diminishing condition, then if compassionate priority applies to concerning satiable diminishing conditions, then compassionate priority of resources should be given to those in poverty.
[Data\Warrant\Claim]	If compassionate priority applies to concerning satiable diminishing conditions, then compassionate priority of resources should be given to those in poverty.

This completes the reconstruction of the compassionate priority argument's conception of social justice.

### The Role of the State

To justify aid fully, the idea of compassionate priority must be coupled with a conception of the state's role in global justice. What exactly justifies the Warrant that 'if compassionate priority of resources should be given to those in poverty, then aid should be given to poor countries'? Mitchell writes that:

[...]even at a time of economic hardship for many families in Britain, we have refused to balance the books on the back of the world's poor. This is in our best traditions. Britain has a proud history of going to the assistance of those who are suffering [...].<sup>21</sup>

States are seen as having a responsibility to act out of their compassion for those in poverty. In a similar sentiment, Anas Sarwar MP discusses this in relation to other states and international relations:

The failure of France, Germany and particularly Italy to deliver on the commitments that they made at Gleneagles represents an unforgivable betrayal of the world's poorest people, because, in the words of the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, "we cannot balance budgets on the backs of the world's poorest people. We cannot abandon our commitment to the most vulnerable." For international development to be effective, it has to be a truly global effort on behalf of all developed nations. The Government must

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<sup>21</sup> Collier and Mitchell, *Prosperous World*, 5.

therefore do more to ensure that the future of the world's poorest remains high not only on their agenda but on the agendas of other members of the international community.<sup>22</sup>

In both cases, the idea is that in government budgeting, the state should act morally in its capacity as a resource allocator. The state is the only institution which can forcibly correct the injustices according to compassion through fiscal policy. This can form Data to the root Warrant:

- [Warrant\Data]        If compassionate priority of resources should be given to those in poverty, then the state should allocate resources out of compassionate priority.
- [Warrant\Warrant]    If the state should allocate resources out of compassionate priority, then aid should be given to poor countries.
- [Warrant\Claim]        If compassionate priority of resources should be given to those in poverty, then aid should be given to poor countries.

This gives a reason as to why the state should be involved in matters of social justice by giving aid, but does not fully explain why aid should go only to poor countries. After all, there are poor people all over the world. An explanation for this could be found in what Mitchell argued to the House of Commons:

We have already announced that we will end aid to China and Russia as soon as it is practical to do so. [...] We cannot justify giving taxpayers' hard-earned money to a country that has just spent billions hosting the Olympics or is a member of the G8.<sup>23</sup>

On an argument focusing on compassion as the key motivator, the solution is to say that the national socioeconomic context of a person's poverty matters; poverty in wealthier countries does not evoke the same compassion in comparison to poorer countries. That is, there is something special about the overall wealth of the society in which someone lives which affects the level of concern Britain has for them, such that only poverty in poor countries evokes compassion. This can support the Warrant:

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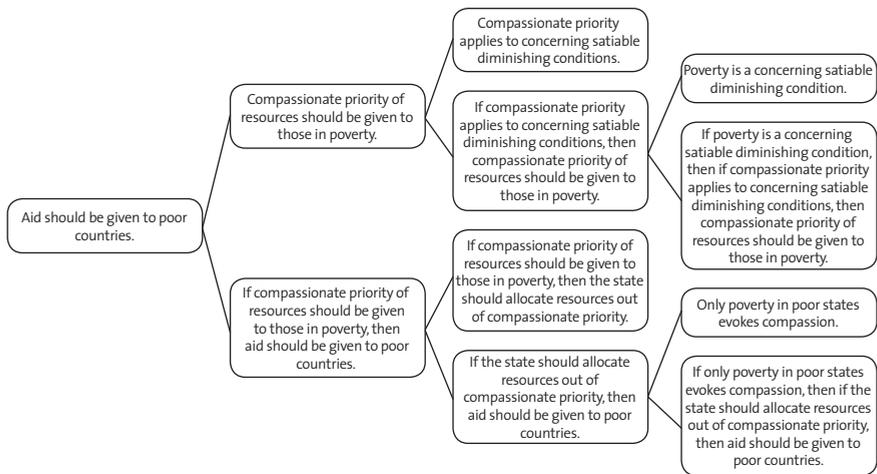
22 Anas Sarwar MP, "Global Poverty: House of Commons of the United Kingdom," *Hansard Debate*, July 1, 2010, col. 1068.

23 Andrew Mitchell MP, "Global Poverty: House of Commons of the United Kingdom," *Hansard Debate*, July 1, 2010, col. 1026.

[Warrant\Warrant\Data]	Only poverty in poor states evokes compassion.
[Warrant\Warrant\Warrant]	If only poverty in poor states evokes compassion, then if the state should allocate resources out of compassionate priority, then aid should be given to poor countries.
[Warrant\Warrant\Claim]	If the state should allocate resources out of compassionate priority, then aid should be given to poor countries.

This completes the reconstruction of the argument on principles of both compassionate priority and the state's role.

Figure 11.1 The Compassionate Priority Argument



### 3 Evaluating the Moral Argument

Compared to the sufficiency argument, the compassionate priority argument has a number of significant advantages. Firstly, by allowing priority to diminish in tandem with the conditions which provoke compassion, there is no debate as to who under the poverty line receives resources. Resources are allocated to those who need them the most. This seems more appealing than trying to specify what it means to have enough.

Secondly, by using compassion rather than a system of rights, problems of development cannot all be blamed on a failed state. With compassion, the priority is not merely directed towards helping states secure rights, but rather to do whatever necessary to alleviate

misery, be it with other governments or other institutions. Thirdly, it is not necessary to specify what responsibilities states have towards each other; what is morally right for a state to do merely concerns the compassion a state feels and what it does about it. However, the argument raises a number of questions might be of concern.

### **Is Compassion Really the Principle?**

The compassion argument avoids specifying what each person should have a right to by focusing on the feeling of compassion held by the British as a guide to where resources should be allocated. Whilst this could be seen as advantageous in comparison to the sufficiency argument, it doesn't seem entirely satisfactory either. Why should distributive justice depend on the feelings of the British? If there is a downturn in the British economy or a major national sports game defeat, then the feelings of compassion felt by the British might diminish. This conception would suggest that as a result, the morally appropriate action is to reduce aid spending. If compassionate priority is the moral principle of distributive justice, then it seems ultimately highly arbitrary. Where the rights-based list making of sufficiency may seem too strict to be practical, the emotion-driven distribution of compassion seems too slack to be just.

### **Whose Compassion is it Anyway?**

If compassion is the right moral principle, and it is indeed essentially an emotive feeling towards the poor, then to whom does this emotion belong? Is it a 'general will' of British popular sentiment? If that is the case, then why should aid be given at all? Surely this would be much better reflected if British aid money were simply donated by British individuals. That would, seemingly, be a more moral outcome, more accurately reflecting compassion. If it isn't the general will of the population, then is it perhaps the feelings of elected representatives, or of the government, or of the development minister?

It seems difficult to specify who or what gives the definition and measurement of compassion. The variable of compassion will need to be operationalized more clearly in order to make the argument work effectively. Crisp suggests that operationalizing compassion could come from an objective understanding of what is meant by compassion.<sup>24</sup> Whilst his position may prove effective for the development of the argument, it could be extremely difficult to argue for in political discourse, and even harder to implement as policy. A deep public discussion might be helpful.

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24 Roger Crisp, *Equality, Priority, and Compassion in Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

## Sufficiency in Disguise?

If the variable of compassion must be operationalized, it will need to be broken down into something more systematic. This has been at the heart of recent reforms in British aid bureaucracy: there has been a push towards making aid more accountable and better structured.<sup>25</sup> This will most likely involve making a list of social issues that are seen as unacceptable and to which resources should be prioritised. But if this is the case, then the government seems to be well on the way to specifying a theory of what it means to have enough. Priority could therefore be seen as a theory of sufficiency in disguise.

Whilst priority is given to those who are worst off, there is a point at which someone's troubles have been reduced sufficiently to take them off the compassionate priority list altogether. That point is, as Crisp argues, a sufficiency threshold.<sup>26</sup> If that is the case, then all of the sufficiency problems from the sufficiency argument ultimately come flooding into the compassion argument.

## Why does Geopolitics Matter?

Lastly there is the problem of methodological territorialism. On the grounds of priority, compassion seems to apply to any human individual based on their need. So why is it that justifications of aid are often combined with a strong form of methodological territorialism? It would be a contradiction to say that regardless of where they are, anyone in desperate need should receive priority of resources, but that this only applies to poor people in poor countries. So why is it that aid should only go to poor countries?

At this point, it seems that the compassionate-prioritarian is forced into saying that only poverty in poor countries evokes compassion. But is this true? Does it really matter if a person is poor in India or China rather than Burundi? Should that really affect whether they are given aid? What is special about being poor in a poor country that increases your position on the compassionate priority list? One possible response is that those who are in poor countries are especially vulnerable due to structural insecurities in their societies. Aid discourse based on compassion could benefit from further consideration of these difficult ideas. The idea of methodological territorialism seems to resonate more with a self-interest argument, where good relationships with foreign governments can be taken into account as benefits of aid.

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25 Collier and Mitchell, *Prosperous World*.

26 Roger Crisp, *Equality, Priority, and Compassion in Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

## 4 Reconstructing the Rational Argument: Self-interest

The second Claim made by David Cameron in the quotation at the beginning of this article is that Britain should give development aid because it is rational to do so. MP Damian Hinds claimed that:

The moral and altruistic argument for aid is strong, but as politicians we can, and must, do better than hitherto in explaining to, and convincing, people why aid can also be in our own interests[...].<sup>27</sup>

In order to succeed, this argument must demonstrate how aid spending is rational, and what it is about rationality that warrants the state's spending of aid.

### The Basic Argument

The central Claim about aid spending is defended by reference to national self-interest, and can be put into a Toulmin structure thus:

[Data]	Giving aid is in our self-interest.
[Warrant]	If giving aid is in our self-interest, then public finances should be spent on aid.
[Claim]	Public finances should be spent on aid.

The Backing to the Data must explain the theoretical justification of how aid is in Britain's interest, and the Backing to the Warrant must explain the link between rational choice and policy making; the role of the state. The Data is addressed first, followed by the Warrant.

### How is Aid in our Self-interest?

The Backing to the self-interest argument concerns costs and benefits. As Damian Hinds continues:

A larger world gross domestic product benefits not just newly developing countries, but the entire world economy, through bigger markets, specialisation and trade. It ensures that the world's scarce resources, including human resources, are put to better use, and through the promotion of stability in otherwise volatile parts of the world, it

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<sup>27</sup> Damian Hinds MP, "Global Poverty: House of Commons of the United Kingdom," *Hansard Debate*, July 1, 2010, col. 1083.

contributes to our security. Furthermore, there are benefits in terms of climate change, economic migration and so on, and often direct benefit can be had from strategic bilateral relationships, which of course are competitive exercises between countries.<sup>28</sup>

Here, Hinds lists a number of ways in which aid is beneficial. The implied idea is that if the benefits are greater than the costs, then aid is in the national interest. This applies not only to costs and benefits that are incurred immediately, but costs that can be avoided in the future by taking action now, as Mitchell argues:

[...]tackling poverty throughout the world is also very much in our national interest. Whether the issue is drug-resistant diseases, economic stability, conflict and insecurity, climate change or migration, it is far more effective to tackle the root cause now than to treat the symptoms later.<sup>29</sup>

Whether they occur in the short or the long run, the calculation argued for relates to the accounting costs and benefits. This can support the Data thus:

[Data\Data]	The accounting benefits of aid outweigh the costs.
[Data\Warrant]	If the accounting benefits of aid outweigh the costs, then aid is in our self-interest.
[Data\Claim]	Aid is in our self-interest.

## Linking Rationality to Policy

This raises the question of why exactly the state should execute a policy if the costs are outweighed by the benefits. An answer to this requires a conception of the state's role within society. Whilst political discourse is not entirely clear on this issue, there are two plausible answers which can be identified. The first conceives of national spending on utilitarian grounds, and the second conceives of it on democratic grounds.

## The Utilitarian Warrant

The first answer is simply to argue that the primary responsibility of the state is to bring about the greatest happiness for the greatest number of citizens through its budgeting.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Mitchell, "Global Poverty," col. 1022.

This is close to the sentiment underlying Rebecca Harris MP's speech to the House of Commons:

I am sure that I am not alone in this House in being asked by constituents some searching questions about the Government's commitment to ring-fence the foreign aid budget. [...] Every pound of taxpayer's money that we deliver in aid must provide the most value possible and be distributed through a system that is completely transparent.<sup>30</sup>

On this conception, the state should therefore pursue the national interest by maximising 'national utility'; avoiding costs and increasing benefits. This idea finds resonance with Bentham's political theory. According to Driver, Bentham:

[...] promulgated the principle of utility as the standard of right action on the part of governments and individuals. Actions are approved when they are such as to promote happiness, or pleasure, and disapproved of when they have a tendency to cause unhappiness, or pain.<sup>31</sup>

This can be taken as a constitutional value requiring no further Backing:

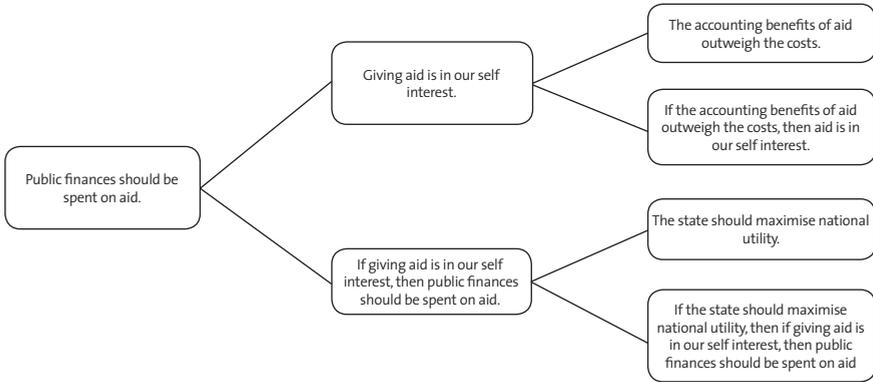
[Warrant\Data]	The state should maximise national utility.
[Warrant\Warrant]	If the state should maximise national utility, then if giving aid is in our self-interest, then public finances should be spent on aid.
[Warrant\Claim]	If giving aid is in our self-interest, then public finances should be spent on aid.

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30 Rebecca Harris MP, "Global Poverty: House of Commons of the United Kingdom," *Hansard Debate*, July 1, 2010, col. 1070.

31 Mitchell, "Global Poverty," col. 1025.

Figure 11.2 The Self-interest Argument: Utilitarian Warrant



Prima facie, the foregoing may seem obvious. One might suppose that the role of the state is to ensure the best for its citizens in any case. However, one could also see democracy as the ultimate value here. The government should maximise social utility because citizens want them to do so. It seems to be this line of reasoning which leads some politicians to suggest that it is the will of the public that justifies self-seeking aid.

### The Democratic Warrant

The state is not primarily subservient to some utilitarian ideal, but instead subservient to its citizens and their constitution. It can be argued that the majority of citizens are in favour of doing what is in the state's interest. This is the idea that if aid is in the national interest, then citizens simply must be in favour of aid. Mitchell points out that without public support, aid is unsustainable:

I suggest to the House that we will not be able to maintain public support for Britain's vital development budget unless we can demonstrate to the public's satisfaction that this money is really well spent.<sup>32</sup>

This idea suggests that democratic consent is important for justifying aid, and that communicating the self-interest justification of aid to the electorate is important. It can be used to back the Warrant as follows:

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., col. 1025.

[Warrant\Data]	If giving aid is in our self-interest, then the majority are in favour of giving aid.
[Warrant\Warrant]	If the majority are in favour of giving aid, then public finances should be spent on aid.
[Warrant\Claim]	If giving aid is in our self-interest, then public finances should be spent on aid.

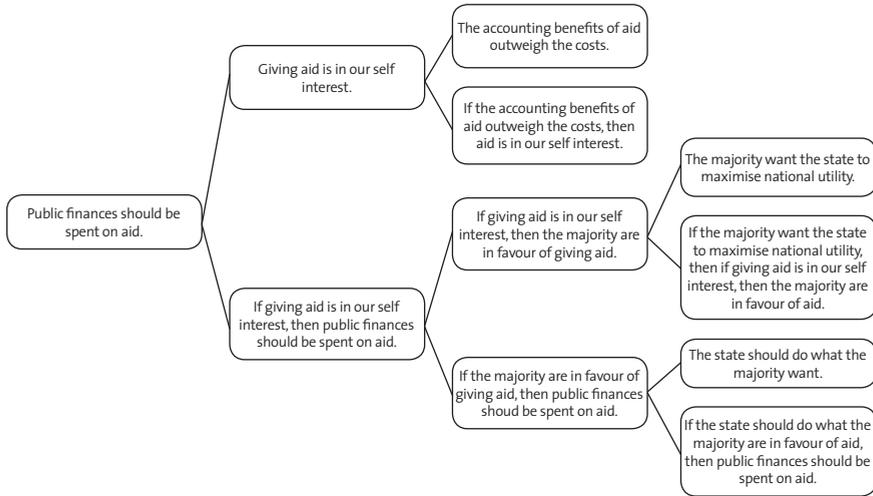
There are two aspects to this sub-argument. One concerns the role of the state and the other concerns the will of the majority. A conception of the state's role must justify the idea that if the majority are in favour of aid, then public finances should be spent on aid. The Backing to this must be that the state should do as the majority please:

[Warrant\Warrant\Data]	The state should do what the majority want.
[Warrant\Warrant\Warrant]	If the state should do what the majority want, then if the majority are in favour of aid, then public finances should be spent on aid.
[Warrant\Warrant\Claim]	If the majority want the state to maximise national utility, then public finances should be spent on aid.

The second aspect to this sub-argument is explaining what the majority want. The Claim has been made that 'If giving aid is in our self-interest, then the majority are in favour of aid'. The enthymematic premise is that the majority are in favour of anything that is in the national interest. The national interest has been defined by the argument in utilitarian terms. It is about costs and benefits. This resonates strongly with comments in aid debates about taxpayers' money. Taxpayers want value for money, and are therefore, it is assumed, in favour of whatever maximises national utility. The majority of citizens are thus taken to support the maximisation of national utility:

[Warrant\Data\Data]	The majority want the state to maximise national utility.
[Warrant\Data\Warrant]	If the majority want the state to maximise national utility, then if giving aid is in our self-interest, then the majority are in favour of aid.
[Warrant\Data\Claim]	If giving aid is in our self-interest, then the majority are in favour of giving aid.

Figure 11.3 The Rational Argument: Self-interest – Democratic Warrant



## 5 Evaluating the Rational Argument

The self-interest argument takes a view of self-interest as rationality based on cost-benefit analysis. In addition, it justifies the role of the state in giving aid by appeal to either democracy or utility. The utilitarian Warrant assumes that the state is constitutionally utilitarian, whereas the democratic justification assumes that the majority of citizens are in favour of the aid since it is in the national interest, and that the state should do what the majority want.

The rational argument has some advantages over the moral arguments. It leads much more naturally to a development framework based on countries as the primary unit of aid organisation, since different relationships with different types of economy, society and state will clearly be more beneficial than a blanket approach to foreign policy -spending based on some distributive value. Furthermore, it may appeal to the taxpayers who ultimately fund aid more than arguments about morality, since there is an explicitly stated gain on their behalf. However, there are many questions to be raised over the argument's Claims.

## How Do You Know?

In claiming that the benefits of aid outweigh the costs, a minister or politician should be able to detail the costs to the aid budget and the benefits gained from it. One problem is that the benefits gained are often the result of the avoidance of potential social problems that could occur if poverty is not eliminated. These are hard to test empirically and present persuasive Data about.

Furthermore, the benefits gained in global macroeconomic stability and security are often only gained and seen in the long run, and are therefore even harder to implement over time when elections and changes in government take place frequently in the shorter and medium terms. Making claims about the avoided costs and long run benefits must involve some method of prediction about social issues which are in many ways difficult to predict. How can a politician possibly know that the benefits outweigh the costs of aid if the benefits are difficult to predict?

If there is a lesson to be learned from this, it is that measurement of aid impact matters, and that for the argument to gain stronger foundations, it would be worthwhile looking at investing in the right apparatus and institutions to make the best possible measurements for assessing the impact of aid.

## The Best Deal?

Even if the benefits do outweigh the costs of aid, this is not necessarily an argument for it being rational. Rational choice theory does concern costs and benefits, but the self-interest argument only concerns accounting costs. Since this argument refers to the utility gained by an entire economy, it makes more sense to look at the economic costs. These are the accounting costs plus the opportunity cost.

The opportunity cost of aid is rarely debated in discourse, but is highly analytically significant. On this account, aid must not only have more benefits than costs, but must also be the best deal; there must be no other policy which yields a higher cost/benefit ratio than that of aid. Spending on aid could be directed towards British infrastructure development, the National Health Service, education or other forms of national expenditure. For the self-interest argument to work, the marginal benefit of the last penny spent on aid must be higher than the benefits that could be gained from putting it to use anywhere else. This may well be a difficult position to argue for due to the difficulty in gathering the evidence required to support it.

## Utilitarian Justification

The first option to justify self-interest as the guide to government finance is to assume that the role of the state is to bring about the greatest possible happiness for the greatest possible number of citizens as a matter of constitutional principle. Is this really the role of the state?

One obvious objection to this is that a state aiming to maximise social utility could use tyrannical policies; prima facie, such a goal could legitimise executing life prisoners or using torturous interrogation methods.

Such an objection, however, does not do full justice to utilitarianism.<sup>33</sup> A more sophisticated conception of utilitarianism might suggest that only in a society in which human rights and democracy are respected can utility be maximised, thus allowing aid but disallowing tyrannical policy. This, however, raises a tension between which principle decides whether or not to give aid; democracy or utility. If utility makes the decision directly, then it seems that the problems of the unacceptable basic articulation of utilitarianism must be confronted. On the other hand, if democracy is taken to make the decision about aid as a political value which is derived from a utilitarian moral framework, then the problems of the democratic Warrant must be confronted. Either way, the utilitarian Warrant faces significant difficulties. There are, of course, further possibilities for incorporating utilitarian policy frameworks into democratic governance, but these were, unsurprisingly, not found in the discourse evaluated. A deep political discussion about these values in relation to aid spending could strongly clarify and benefit the public discourse.

## Democratic Justification

An initial and obvious problem of the democratic justification is that the state does not merely do what the majority tells it to do. A constitution and judicial system exist to limit the government and ensure that majorities do not tyrannize minorities, and that rights and freedoms are protected. This objection may not be particularly powerful in this discussion since it is not immediately obvious how aid could be seen as unconstitutional.

A more powerful objection may be found in evidence from a 2011 poll<sup>34</sup> which claims that nearly 70% of Britons would have preferred the aid budgeted to have been frozen, whilst 43% would also support the scrapping of the entire budget. A crucial premise of the argument is that the state should do what the public want, but presently, the public

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33 Jeffrie Murphy and Jules Coleman, *Philosophy of Law* (Westview Press, 1990), 73.

34 Tax Payers' Alliance, "Public support billions of extra spending cuts to foreign aid, high speed rail and trade union funding," in *Spending Poll Analysis 2011*.

may not necessarily want aid to be spent. On this theory, therefore, the [Warrant\Warrant\Warrant]'If the state should do what the majority want, then if the majority are in favour of aid, then public finances should be spent on aid.' may fail lead to the conclusion that public finances should be spent on aid since the majority may not be in favour of aid.

A more recent (albeit methodologically different) poll conversely showed majority public support for the aid budget.<sup>35</sup> If politicians want to continue aid spending justified by a democratic argument, then energy needs to be placed on communicating to and convincing the electorate. That said, if aid falls into and out of favour with the British public, then aid spending, too, would need to change commensurately on this argument. The democratic self-interest argument could thus lead to pendulum-like changes in aid spending, which could seriously harm development processes, thus presenting clear problems for the argument.

A prominent example of these problems affecting aid could be the Iraq War. Blair and Bush went into Iraq on the grounds that it was in their self-interest. The measurement problem presented itself in the false prediction of the relative costs and benefits; Hussein did not have weapons of mass destruction. The justification was made on utilitarian grounds without public support, and thus had little popular legitimacy. Many might argue that the use of utilitarian justification by the state led to injustice in Iraq. Some might argue that nobody in Britain or elsewhere gained net-utility from the Iraq invasion. In addition to the aforementioned problems, this raises an interesting question about utility. Whose utility are we talking about exactly?

## Who Are We?

If utility is the key principle, then whose utility is intended to be taken into account? Is it that of the 'British state'? It seems strange to suggest that an institution could experience benefits, since utility or happiness is experienced by human beings. So which human beings are intended? It is unclear whether this is all British people, the electorate, the majority, the taxpayers or the government. Defining this will have important repercussions for choosing which benefits and costs to measure in the utility calculation. If it is the British Government's social utility, it might be easy to see how aid could increase utility, since the politicians and civil servants who constitute the government may gain much from better foreign relations and other benefits of aid spending. However, it would be plausible to suggest that the wider populace would not gain as much utility. The reasonable citizen

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35 ComRes, *The ONE Campaign Overseas Aid, Overseas Aid Poll*, (2011), accessed July 20, 2013, <http://www.comres.co.uk/poll/760/one-campaign-overseas-aid-poll.htm>.

may have a net loss in utility since they might be happier keeping their taxes to spend on what they want. If this is the case, then the argument may point away from aid spending. One cannot simply assume that taxpayers', citizens' and the government's interests are all automatically aligned. As Kratochwil points out, "[...]the conflicting demands made in the name of the national interest clearly defy a substantive definition of its content".<sup>36</sup>

## 6 Conclusion

To use Dekker's words, sifting through the hours of parliamentary debates, press cuttings and presidential speeches presented a '[...] cacophony of partial arguments, rather than a symphony of fully laid-out arguments'<sup>37</sup>. Through using Analytical Discourse Evaluation, this research has sought to identify the most significant arguments for development aid spending used in the British context and evaluate them.

The two most prominent arguments are a moral argument from compassionate priority and a rational argument from self-interest and utility. The arguments arise from a discourse which is ambiguous, and thus it is argued that using Analytical Discourse Evaluation as a philosophical cherry picker brings greater clarity to public discourse about development spending. Reconstruction has given structure and coherence to the arguments by connecting a conception of justice or interest, the Data, to a view of the state's role, the Warrant, which connects that conception to government spending on aid, the central Claim. Both the Data and Warrant present points for critique in each argument.

The compassionate priority argument appeals to the compassion of a potential aid donor as a principle for attributing priority of resources to those in need to justify aid. This permits a moral argument and conception of justice which expresses concern for the absolutely poor without reference to equality and relative poverty. However, it seems strange that justice should be based on the feelings of the British. Even if this were true, which British people's emotions count as defining the parameters of compassion, and why should the state as a resource allocator be the right institution to express compassion financially?

Furthermore, for those wanting to use this argument, it would be worth considering whether it is ultimately an argument based on sufficiency rather than priority, since a

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<sup>36</sup> Friedrich Kratochwil, *The Puzzles of Politics: Inquiries into the Genesis and Transformation of International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> Teun J. Dekker, *Paying Our High Public Officials; Evaluating the Political Justifications of Top Wages in the Public Sector* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 7.

compassion parameter seems to imply a sufficiency threshold at which point one has enough. This opens the floodgates to many problems of sufficientarian conceptions of justice to the argument. Lastly, the question of why exactly aid should take the geopolitically orientated form it does is troubling. It seems strange to think that the geopolitical territory in which someone lives makes such a difference as to whether they should benefit from aid or not. Why should compassion for equally poor people in different countries be different? This could benefit from considerable conceptual development, if not an entirely new approach to the moral argumentation for aid.

The self-interest argument doesn't appeal to a distributive ideal, and instead focuses on the utility gained by the British in spending development aid. The argument runs into trouble in measuring how Britain benefits from aid. Those making the argument will find a stronger position by arguing strongly for measurement of aid and the benefits it brings to Britain. However, the idea that benefits can in principle be measured adequately in uniform utility units is questionable, and making the predictions about social issues necessary to evaluate costs and benefits may also prove particularly difficult - across what time frame should such predictions be made? Parliamentary discourse focuses primarily on the accounting costs and benefits of aid in relation to self-interest, but measurement of aid effectiveness will also need to look at opportunity costs to make a self-interest argument work. Each of the articulations of the utilitarian Warrant considered face significant problems and will need considerable refinement if utilitarianism is to be a workable Warrant for the argument. The discourse does not come close to entering this discussion. The democratic justification may well therefore be preferable, but if politicians want this argument to work, they will above all need to work hard to keep convincing the public that aid is indeed worthwhile.

Beyond mere argumentation, I would also suggest that there is a degree of political urgency attached to this discussion. At stake is enormous financial investment, and possibly significant changes of individuals' and communities' welfare. Different justifications will lead to different types of aid and different forms of measuring aid, and thus understanding effectively the justifications for aid is vital for delivering aid as intended and assessing its effectiveness.

It is hoped that this research has clarified the key arguments at the heart of British development discourse. If the fog has been lifted effectively, then it reveals that the ethical and rational cases for aid are problematic and questionable at best, and that there is much work to be done in discussing clearly why, and consequently how, aid should be spent.