World Poverty and Moral Obligations

by

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Abstract

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Extreme poverty is a persistent social problem in the world. Millions of people live in abject poverty and thousands die each day of preventable causes. Ordinary moral intuitions suggest that we should not ignore this issue, but intuitions vary as to what we should do, if anything.

Some philosophers who have addressed this issue claim that the affluent have moral obligations to assist the poor until they become poor themselves. Other philosophers claim that poverty aid is misguided and does more harm than good. Others insist that the affluent are justified in claiming their own economic entitlements before considering the needs of others, including the desperate poor.

The author of this dissertation considers in detail the views of four prominent philosophers who have considered the issue of poverty and moral obligations, and draws independent conclusions based on ordinary moral thinking, as influenced by the philosophers discussed and by his own moral intuitions. The author concludes that each affluent person has a moral duty, based on beneficence, to consider all ones moral obligations, beginning with obligations to dependents, to oneself, and to other loved ones (the “philophilic

family"), but also extending to the poor, near and far. The obligations owed to those in the philophilic family are "thicker" or more substantial than to others. While a priority should be given to these thicker obligations, spending on oneself and other loved ones should not be excessive because the needs of the desperately poor should be considered ahead of such excess. Partiality to oneself and those one loves and cares for is morally justified, but excessive and indulgent spending is not morally justified. To insure that ones various moral obligations are properly considered, one should form a plan for moral obligations, execute the plan, and then review it after the fact on a periodic basis.

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Introduction

World Poverty

Many millions of people in the world are desperately poor, and thousands die each day of hunger and preventable diseases. We are made aware of this tragic situation in numerous ways; by newspaper and television stories, by graphic appeals from aid agencies on the television, in newspaper ads, in direct mail solicitations, and also by academic articles and books such as those that address our moral obligations to these desperately poor.

What should be our response to this information and these appeals? An article by philosopher Peter Singer, published in 1972, suggested that we have very demanding obligations to these poor - so demanding that if we fully complied our own lives would be dramatically changed because we would give to the poor until giving any more would cause us to be desperately poor ourselves. This may seem hard to believe, but the reasoning of this article, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” stimulated a multitude of discussions, books, further articles, seminars, and more responding to Singer and usually proposing less demanding moral obligations regarding the poor. Singer’s argument was and still is taken seriously by the academic community and others. Can we live moral lives without giving as much as Singer suggests while the poor continue to die of preventable causes? After thirty-five years there is still no consensus on what obligations we have in this regard, or on what ethical basis we should make this decision. Considering the seriousness of the problem and the ability that we have to help the desperately poor people of the world with contributions and

otherwise, what are our moral obligations? Is a small contribution sufficient, or is a much more demanding obligation called for, as Singer suggests?

Singer's 1972 article, and his subsequent ones, serve as the beginning point for my analysis of the questions - Why and how much should we help those in poverty who desperately need help? There are many reasons to be concerned about our suffering fellow humans, both prudential and ethical, but I will rely on the reason that almost all humans are motivated by a basic instinct of beneficence toward other humans (and for many, toward other animals) and it is natural as well as moral for us to act on that instinct. Singer starts from a similar point when he assumes in his article that most people would stop to help a child drowning in a shallow pond if they can do so without a large cost to themselves. He and I presume that the unnecessary death of the child is a bad thing, that saving the child at a minimal cost is a good thing, and thus that moral people will choose to save the child. Failure to be motivated by this basic instinct would remove one from any appeal I will be presenting. Singer did not name this basic instinct, but I will call it beneficence – a concern for and a willingness to help other people because they need to be helped.

In my discussion I will briefly consider, as a threshold issue, reasons that have been given for why we have no duty to help people who are starving, but I will conclude that none of these reasons hold up to scrutiny. If one believes that helping the poor is not the right approach because, for instance, it only perpetuates the problem of poverty for future generations, then they have an obligation to help in some other way, such as with population control efforts. It is

not ethical to do *nothing* while people die of preventable causes and we have the ability to help. Assuming then that we do have duties in regard to the desperately poor, I take up my main issue, described below.

Embedded in my concept of beneficence is respect for the dignity of individuals as persons, recognizing that such respect is subject to various interpretations. Some may argue that merely saving a life is insufficient (and maybe even inappropriate) if it is not done with the right motive, such as love for the person. For purpose of this discussion, I assume that life-saving is the primary good to be achieved, with life quality enhancement as a very desirable secondary goal. I will also assume that it is wrong to allow people to suffer and die of preventable causes when we have the ability to help, unless we investigate and conclude that our help is counterproductive. I recognize that others may take the view that better long-term consequences result if we leave people alone and let them work our their problems in their own way, and intervene only if it becomes obvious that aid is warranted and wanted by the needy. Along with Singer and others, I advocate a proactive approach, assuming that help is morally required unless empirical evidence proves otherwise.

Allocation of Resources and Balance

A difficult issue, and one I will address, is how to allocate our personal resources of time and goods, considering the various obligations and priorities one has in life.[1] There is more than one way to think of this allocation. One way

[1] I don't advocate a totally *impartial* attitude, because I don't believe it is psychologically possible for most people, and I don't believe it is necessary for an ethical life. I will discuss partiality and impartiality more fully in Chapter Five.

is to envision two categories: personal and other. Within the personal category would be concerns for self and concerns for those we *are* responsible for or naturally *want* to be responsible for, such as our children, and those we naturally care about, such as family and friends. The other category would include those with whom we have no personal relationship, but who need our help to varying degrees. These others would include the child drowning in the shallow pond as well as people starving in another county. Allocating our time and resources between these two categories seems to be difficult for most people.

Another way to think of our allocation of time and resources is to imagine a circle of concern. The center of our circle of concern would represent ourselves, our children, our family, and our close friends. As one moves out from the center other concerns would be represented, such as concern for those in our community, our society, and those in other societies. [2] A concern for those on the outer edges (those people in foreign societies, for instance) may not be as strong or as thick as our concern for those in the center, but the important point is that there *is* a concern to some degree that extends to all. The circle of concern is more heavily weighted ("thicker") in the center and gradually thins out as our responsibilities, concerns, and connections to others diminish. This image will allow a person to prioritize interests on a gradually diminishing basis but still maintain a concern for the distant and/or unrelated needy. I will refer to this

[2] I will be using the terms 'concern', 'responsibility', and 'duty' as more-or-less synonymous terms in regard to beneficence, even though 'concern' has a psychological connotation that 'responsibility' and 'duty' may not have. In some moral systems such as Kantian ethics we have duties towards those for whom we may feel little concern. I will not be attempting to impose duties in a Kantian fashion, but instead I will be trying to motivate personal duties and responsibilities based on concerns that arise naturally from beneficence.

concept as either a “circle of concern” or, as enhanced with various thicknesses to represent levels of concern and obligation, a Hierarchy of Moral Obligations (“HMO”). I will refer to my HMO concept throughout my writing, and describe it in detail in Chapter Five.

I contrast my circle of concern with those of others who claim that the circle should be the same thickness throughout – that we should be impartial in our regard and concern for all others.[3] Even though impartiality is often viewed as an essential element of morality, I will argue that morality does not require impartiality. I base my graduated theory of concern on the practical observation that we cannot show meaningful equal concern for all others. If one attempted to be impartial in all areas of concern, I contend that one would be ineffectual in regard to others and depriving towards oneself of personal relationships and interests. A moral life can better be lived with reasonable priorities. I will focus on how to establish those priorities in a well-lived moral life.

Before continuing with an exploration of allocation of concern among our family, friends and others, perhaps we should consider whether we can increase our concerns generally so we are *more* beneficent to *more* people. Thus *all* people in our extended circle of concern will benefit. Perhaps a higher level of a well-lived moral life could be achieved if we elevated our levels of concerns for all others generally – making our HMO “thicker” throughout. Considering seriously the views of Singer and other philosophers I will discuss will likely have the effect of increasing our general level of concern for others, and this concern will

[3] Peter Singer, for instance, is said to have a “flat” circle of concern. See Singer 2004, 11. But in recent writings even he allows for some variations in thickness of concern.

become more practical to implement with my Hierarchy of Moral Obligations model and my Periodical Personal Plan ("PPP") process. My PPP process is, as the name suggests, an individual plan or budget process designed to help one focus on and prioritize one's various moral obligations on a regular periodic basis. As with the HMO model, I will refer to the PPP process throughout my writing and discuss it in more detail in Chapter Five.

Although I will deemphasize the moral significance of political boundaries on duties of beneficence, I should say more. The reading audience I have in mind is composed primarily of wealthy residents of the United States and Canada, and secondarily Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. As to those readers, I have assumed that the needs of the domestic poor are less desperate than those of certain foreign poor, such as those in poor countries of Africa where people in large numbers die of poverty related causes daily. My intention is to philosophically motivate those readers to consider the needs of the foreign poor, even though many worthy projects (poverty related and otherwise) vie for attention in their own country. The vast numbers and the dramatically severe level of poverty in some African countries demand our attention, I argue, although the amount and form of attention I leave to the moral discretion of each reader, as motivated by my PPP and HMO concepts.

One may reasonably ask if wealthy readers in countries such as Sweden or Mexico should respond differently.[4] Sweden's social safety net is more extensive that that of the United States, and as a result taxes are generally higher in that country. And the Scandinavian countries also give a larger

[4] I owe this point to Professor Steven Ross.

percentage of their GNP to alleviate foreign poverty than most all other countries. Given these factors, Swedes may have a stronger argument than U.S. Americans that they have satisfied their moral obligations regarding poverty. Nevertheless, for those wealthy Swedes who still have discretionary incomes after taxes, the reasons for moral concerns for the foreign poor I have been advocating still apply. For a Swede and a U.S. American, the mix or percentage of aid (taxes versus voluntary contributions) will be different, but I see no reason why the bottom line total contribution to poverty relief should be different. The Swede will pay more in taxes that go to poverty relief and thus may justify less in voluntary contributions. The U.S. American will pay less in taxes for poverty relief, and thus has more resources to make voluntary contributions, all other economic factors concerning these two hypothetical readers being the same.

A wealthy Mexican citizen has a different issue. Considering the larger amount of poverty in Mexico as compared to the United States, a wealthy Mexican may very well have reason to devote a larger percentage (maybe 100 percent) of contributions to poverty relief to his own country. This would certainly be allowed by and consistent with my hierarchy of moral concerns (HMO), by addressing the needs of those closest to us before moving to more distant circles of concern. The wealthy Mexican should consider the needs of desperately poor Africans, but when compared to the desperate needs of fellow Mexicans during the PPP process he may be justified in aiding only domestic poverty relief.

Guidelines and Limits

How do we morally allocate and prioritize our obligations and concerns for others? There is no magic formula for how to do this, but I will suggest a method and a model of priorities to assist us in devising our own formula or plan. But first I will consider some leading arguments regarding moral obligations toward the poor. I describe now these arguments in general terms and the philosophers whose work I have chosen to represent the arguments.

Peter Singer is certainly not the only philosopher to advocate for very demanding obligations. For instance, Peter Unger in his 1996 book, *Living High and Letting Die,*[5] sets forth numerous examples to make the point that our initial moral intuitions can be wrong, in his view, and that our obligations to the distant poor are much greater than we think. But I will concentrate on the work of Singer because his 1972 article and his pond case analogy provide clear principles and examples from which to work. And because his article was the first of its kind and is clear (and also controversial), he is the philosopher most often cited for very demanding moral obligations to the poor.

Many have argued that rights and deserts of the affluent, and not just the needs of the poor, must be considered in a moral response to poverty. John Arthur is an often cited advocate of this approach, and his articles provide a direct and clear response to Singer's position. Thus I will discuss Arthur's work.

Moral philosophers are well known for their propensity to conjure up cases such as the pond case and other scenarios to present moral dilemmas. As

[5] Unger, Peter, *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence* (Oxford U. Press, 1996).

mentioned above, Peter Unger packs an entire book with such scenarios. These scenarios present hypothetical moral dilemmas that serve the purpose of challenging our moral intuitions, and upon reflection may help us sharpen our moral thinking. But these sometimes far-fetched dilemmas do not represent the questions of morality that face most people on a regular basis. In most situations we should trust our moral intuitions and not stray from them unless we are convinced they are wrong. I will discuss the work of Richard Miller who makes the case for "ordinary moral thinking" in his writings, which is a safeguard against reaching untenable positions based on elaborately designed moral dilemmas. But to account for unusual situations, he also considers emergency or "direct rescue" cases and proposes a "Principle of Direct Rescue" instructing us what to do if we should come across a child drowning in a pond or something similar.

Many writers who consider the moral imperatives of the pond case (and similar cases) and the analogy to distant and thus non-immediate demands in regard to the desperately poor find ways to undermine the analogy without taking on the hard work of analyzing each element of the analogy. But Garrett Cullity is an exception. In his book, *The Moral Demands of Affluence,*[6] he thoroughly analyzes and supports what he calls the "life-saving analogy" and then meticulously builds a case explaining why it can be morally resisted in the extremely demanding way advocated by Singer, Unger, and others. I will describe Cullity's very detailed and somewhat complex analysis, and then recast his conclusions, with which I mostly agree, into a less technical framework that can be understood and applied by any interested reader.

[6] Cullity, Garrett, *The Moral Demands of Affluence,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Thus, to set the stage for my own conclusions, I will describe and assess the writings of each of these philosophers (Singer, Arthur, Miller and Cullity), constructing a theory that draws on ideas from each, build on those ideas, and introduce ideas of my own to support my conclusions regarding our various moral obligations.

As a preview, I will suggest that we do have demanding duties to the poor of the world (Singer), that we should consider rights and deserts in any proposed moral code or plan (Arthur), that we should pay attention to our ordinary moral thinking and not be easily persuaded by reasoning that goes against our ordinary moral intuitions (Miller), that the extremely demanding obligations suggested by Singer can be resisted and replaced by more moderate (but still demanding) duties and that we should rationally and deliberately plan our life in advance with annual (or other periodical) budgets and reviews (Cullity). I will conclude that we are not required to abandon our own interests because of poverty in society (contra to the most demanding of Singer's principles), but that we do have serious and demanding duties to the poor. My PPP process and HMO model (with an implied permissibility of some partiality) can help facilitate our moral thinking about various obligations and then help us act on those obligations.

Singer has made us think harder about these issues than we might otherwise have, and that is a valuable contribution to moral and philosophical scholarship. But we can be stimulated by his ideas without reaching his conclusions. I suggest that we can draw conclusions of morality that are less demanding than his, and thus much more practical, and that are consistent with

the basic moral intuitions he brings to our attention. I will argue that individuals can ethically balance the various interests in life without being bound by any particular moral theory or set of moral principles such as Singer's. This requires hard thinking. A periodic process or budget, which I will call a Periodic Personal Plan or "PPP", will help one focus these issues of life balance, and a model of moral obligations, which I will call a Hierarchy of Moral Obligations or "HMO", will help us allocate our resources of time and money.

Chapter One – Peter Singer

Famine, Affluence, and Morality

In 1972 Peter Singer caused many modern philosophers to reconsider their views on moral obligations to the poor. His article, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" provoked discussion and evaluation that continues today. I will outline the arguments in the article and then assess those arguments.

To establish a context for his discussion, Singer referenced a famine that was taking place in East Bengal in 1971, while he was writing the article. He observed that the suffering and death from the famine was "not inevitable, not unavoidable in any fatalistic sense of the term."[7] And yet, neither individuals nor governments were sending aid relief in amounts that would significantly benefit the famine victims. And individuals were not writing their elected representatives to ask for more government assistance, they were not demonstrating in the streets, and they were not having symbolic fasts. Because the famine was well documented and widely reported, people and the governments could not claim ignorance of the famine.

He concluded that the lack of famine relief action was "morally unjustified" and that "the whole way we look at moral issues - our moral conceptual scheme - needs to be altered."[8]

Approximately thirty-six years have now passed since the famine that Singer wrote about. In 2007, famines and worse continue in the world as a

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[7] Singer, Peter, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy & Public Affairs,* vol. 1, no 3, (1972), 229. (hereafter, "FAM")
[8] Ibid., 230.

perusal of the New York Times on almost any given day will reveal. Similar catastrophes are taking place without sufficient action being taken to stop the resulting starvation and death by preventable causes. One example is the genocide taking place in the Darfur region of the Sudan. The political dynamics make the Darfur situation complicated, but the deaths and suffering in Darfur could most certainly be prevented if enough attention and resources were devoted to the matter. Current moral conceptual schemes appear to be inadequate in ways similar to the inadequacies of 1972. The moral issues that troubled Singer in 1972 are still salient today.

Singer's assumptions and proposed principles

In arguing for moral obligations or principles related to poverty, Singer later claimed not to have been relying upon any particular moral theory for reasoning.[9] His simple plan was that "anyone who accepts certain assumptions, to be made explicit, will, I hope, accept my conclusion."[10]

His first assumption was that "suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad." He accepts this assumption without making an argument, and suggests that if a reader disagrees he should "read no further."

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[9] Singer, Peter "A Response" in Jamieson, Dale, ed., *Singer and His Critics* (Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999) – "I wanted to appeal to the widest possible audience, and so I thought to construct arguments based on considerations that most people would accept." (292). "I didn't want to limit the force of the argument to utilitarians – that would have been preaching to the converted. I therefore used the phrase 'comparable moral importance' rather than 'comparable suffering', in order to allow readers to judge for themselves what is of comparable moral importance." (302-3). Although he acknowledges being a utilitarian, he says that "in 'Famine, affluence and morality' I was consciously refraining from presenting a utilitarian argument." (334, FN 27).

[10] FAM, 231.

His next assumption, which becomes his primary principle, is much more controversial and forms the thesis of his article (and his continuing ethical position on world poverty). It is as follows:

> 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.[11]

He explains that the phrase "without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance" means, without causing anything else comparably bad to happen, or without doing something that is wrong in itself, or without failing to promote some moral good, comparable in significance to the bad thing that we can prevent. Although he does not refer to this as utilitarian reasoning, and as indicated above, he since has claimed that this argument is not based on utilitarianism, the reasoning is very utilitarian in spirit, and certainly is consequentialists in substance. I am not suggesting this is a reason to criticize the argument, as such, but merely an observation in attempting to thoroughly evaluate and categorize the argument. He then offers a qualified version of the principle;

> If it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it.[12]

He later refers to the first formulation of this principle as the "strong version" and the second formulation as the "moderate version." I will use the same references, and may also refer to the strong version as the CMI principle (for "comparable

[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

moral importance") and the moderate version as the AMS principle (for "anything morally significant").

He then briefly describes, for the first time in his writing, what I will call the "shallow pond case." It is simple and short;

> If I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out. This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing.[13]

It seems that Singer proposes the pond case as an application of both the strong and the moderate versions of his principle. It would clearly illustrate the strong version and probably the moderate version in most situations, but it could be plausibly argued that wearing muddy clothes to a meeting or completely missing a meeting or some other appointment has *some* moral significance and thus would fail to morally obligate saving the child under the moderate version.

Singer comments that his second principle, in either the strong (CMI) or the moderate (AMS) form, would fundamentally change our lives, our society, even our world if it were followed. This certainly seems true as to his strong version, but questionable as to his moderate version, since many events in our lives have *some* moral importance and thus could override the duty to save the child.

Distance

Singer next makes the controversial claim that "It makes no moral difference whether the person I can help is a neighbor's child ten yards from me or a Bengali

[13] Ibid.

whose name I shall never know, ten thousand miles away."[14] He claims that "If we accept any principle of impartiality, universalizability, equality, or whatever" then we ought not to discriminate against anyone on account of proximity or distance. If being near by would enable us to be in a better position to judge what needs to be done or better able to provide assistance, then there would be a reason to help those near to us first, according to Singer. But he says the development of the world into a "global village" has mooted those reasons. This claim contains an empirical point, and much has been written about the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of aid organizations in far away countries, casting some doubt on Singer's conclusion that such organizations "can direct our aide to a refugee in Bengal almost as effectively as we could get it to someone in our own block."[15] But this is not a debate I wish to take up here. I wish instead to *assume* that Singer is correct about the effectiveness of aid organizations in far away places, and then consider the philosophical issues of distance and whether our moral obligations extend to the distant desperately poor. However, Garrett Cullity does address the issue of aid agency effectiveness, which I will describe when I discuss Cullity's views.

Although Singer claims not to be relying on his utilitarianism in making his arguments in this paper, the principles of "impartiality, universalizability, equality" are certainly compatible with utilitarianism. But unless we first accept utilitarianism (or another ethical system that encompasses these principles) we are not bound by these principles. I will take up each concept individually, beginning with universalizability, which I believe is fairly easy to dismiss in this context. If we

[14] Ibid., 231-2.
[15] Ibid., 232.

conclude that all people, wherever situated, should be treated the same, then we could 'universalize' that conclusion. Or if we conclude that we should give preference to our family and friends before distant strangers, we could also 'universalize' that conclusion. Likewise with any other ethical conclusion we can reach. Therefore, I don't believe universalizability pushes us in any particular direction on the issue of distance.

Equality is a bit more difficult. We can agree that all people are 'equal' and still not be committed to actively treating everyone equally. For instance, a teacher in a school may be totally committed to the ideal of equality of all students in that school (or indeed to the ideal of equality of all students everywhere), but that would not necessarily commit the teacher to teaching every student in the school equally. That would be impossible and since *ought* implies *can* in ethics, the teacher has no ethical duty to teach every student in the school, even if some of the students are not being adequately taught by other teachers.

The concept of impartiality is more difficult still. But if adopted as an ethical principle, impartiality could provide the foundation for a duty to the distant poor. So the question is - Should we be impartial? We are naturally partial. We have feelings for those close to us, family and friends, that come to us naturally and without reflection. If we are to argue against these natural feelings, we should have good reasons for doing so. Otherwise, our default position should be to act on what comes naturally, unless there is reason to act differently. And partiality, at least towards our children and others close to us, seems to be inevitable. In a later writing, Singer acknowledges this inevitability;

> The love of parents for their children, and the desire of parents to give preference to their children over the children of strangers, are as the experience of utopian social experiments has repeatedly shown, extremely difficult to eradicate.[16]

He notes as an example that mothers in Israeli *Kibbutzim* used to sneak into the communal nursery at night to kiss and hold their children, despite the rules of the *Kibbutzim* requiring impartiality as to all the children.

Using the teacher analogy again, the class assigned to a teacher should have a priority with the teacher. Even if the teacher is completely unbiased in feeling toward all the students in the school, her own students represent a higher obligation. In my Hierarchy of Moral Concerns, those students would occupy a closer circle than other students in the school. Only when she has taught her own students to the best of her ability should she concern herself with teaching other students in the school, even if their own teachers are inadequate. If time permits the teacher to help other students, that would be a very kind thing to do, but it should be a secondary obligation, at best, and perhaps only a discretionary matter and not an obligation, and thus supererogatory.

The teacher analogy seems to work well enough in analyzing the time, effort, affection, feeling, etc. that an individual should spend on other individuals who need help. But then the issue of material resources may raise other issues. Suppose that the teacher's students have the latest computer equipment, while other students in the school have only worn out and out-of-date crude supplies. Is it right for the teacher to continue to favor her own students and lobby for their needs exclusively?

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[16] *Singer and His Critics*, 300.

Fairness, as a school policy matter, suggests that resources be more evenly distributed, even if not entirely equally. The teacher could maintain an appropriate level of dedication to her own students, and still favor money being spent on the ill-equipped students before even more is spent for equipment for her students. This requires a balance, but no specific formula to achieve a balance is obvious. Impartiality, as argued above, is not the right attitude for the teacher to take, and total dedication to her students to the exclusion of the needs of other students is also not the right approach. The correct, or ethical, approach is somewhere in between – but at a place we can't yet specify.

Applying this analogy to world poverty, neither impartiality nor partiality fully describe the appropriate ethical position. Some balance between the two extremes is required, which I will define more precisely as we explore further ideas. And since impartiality is not justified, neither is the philosophical concept of indifference to distance. Distance does matter, but it only diminishes moral obligation and does not totally eliminate our moral obligations to those in far away places. I will further discuss concepts of partiality in Chapter Five.

Number or Unique Position

Singer next considers whether it matters if the subject of moral obligation is the only person who could help, or is one among others. Although this issue may present psychological issues, it does not seem to cause much philosophical difficulty. That is, we may feel less guilty if we are among others who fail to act to feed the poor, but it does not necessarily make us less responsible. It could even be argued that if others do less then it is up to us to do more since the

ethical objective is to feed the hungry (or save the child drowning in the pond), The ethical issue is not an exercise in teamwork, for instance, intended to demonstrate how to most efficiently distribute the task at hand among various participants. Singer's description of this argument as "the absurdity of the view that numbers lessen obligation"[17] seems morally correct. If many of us walk past the pond without saving the child we are all as wrong as if we were alone. And his observation that our moral obligations are reduced if others take appropriate action also seems morally correct, maybe even obviously correct. If the child in the pond has already been saved or if the starving poor have been fed, then the extent of our obligation is reduced and maybe even eliminated. But unfortunately this is not the case as to world poverty, so the observation is a logical one, but is not practically or morally relevant as to world poverty.

Related to this discussion, there is an issue of *fairness* related to the duty to participate with others in a rescue operation and analogously as to addressing world poverty. It may not be absolutely necessary to assist if others are doing the job, but failure to participate in collective efforts when your help would lessen the burden of other participants demonstrates a failure of fairness to the other participants. I will discuss fairness further when discussing the views of Garrett Cullity.

Absurd Consequence?

The level of appropriate giving is first addressed by Singer when he considers whether his argument leads to an absurd consequence. He concludes

[17] FAM, 233.

that the consequence is absurd only if too much aid is given, which is another hypothetical or logical issue, but not a real-world issue. And even if there were a risk of excess giving to the poor, this could be avoided by becoming informed of what others are doing and coordinating among donors.

The more interesting issue is the level of giving morally required. His principles would prescribe that people give "at least up to the point at which by giving more one would begin to cause *serious suffering* for oneself and one's dependents – perhaps even beyond this point to *the point of marginal utility*, at which by giving more one would cause oneself and one's dependents as much suffering as one would prevent in Bengal" (i.e., on behalf of the victims).[18] These two levels of giving seem to roughly follow from his strong position (which ends at *marginal utility*) and his moderate position (which arguably ends at *serious suffering*, even though, as discussed above, the moderate position seems literally mooted if *anything* of moral significance has to be given up, which could be well short of "serious suffering").

Singer pauses to sum up his arguments at this point. He assumes that if neither distance nor the number of people who could help lessens our obligations, then he can assume his principle is established. He claims to need only his modified (or qualified) form – i.e., must prevent bad things from happening unless this requires sacrificing "anything morally significant." Again, this modified form seems toothless, whereas the strong form – must act unless something of "comparable moral significance" must be sacrificed – has fangs so deep as to reduce the follower's life to bare subsistence.

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[18] Ibid., 234.

Appropriateness of Teacher Analogy

It may seem that my teacher analogy is not appropriate since the teacher is normally in a superior position vis-à-vis the students, which may suggest that wealthy people with discretionary money to spend or to give away are somehow superior to the people who are starving or dying of preventable diseases. I do not mean to suggest that the wealthy are superior to the poor in a fundamental sense, but as to the issue at hand – material wealth – they are in fact superior. It may be argued that the wealthy have no claim to their wealth since they or their forbearers may have acquired the wealth unfairly and even at the expense of the poor. But the fact is that the wealthy do in fact now have the wealth and the poor do not, and given that brute fact, the issue is "What moral obligations do the wealthy have?" By analogy, the teacher may have become educated as a teacher in a system that unfairly discriminated in favor of the ethnic group or gender to which the teacher belongs, but the fact is that the teacher is now educated and is in a position to help the uneducated (the students), so the question is how should the skills of the teacher be put to use. Note that I haven't addressed whether the teacher has an obligation to teach at all, but instead I have assumed that the teacher is willing to teach and is just trying to decide how and where to morally apply her teaching skills. She may feel called to teach the most uneducated of the students in her school, or in her community, the country, or even the world. But that seems like a personal choice. If she is teaching those who need and want to be taught, she is moving in the right direction, even if people could reasonably debate what would involve the optimum use of her

skills. Such autonomy is allowed by my proposed Hierarchy of Moral Obligations. Autonomy allows a person to make certain life choices for oneself, and the morality that I argue for will not suggest otherwise. What I argue is that after one satisfies his or her own worthwhile personal goals, and satisfies obligations to children and any other direct dependents, then a moral person will look beyond the inner circle of concern and address the concerns of others, including distant others, following a duty of beneficence. The Periodic Personal Plan is the process I suggest that one uses to make these decisions.

Duty vs. Charity

Singer next considers the difference in duty and charity. Do we have a duty to help the poor, or is this merely a matter of charity? This is a key issue because without ethical duties or obligations there are no teeth in the ethical arguments. We can only suggest that people do more to help the poor, but not insist that they are wrong not to do so.

Singer says that the outcome of his argument is that "we ought to give the money away, and it is wrong not to do so."[19] But unless we accept impartiality as a required moral principle, which I have not, we have only an undefined duty to those in our sphere of normal concern and an even less defined duty to those outside our normal sphere of concern. Do we have any ethical duties? Analogously, does the teacher have any duty to teach anyone, or does the philosophy student have any duty to do anything with the knowledge gained after the degree is obtained?

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[19] Ibid., 235.

Singer argues in his second principle that we ought, morally, to prevent a bad thing from happening (i.e., extreme poverty or in my analogies, lack of education and philosophical ignorance). His clearest and most compelling reason is demonstrated by the shallow pond case. But even there, we are left to make a comparison between our potential loss (muddy clothes) and the potential gain to another (saved life of the child). Unless we had something to do with the child, or with the pond, or with the child being in the pond, what is the argument for us being called to duty?

Singer's bold (and somewhat bald) assertion is that we are duty-bound to prevent something bad from happening (within limits). The argument immediately focuses on the limits – strong or moderate, but what about the duty in and of itself? If there is absolutely no cost to me to save the child (and thus no limits to argue about), what produces my duty? Certainly a Kantian duty can be argued for, but Singer has not done that. And a utilitarian formula could be argued for (saving the child will produce the most overall happiness), but Singer has not explicitly made that argument either. He could also have employed virtue ethics and argued that saving the child is the virtuous thing to do, or the ethics of care and argued that we have a duty of care to our fellow humans (and perhaps beyond), but he argued for none of these ethical methods of thinking.

The difficulty I am raising here is fundamental to ethics. Essentially it is the issue of how do we get started with positive duties, how do we get traction to move beyond our original position of having no obligations. To say that we

merely begin or are born with certain obligations is reminiscent of the imposition of 'original sin' on all people from birth, argued by some Christian theologians.

I don't believe Singer has tried to make a case, other than by appealing to our moral intuitions, for the fundamental issue of why we have obligations. But I will assume that we do have such obligations so that I can continue an analysis of his further arguments. I too will *presume* that we have reasons, ethical and otherwise, to be kind and beneficent to other people, especially if they are in severe need. Except for reasons based on ordinary moral thinking and ordinary moral intuitions, the more fundamental issue of reasons to help others at all is outside the scope of my dissertation. I assume that beneficence is sufficient as a foundational moral principle for the arguments that follow.

Objections:

(1) Too drastic a revision of our moral scheme

In his next discussion, Singer is essentially arguing for positive duties, as well as more specifically for duties to aid the poor, which many consider to be too drastic. He observes that a common way of thinking of the imperatives of duties is that they "function so as to prohibit behavior that is intolerable if men are to live in society," citing an article by J. O. Urmson, "Saints and Heroes" (1958). Looked at this way, the main function of duties is to maintain order in society by prohibiting violations of norms against killing, stealing, etc.

Singer argues for a more expansive view of moral duties. He claims that morality requires us to "look beyond the interests of our own society."[20] But Singer seems to have skipped a step in his analysis, since he goes from the norm of negative duties (no killing and stealing) within a particular society to advocating positive duties (famine relief) toward those in other societies. We need to first consider positive duties toward those in the *same* society, and toward those closer to us in other ways (family, kinship, friendships, professional and social relationships, etc.). My image of the concentric circles of concern, enhanced as a Hierarchy of Moral Obligations, addresses this issue. Unless the concerns in outer circles are so important as to outweigh our concerns in inner circles, we should address the inner circles first and with more "thickness" of concern. Once we establish by stipulation that domestic poverty relief should be addressed, then we are better situated to consider Singer's arguments for why we should extend our sphere of concern to those in other societies. One may even conclude that foreign poverty, because of its extreme amount and severity, should take priority over domestic poverty where more government and private aid is available. If so, concerns for the foreign poor would move to a ring closer to the center.

Singer considers the views of Sidgwick and Urmson, who argued, according to Singer, that "we need a basic moral code which is not too far beyond the capacities of the ordinary man."[21] Otherwise, people will simply not

[20] Ibid. 237.
[21] Ibid., 237.

comply. This is a practical consideration, and seems well suited to the utilitarian mode (*a la* John Stuart Mill) in which Singer casts the issue.

> The issue here is: Where should we draw the line between conduct that is required and conduct that is good although not required, so as to get the best possible result?[22]

Singer suggests that setting more demanding moral standards will encourage more generous giving to the poor, and not as some suggest "a general breakdown of moral behavior."[23] Because the goal is so laudable ("an end to widespread starvation"), he deems the risk of such a breakdown justified.

But all of this seems better suited for consideration by a social engineer (or perhaps a utilitarian engineer) and not for moral philosophers trying to establish reasons for including poverty relief in the moral sphere based on something other than good consequences. Singer seems aware that this particular analysis is social engineering, and not ethics per se: "…it should be emphasized that these considerations are relevant only to the issue of what we should require from others, and not to what we ourselves ought to do."[24] Although consequentialism is recognized as a legitimate moral philosophy, it seems more suited to social policy than to personal morality. I am hoping to establish a basis for personal morality and obligations regarding poverty relief consistent with other interests in life, and capable of being advocated to and accepted by the public. A private morality, in my view, is one that a person doesn't write or talk about, but just does. If one is inclined to engage in

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[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 238.
[24] Ibid.

supererogatory acts of kindness, then one can do this privately without suggesting that others should do the same. A morality, such as that advocated by Singer, is no longer private when he advocates it as what we all should do. Thus I would collapse the public-private distinction.

Too Burdensome

The main objection that many people have to Singer's proposed moral principle (in particular his 'strong' position or 'CMI') is its burdensomeness. Singer defines the issue as follows:

> Given the present conditions in many parts of the world, however, it does follow from my argument that we ought, morally, to be working full time to relieve great suffering of the sort that occurs as a result of famine or other disasters.[25]

Except in the case of mitigating circumstances, he says we should adhere to his strong position - "we ought to be preventing as much suffering as we can without sacrificing something else of comparable moral significance."[26] He says we may be reluctant to face this conclusion, but he views this not as a criticism of his proposed moral principle, but rather as a criticism of our "ordinary standards of behavior." His defense of his position is oblique at this point. He says very few of us are likely to do everything that we ought to do because most people are "self-interested to some degree." But just because we don't do something doesn't mean we ought not to do it. Although Singer does not reference David Hume, his conclusion is in the spirit of Hume's admonition that an *is* does not

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

make an *ought*. Singer seems to be saying that most of us *are* selfish and self-interested but that does not mean we *ought* to be. Instead, Singer suggests we ought to be more selfless.

To defend against anticipated criticism – that his conclusions are "wildly out of line with what everyone else thinks and has always thought" – he aligns himself with Thomas Aquinas – "a writer not normally thought of as a way-out radical."[27] He quotes Aquinas who said, *inter alia,* that "whatever a man has in superabundance is owed, of natural right, to the poor for their sustenance." Aquinas was not original in this thinking. The founder of Christianity (who *was* most likely considered a "way-out radical") had the following severe advice, "sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven" (Luke 18: 22 – Jesus' advice to the rich ruler). And the ancient Jewish scriptures advised similarly.

- Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land. Deuteronomy 15:11.
- He that despiseth his neighbor sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he. Proverbs 14:21.
- He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth Him hath mercy on the poor. Proverbs 14:31.

These religious doctrines are not surprising to many of us who have heard them all our lives. We have become accustomed to being told by the scriptures how we ought to live, but we also know that only a very few strictly follow the

[27] Ibid., 239, quoting from *Summa Theologica*. Aquinas (1224/6 – 74) also prescribed priorities for charity and love (a very early inspiration for my Hierarchy of Moral Obligations) in *Summa Theologica*, Second Part of the Second Part, Question 26.

scriptures. What arouses our attention is that a modern, secular philosopher is saying essentially the same thing, based on logical reasoning instead of the commands of a mysterious God (or messengers of God). It is one thing to ignore God (we have become accustomed to "failing" in this respect), but it is perhaps more provocative to be confronted with human reasoning that we can't easily refute, but that we also can't follow without severely disrupting our lives. That is my task – to refute Singer, or failing that, to endorse him.

Government Responsibility

Singer next considers several practical points ("more practical than philosophical") which address whether giving away money to the poor is the best means to the end of preventing starvation. He first considers whether giving privately (i.e., individually) sends the wrong message to our governments. The argument is that if individuals take on this cause then governments will be allowed to escape their responsibilities. Presumably, the argument goes, this would send a signal to governments to focus their efforts in other areas. Singer considers the opposite view to be more plausible – that if individuals do not give privately then their governments will consider foreign poverty relief to be a low priority of its citizens and thus the citizens would not favor their tax money being spent on poverty. This is an empirical issue that Singer does not try to resolve, but instead summarily shifts the burden of proof to those who refuse to give, saying they are "refusing to prevent a certain amount of suffering without being

able to point to any tangible beneficial consequence of their refusal."[28] Thus we should give privately unless someone demonstrates that more harm than good is thereby produced – yet another instance of consequentialist argumentation. The issue of the effectiveness of private aid is addressed by Garrett Cullity, which I will later discuss.

If it is first established that money should be spent on global poverty, then Singer's logic seems sound since any money spent is good, regardless of its source, and the more the better. What is missing here is an analysis of where the burden of global poverty morally belongs. Singer's consequentialist thinking is indifferent to where the money comes from, as long as it produces the good result desired (and minimizes any bad results). A more fundamental analysis of moral reasons for giving may shed light on where the money should come from. It may be that global poverty relief is analogous to and belongs with other issues generally recognized as being governmental responsibilities exclusively. Examples include maintaining peace and preventing war, declaring war, apprehending criminals, building roads and bridges, regulating international trade, raising funds through taxation, and many others. Even more analogous to world poverty relief is domestic poverty relief. In the United States, and I presume in most normally functioning countries, the issue of preventing the starvation of its citizens is considered a responsibility of the government, and only secondarily (if at all) a responsibility of private citizens. Although some may disagree (e.g., libertarians who favor only a "night-watchman" function for government), most people readily accept that governments should have this responsibility. It is

[28] Ibid., 239.

expected that the government will have programs to prevent starvation, even if the programs are not perfectly designed and are not perfectly administered. Citizens and private organizations who supplement these programs with private aid (e.g., church soup kitchens) are generally considered charity and supererogatory and not fulfillment of a secular moral obligation. Many people may feel a moral obligation, but this more than likely arises from religious convictions or other private moral convictions, and those same people would not likely consider others who do not participate in hunger relief as committing a moral wrong. The prevailing social morality seems to be that it is wrong for the government to allow its citizens to starve, but not a wrong belonging to private citizens, unless they somehow are implicated in the cause of the starvation. This of course does not address issues of emergency rescue, which Singer's pond case illustrates.

Even if I am correct about the social norms of today, Hume would remind us that the current norms of society (the 'is') does not necessarily mean the norms are what they should be (the 'ought'). In other words, we could be dead wrong about our assumptions as to who ought to be primarily responsible for domestic hunger relief. But it seems reasonable to assume that hunger and poverty relief belong at the government level, both domestically and globally. If governments fully satisfied hunger and poverty obligations, then private obligations would be empty because unnecessary, and vice versa. But the governments' failure in this respect does not mean that affluent individuals are relieved from obligations - the obligation is lifted only if it is successful. Our moral

obligation to pull the drowning child from the pond is not diminished just because someone, or even a group of people, walked by the drowning child ahead of us without saving the child.

Political Action

Singer agrees that giving privately is not enough and that governments should also be involved in hunger relief, but he argues to keep primary responsibility on the individual. In addition to giving privately, he says we should be campaigning for "new standards for both public and private contributions to famine relief." Another reason to continue private contributions is that lobbying for government action without also contributing may constitute "preaching what one does not practice" and that behavior could undermine lobbying efforts. If however, we conclude that famine relief belongs primarily or exclusively at the governmental level, then 'practicing' is not a prerequisite to 'preaching,' just as lobbying for new roads and bridges does not require that we also begin work on a private construction crew. But poverty is different because we do have mechanisms such as aid agencies to make our efforts effective. Our lobbying for more government aid for the poor represents civic responsibilities, our private efforts at hunger efforts represent moral obligations based on beneficence, and we should do both. As long as poverty needs continue to exist and we have reasons to address those needs (as we have stipulated), then individuals should address those needs until a more appropriate entity (e.g., government) steps up to the task. Simultaneously we should continue to lobby the government to take

on this concern because then the issue of abject poverty could be more comprehensively and effectively addressed.

Population Control

Singer acknowledges that overpopulation is a cause of hunger and poverty, but that this is no reason not to try to prevent the suffering of those already born. The long-term solution to extreme poverty may involve population control, and Singer supports efforts in that regard. Economists and others debate whether the available resources are sufficient to distribute and feed the entire world's hungry, but this is an empirical debate. The philosophical issue arises if we conclude that feeding the existing poor leads to further overpopulation and thus even more suffering. Using a utilitarian analysis, we *could* decide that the ethical course of action is to stop further overpopulation by allowing the poorest of the world to perish of hunger and thus prevent further reproducing. Singer addresses the issue of triage in his more recent book, *Practical Ethics, 2nd Ed.,* (1993). After discussing the options he concludes as follows:

> Success cannot be guaranteed; but the evidence suggests that we can reduce population growth by improving economic security and education, and making contraceptives more widely available. This prospect makes triage ethically unacceptable. We cannot allow millions to die from starvation and disease

> when there is a reasonable probability that population can be brought under control without such horrors.[29]

He does concede that we may have no obligation to help those who refuse to help themselves. So if particular societies are plagued by severe poverty caused by overpopulation, and they refuse to address the population problem, then we may be justified in not giving aid since that aid will not lead to long-term poverty reduction. An individual implementing my suggested Periodic Personal Plan may conclude that this is a reasonable line to draw, thus giving a priority to the poor of those countries that have responsible population policies.

How Much to Give?

In his last substantive discussion, Singer considers how much we should give. The strong version of his principle would require followers to reduce themselves to the level of marginal utility – "that is, the level at which, by giving more, I would cause as much suffering to myself or my dependents as I would relieve by my gift."[30] He considers the strong version to be the "correct one" and says he introduced the moderate version "only in order to show that even on this surely undeniable principle a great change in our way of life is required." But he says he can see "no good reason" for holding the moderate rather than the strong version of his principle.

As earlier discussed, the strong version has the problem of being overly demanding, whereas the moderate version seems to have the opposite problem

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[29] Singer, Peter, *Practical Ethics*, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 240.
[30] FAM, 241.

– almost any sacrifice could be argued to have *some* moral significance, and thus defeat the moderate principle. Because Singer argues for the strong version and because the moderate version fails to provide a worthy target, I will aim my comments and concerns at the strong version in subsequent discussions herein.

Role of Philosophers

In the final section of his paper Singer addresses the role of philosophers in public affairs, and in the poverty debate in particular. Although philosophers are not fact gathers, nor social policy or foreign policy makers, they do have a role to play when the facts are clear and ethical judgments are needed. Singer considers the facts of suffering from famine and the facts of plausible solutions to be well enough established that philosophers should now contribute to this debate, and I agree.

Where I disagree with Singer is on the issue of how to allocate ethical obligations. If the principles lead to obligations that are set so high that virtually no person follows them, or can reasonably follow them, then something seems wrong with the principle. Lofty but unachievable ideals can inspire us to do better, but they are better suited to religious or private ethics, where we can offer the defense of moral weakness when we fail to measure up. But a public ethic, such as what I advocate as to global poverty, should be within the grasp of even moral weaklings who want to do the right thing.

Singer recently acknowledged that his vision or map of moral obligations is sometime thought of as "flat."[31] He defends the flatness or impartiality of his views, although he does admit to some partiality himself, such as to family members, which he does not try to defend morally. My vision of obligations is not flat, but is instead gradated, with some obligations "thick" and other obligations "thin." Unlike Singer, I propose that the thicker parts of my moral vision (i.e., those parts reflecting partiality) can be defended from a moral point of view.
I envision personal morality as a circle of concern, with the center being thick and the edges thin, and with gradations of thickness in between. One could also imagine a round sphere of concentric circles, with the inner circle thick and other circles becoming gradually thinner in proportion to their distance from the center. I envision personal integrity and personal responsibilities (such as to one's children) at the center, closely followed by other self- interests such as family, close friends, life goals, projects, and interests necessary for a fulfilling life. I envision concerns for the needs of others who we have no connection with or specific obligations for at the outer edges. The important point as to obligations to the distant poor, represented by the outer circle, is that they *are* within the circles of concern at all. But it is also important to my thesis that the distant poor are not *as* important as those people closer to the center of ones life. This vision of moral obligations for each individual, which I will further describe and refer to throughout, I refer to as the Hierarchy of Moral Concerns or HMO.

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[31] Singer, Peter, "Outsiders: our obligations to those beyond our borders" in, Chatterjee, Deen K., *The Ethics of Assistance: Morality and the Distant Needy* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 11.

Practical Ethics

Absolute Poverty

In his 1979 book *Practical Ethics,* (Second Edition in 1993), Singer continues his discussion of the issue of poverty ethics in a chapter entitled, "Rich and Poor." He defines the term 'absolute poverty' as "life at the very margin of existence" and "beneath any reasonable definition of human decency" (quoting former World Bank president Robert McNamara), and as "the lack of sufficient income in cash or in kind to meet the most basic biological needs for food, clothing, and shelter" (quoting The Worldwatch Institute) and in his own words, he says "Absolute poverty is probably the principal cause of human misery today."[32] If poverty is believed to be the principle cause of human misery, this belief would be a strong reason for those committed to utilitarian ideals to want to address this problem. The simple goal of the utilitarian ethic is to produce the greatest happiness, and the least suffering, for the greatest number, so addressing the "principal cause" of suffering would arguably be a top priority.

Although Singer is a utilitarian, he claims not to have argued as a utilitarian in FAM, his 1972 article. Because he did not want to "limit the force of the argument to utilitarians" he "was consciously refraining from presenting a utilitarian argument."[33] Presumably he was not arguing strictly as a utilitarian in *Practical Ethics* either*,* since it is a continuation of the same general argument from FAM. Nevertheless, it may be useful to apply utilitarian concepts to Singer's arguments for purposes of evaluation. If he provides sufficient utilitarian reasons

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[32] Singer, Peter, *Practical Ethics*, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 219-220.
[33] Jamieson, Dale, ed., *Singer and His Critics* (Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999), 302-3, 334 (FN 27).

for his recommended principles, the next steps may be to apply the principles of other ethical systems. If the utilitarian argument fails then we may have reason to abandon his principles, unless we can justify them on other grounds.

Absolute Affluence

To compliment the discussion of 'absolute poverty,' Singer next discusses 'absolute affluence.' The absolute affluent are "affluent by any reasonable definition of human needs," meaning that "they have more income than they need to provide themselves adequately with all the basic necessities of life…and are still able to spend money on luxuries." The defining characteristic is "a significant amount of income above the level necessary to provide for the basic human needs of oneself and one's dependents." [34] By this definition, most of the people in our Western society are 'absolutely affluent,' and Singer says "the majority of Western Europe, North American, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and the oil-rich Middle Easter states are all absolutely affluent."[35]

The obvious reason for defining affluence is to lay the foundation for suggesting that the affluent people of the world could transfer wealth to the absolute poor "without threatening their own basic welfare."[36] Since most of Singer's readers are affluent by this definition, the argument becomes personal if the reader takes it seriously. Do we readers have the moral obligation to transfer wealth to the poor?

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[34] Practical Ethics, 2nd Ed., 221.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 221-2, again quoting Robert McNamara.

Allowing to Die vs. Murder – The 'Difficulty' Criterion

If affluent people can stop poor people from dying of starvation, is the failure to do so the equivalent of murder? After a lengthy discussion of several factors that could distinguish murder from not saving, Singer concludes that "the difficulty of completely discharging the duty of saving all one possibly can makes it inappropriate to blame those who fall short of this target as we blame those who kill; but this does not show that the act itself is less serious."[37] Thus he foregoes any attempt to bootstrap obligations of poverty relief by relating it to obligations not to murder, and then moves on to a new approach. Since he ultimately does not base his argument on the murder analogy, neither will I in my evaluation of Singer, but his discussion of the 'difficulty' criterion below is relevant for other discussions.

It is usually easy for most of us to forego murder (even though we may have 'murderous thoughts' from time to time). But it would be very difficult to save the lives of all those who we possibly could who are dying of starvation and other poverty causes. According to Singer, this would require either, (1) "cutting our standard of living down to the bare essentials to keep us alive", or (2) "cut down to the minimum level compatible with earning the income which, after providing for our needs, left us the most to give away."[38] We would keep for ourselves only the bare essentials necessary for life, or life with an occupation. This would be difficult. Even if Singer's arguments and logic seem sound up to this point, reflection on this consequence would make most serious readers

[37] Ibid., 228-9.
[38] Ibid. , 223 and FN 1.

pause and reconsider. Singer allows that strictly following his principles "would require a degree of moral heroism utterly different from that required by mere avoidance of killing" and would be an "ethic for saints or heroes"[39] But perhaps we don't have to be saints or heroes to save *some*, but not all that we can. Justifying this less demanding obligation will require either a change in Singer's CMI principle, a more liberal interpretation of his principle, or a new principle altogether. I will be suggesting an alternative.

This issue of difficulty (or 'demandingness' as it is also called) may be the chief stumbling block in Singer's proposed ethical principle. It will be a recurring theme in my evaluation of Singer.

Acts vs. Actors

Singer distinguishes actions from actors, which may lead to a better understanding of his thinking on this issue:

> The appropriateness of praise and blame is, however, a separate issue from the rightness or wrongness of actions. The former evaluates the agent: the latter evaluates the action.[40]

Thus it may be wrong for someone not to give all they can for poverty relief, but it may also be wrong to blame that person. And similarly, it may be right or good (although not required) for someone to engage in supererogatory acts of kindness, and also right to praise them (even though the act is not morally required). It appears that Singer is prepared to stick fast to his CMI principle in the 'strong' form, even though he is not prepared to blame those who fail to live

[39] Ibid., 223, 228
[40] Ibid., 228.

up to this high standard. In a later writing, he even excuses *himself* from failing to adhere to his principle. Singer says that he may "without any irrationality, choose to be less than totally committed to doing what I ought to do."[41] A principle that is more demanding than most readers (and even the author) are able to reasonably adopt is problematic for the principle. I propose that we should establish principles that most people can reasonably live by.

Singer's CMI Principle reargued and reaffirmed

The now famous Pond Case is again put forward by Singer to establish an obligation to save the child based on the "plausible principle" –

> If it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance, we ought to do it[42]

Singer states that the principle "seems uncontroversial" and will "obviously win the assent of consequentialists; but non-consequentialists should accept it too."[43] He argues that the principle will not override the kinds of actions that "non-consequentialists strongly disapprove," such as serious violations of individual rights, injustice, and broken promises. Thus, for instance, if preventing 'something very bad' in accordance with the principle required a violation of rights, then a person applying the principle would not be required to act if the rights violation was considered by that person of comparable moral importance to the

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[41] *Singer and His Critics,* 309.
[42] *Practical Ethics*, 2nd, 229. Here he uses the phrase 'comparable moral *significance'* in describing his principle rather than the phrase 'comparable moral *importance'* which he used in FAM (1972), but there seems to be no difference in the meanings of the phrases. I will continue to use the phrase 'comparable moral importance' and the abbreviation 'CMI.'
[43] *Practical Ethics*, 2nd, 229

very bad thing. It could be argued that this leaves too much discretion to the individual involved, but Singer makes clear that this is his intent in a later writing, where he says the following:

> I therefore used the phrase 'comparable moral importance' rather than 'comparable suffering', in order to allow readers to judge for themselves what is of comparable moral importance. Some, for example, may think that to cheat or steal to get money that could save the lives of people in the Third World would be to sacrifice something of comparable moral importance, namely the breach of the moral rules that prohibit such actions...The range of things that might be argued to be of comparable moral importance is wide…[44]

This may seem to eviscerate his CMI principle, but he argues that it still has force, even though its application and interpretation is subject-dependent. He says, "…there will be many things on which we spend money that we do not truly believe to be of comparable moral importance to death by starvation…"[45] But if the emphasis is on the 'we' in the phrase "we do not truly believe" then a large discretion is left to the individual applying the principle and what that individual 'truly believes.' It is reasonable to imagine that many well-meaning, conscientious, and benevolent people could 'truly believe' that sending their children to college so they can have a decent life among their peers is of comparable importance to the life of someone they have no connection to in the

[44] *Singer and His Critics,* 303.
[45] Ibid.

Darfur region of the Sudan. And others may think that a new car for their college child is of similar moral importance, and new clothes, and vacations to relieve the stress, and on and on. At some point the comparison would obviously shift to the life of the Darfurian having more moral importance, but that point is relative to each individual and their honesty in the evaluation, assuming they apply the principle at all. I don't believe such head-to-head comparisons are the right approach. Clearly the life of a person is of more importance than an automobile, but few would be willing to forego an automobile (if they want or need one) until no one in the world is starving. A more reasonable approach is to make some accommodation for all the various moral obligations and needs of life. First one should fulfill direct obligations, and then consider the needs of those who are not our dependents, but who nevertheless deserve considerations of beneficence by virtue of being fellow humans. My Periodic Personal Plan and Hierarchy of Moral Obligations model provide the mechanism to set moral priorities in a rational and responsible way.

Meanwhile, Singer further argues for the broad acceptance of his principle by observing that;

> Most non-consequentialists hold that we ought to prevent what is bad and promote what is good. Their dispute with consequentialists lies in their insistence that this is not the sole ultimate ethical principle: that it is an ethical principle is not denied by any plausible ethical theory.[46]

[46] *PE*, 2nd, 230.

This observation seems uncontroversial. But most people (consequentialists or not) are not inclined to be impartial in their efforts to prevent bad and promote good, and ordinary moral thinking supports some partiality.

Singer argues that his CPI principle is deceptive, that if it was "taken seriously and acted upon, our lives and our world would be fundamentally changed." We would not only save children in shallow ponds in the rare situations we come upon them, but we would also regularly (perhaps constantly) attempt to save people living in absolute poverty. He argues that "…we have an obligation to help those in absolute poverty that is no less strong than our obligation to rescue a drowning child from a pond" and that it would be wrong not to do so (not just praiseworthy or supererogatory to do) and it is "something that everyone ought to do." [47]

Pond cases expanded

Since the interpretation and application of the CMI principle is subject-dependent, as discussed above, Singer must be appealing to how we individually ought to evaluate the relative moral significance of matters in our own lives. He is arguing that if saving a drowning child is morally more important than, for instance, being on time for a meeting, then saving a life in Darfur is more important than many routine things in our lives. That may follow logically, as to the specific small cost suggested, but what if the cost of saving the child in the pond is the forfeit of college for our own child? Then the weighing of comparable moral importance is more difficult and reasonable people will differ as to which is

[47] Ibid., 230.

the moral course of action. Even if the subject is impartial as to the two potential victims, the choice is not obvious. Suppose that the child in the pond is one of two identical twin children of the observer. Should the observer (parent) who loves her two twin children equally save the drowning child even if the cost is that the other identical twin on dry land will never be able to go to college? Most parents in the heat of the moment would save the drowning child, and most would probably save the child even if they could reflect on the consequences to the other child, but the choice is not a 'no-brainer.'

Now add some normal partiality, which we all naturally have and Singer later condones within limits, and consider if we should save from a pond a drowning Darfurian child (with whom we have no previous connection or relationship) if the cost was college education for our own child? If we save the child, are we a moral saint or a moral monster? Because I don't think the answer to the last question is obvious, I will argue that we need to either elaborate on Singer's principle or find another one to guide us. We are naturally hesitant to jeopardize important life goals of ourselves and our dependents, even if someone's life is at stake. Ordinary moral thinking would suggest we should not invade our child's college education funds in order to send a donation to Oxfam, even if we believe the donation will save lives.

Before continuing with my critique of Singer and his proposed principle, I will set forth his principle in formal fashion so it is as clear as possible.

Singer's obligation to assist – formally stated:

Singer's argument for an obligation to assist, set out more formally, is as follows:[48]

First premise: If we can prevent something bad without sacrificing anything of comparable significance, we ought to do it.

Second premise: Absolute poverty is bad.

Third premise: There is some absolute poverty we can prevent without sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance.

Conclusion: We ought to prevent some absolute poverty.

Singer observes that "the first premise is the substantive moral premise on which the argument rests" and that he has tried to show that it can be accepted by people who hold a variety of ethical positions.[49] This is a reasonable (but perhaps deceptive) concept and, as Singer argues, most people are unlikely to disagree with the concept regardless of their ethical views. But the disagreement and controversy arises in the application, which I will discuss in connection with the third premise.

The second premise is "unlikely to be challenged" according to Singer, and I don't intend to challenge it because I accept as a premise of my writing on this subject that absolute poverty is bad (unless it is voluntary).

As to the third premise, the main issue, I believe, is whether Singer has overly compromised his principle in attempting to appeal to non-consequentialists.

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[48] Ibid., 230-1.
[49] Ibid., 231.

Would a Kantian who strictly adheres to the imperative not to lie under any circumstance be relieved from the obligation to save a distant life if a lie was required, because he believes maintaining the truth is of CMI to a distant life? Would a libertarian be justified in not saving a life because it infringes on his right to be left alone (his highest ethical principle)? Although others may not agree with the individual assessments made by non-consequentialists, Singer has made clear that the evaluation is subject-dependent, not universal, and not judged by objective standards. The ability to escape the demanding obligations intended by Singer may be too easy if each person can weigh the competing interests without any objective standard. If instead the principle required, for example, measuring the relative amount of suffering and acting to relieve the most suffering, the obligations would be clearer and less likely to be explained away. But then fewer people are likely to ascribe to the principle because it could override other principles they deem important. This is no surprise to Singer who seems to have weighed these options and then deliberately decided to capture a large audience by allowing them to retain pre-determined ethical principles. And there seems to be nothing to prevent a person from adopting Singer's principle with the caveat that they will also adopt certain other values or principles to override overly demanding ethical obligations. Thus Singer has potentially wooed more people to ascribe to his principle, but by doing so he may have allowed them to escape the demanding obligations he intends.

It should be noticed that Singer is no longer trying to "save all the lives we can" as he implies is his goal earlier in the paper. His third premise aspires only

to prevent 'some' absolute poverty. And to get to this result he argues that for utilitarians and those who subscribe to the principle of universalizability, most luxuries are not of CMI to the reduction of absolute poverty. But it seems we can comply with the principle if 'some' luxuries are foregone in order to prevent 'some' absolute poverty. It is only if we continue to apply the principle over and over via an iterative process that we arrive at the demanding obligations Singer is suggesting.

Singer doesn't specifically suggest an iterative process, but instead he finishes his main argument with the observation that the amount of poverty prevented will "vary according to the ethical view one accepts."[50] Thus it seems that instead of being too demanding, the CMI principle could be interpreted in a way that makes it too weak and ineffective, if one's ethical view tends toward egoism.

Objections to the Argument

Taking Care of our Own

Why should we involve ourselves in matters around the world when we already have unmet obligations close to home? Singer says that it is "difficult to see" any sound moral justifications for letting distance or community membership make a crucial difference in our obligations. Although he finds obligations of kinship more problematic, he says that once we have met the "special" obligations to our children (they are "well-fed, well-clothed, well-educated"), then

[50] Ibid., 232.

the needs of the distant poor have a claim on us stronger than the claim of our children for things like new bikes, stereos, and automobiles. He acknowledges the advantages (such as caring for the local poor, ties of affection and personal relationships) of a "recognized system of responsibilities" that families and local communities provide over an impersonal bureaucracy, and thus does not argue against those relationships. He even allows for "a small degree of preference" for family and community. And he does not argue for all to be "equally responsible for the welfare of everyone in the world," but instead limits his argument for the obligation to assist with the absolute poverty that can be prevented without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance or significance. But, he argues, the small degree of preference for family and community is "decisively outweighed by existing discrepancies in wealth and property."[51] While absolute poverty exists in the world, we should not be spending money on things like new bikes, stereo sets, or cars for our children according to Singer.

On a one time basis, choosing between saving a life and buying a bike, , the CMI principle appears reasonable and rational. How can one argue that a new bicycle is as important as a human life? If the choice was presented as a one-time expenditure of funds, it is likely that most parents, and even children who want a bicycle very badly, would agree that if the funds could instead be used to save a human life, the money should go there. But what if every time enough money is available to buy a bicycle, the same choice must be made? The iteration of this choice could run for a *very* long time. Considering that there are approximately 2.4 billion absolute poor in the world, the child will *never* get a

[51] *PE,* 2nd, 233-4.

bicycle if the CMI principle is applied each time. Singer seems to accept this result, since a human life is of greater moral worth than a bicycle, *every time* you compare them. A child can probably grow up and have a happy well-adjusted life without ever having a bicycle. But what about, to use another of Singer's examples, the purchase of an automobile? Except in urban environments such as Manhattan where public transportation is plentiful, the lack of an automobile could severely restrict a person's lifestyle and life options. Making such constant comparisons would be burdensome, especially if the result was predictably always in favor of giving to the poor. A follower of Singer's CMI principle would most likely either (1) live near to subsistence level, or (2) find an ethical system to supplement the CMI principle, as Singer allows and as mentioned above. It is reasonable to expect that those not otherwise inclined to live at subsistence level would supplement any attempt to apply Singer's principle with another ethical system. And the supplemental system could very well offset any burdensomeness of the CMI principle and allow the adherent to ignore the plight of the poor in many situations. If this is correct, then Singer's principle largely fails, since only those otherwise inclined toward the ascetic life would support the poor to the level Singer is suggesting.

In summary, in seems that Singer is now proposing an extremely burdensome principle and then, because almost no one will otherwise follow it, allow it to be modified at the discretion of each individual. This seems like a backdoor way to approach the issue. I propose, instead, that we deal with the issue in a more straightforward way by setting priorities on our moral obligations

and then fulfilling them in order of weight or thickness. Using my HMO as a guide, I propose beginning at the middle and working outwards, allocating resources in such a way that direct obligations such as those owed to our children are fulfilled before moving to outer circles. Necessities for those in the inner circle, including education, would be fulfilled before making any other discretionary expenditure. Assuming money is left over at that stage, one might decide to buy a bicycle for one's child *and* make a contribution to a worthy aid organization such as Oxfam. And if there is not enough money to do both, one could wait until there is enough money (or work out some other compromise). The specifics can be worked out by each individual in his or her own way, but the idea I want to emphasize is that all obligations should be viewed comprehensively and not transaction-by-transaction. My proposed PPP provides the procedure for making these allocation decisions. If one follows such a plan thoughtfully and diligently, one is acting morally and need not fret about isolated decisions such as bicycle vs. save a life. Because I believe it is moral and is reasonable to follow, I propose this system as both a private and a public morality.

Property Rights

Rights to property, if deemed absolute, will subvert any principled ethical argument to assist the poor because then the only grounds for appeal would be to act with charity. The idea of obligations would be incoherent, unless the property is somehow enhanced as a result. But Singer attempts to show that even a libertarian like Robert Nozick, who objects to taxation to redistribute

income, and would object to any obligation to give to the poor, "might accept that giving is something we ought to do and failing to give, though within one's rights, is wrong – for there is more to an ethical life than respecting the rights of others."[52] From the viewpoint of a rights holder this argument is not strong because it merely appeals to one's better nature.

Singer observes that an individualistic theory of property rights is too unpredictable to be an acceptable ethical view. There is no certainty that the poor will be considered and since there is no obligation there is no enforcement mechanism, even psychologically. As an additional appeal to property owners' sense of fairness (and perhaps their sensitivity to the vicissitudes of luck), Singer suggests a thought experiment similar to John Rawls' famous 'veil of ignorance' experiment. He suggests that the reader imagine becoming a citizen of either a rich country such as Bahrain or a poor country such as Chad, but we do not know which. Would we accept in advance a principle that the rich have no obligation to assist the poor? This appeal to fairness may be the best that can be argued to property rights theorists, but the outcome is dependent on the sensibilities of the audience and it leads to no predictable obligations.

More persuasive arguments need to be developed to counter the property rights arguments, but that project is outside the scope of my dissertation. I begin with the premise that the reader is motivated by basic intuitions of beneficence toward others, but pure property rights theorists need not have such intuitions.

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[52] Ibid., 234.

Population and the Ethics of Triage

Singer observes that the population issue may be the most serious objection to his arguments, and he discusses the policy of triage as a method to deal with desperate overpopulation. If there were not enough resources to go around, triage applied to world poverty would result in the people in the poorest countries being left to die of starvation and diseases. The rationale suggested by those who suggest triage is that helping the poor and starving now merely allows for even more poor and starving in the future. As a result, the amount of suffering in the future will be even greater than if we allowed the current poor to perish. Although triage results in "very great evil" in Singer's words, the possible alternative is even a greater evil according to those who advocate triage.

Garrett Hardin has advocated a similar strategy, using a metaphor of rich countries occupying a crowed lifeboat, with the poor of the world in the sea water all around. If the occupants of the lifeboat try to take on board all the poor in the water, the lifeboat will sink and all will drown, including the originals passengers. Hardin's metaphor and his conclusions that we should not try to save all the poor of the world for fear of this consequence has come to be known as 'lifeboat ethics.'[53]

Some have suggested that overpopulation is a myth – that the real problems are inequitable land distribution, manipulation of Third world economies, waste (especially in the West), feeding grain to animals instead of direct

[53] Hardin, Garrett, "Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor," *Psychology Today,* 8, (1974), 38-43, 123-26, reprinted in Aiken, William and Hugh LaFollette, eds., *World Hunger and Moral Obligation* (Prentice-Hall, 1977), 11 – 21.

consumption by humans, and poor distribution. Singer suggests that these issues be addressed before considering drastic strategies such as triage.

Singer also argues against triage and lifeboat ethics by challenging the probability of the disasters described. Rather than react to a disaster that may be improbable, Singer suggests we look for alternatives, which could include such strategies as land reform, smaller families (already happening in some Western countries), education, technology, and population control. The possibility of these other measures being successful makes triage "ethically unacceptable" according to Singer.

Some countries resist population control measures for religious and nationalistic reasons. Is it ethical to condition poverty relief on effective steps being taken to reduce birthrates and thus population? Singer's answers that "we have no obligation to make sacrifices that, to the best of our knowledge, have no prospect of reducing poverty in the long run."[54] Thus if government policies in the target counties make aid ineffective, we have no obligation to assist. We can help more people in the long run by working with countries that are also doing all they can to address the issues of poverty, including population control.

Singer's views are particularly pragmatic on this topic, and I find no reason to criticize his views and suggestions. This "Malthusian" debate is largely empirical and is outside the scope of my dissertation. If one determines that population control is more beneficent or a better public policy than relief of current abject poverty, then one should support and contribute to efforts to limit population in the poorest countries. Pleading ignorance or confusion as to what

[54] *PE*, 2nd, 241.

to do because of this technical debate is not an excuse for doing nothing. One should investigate the facts, make a personal determination of the best way to address abject poverty, and then contribute to that cause.

Leaving it to the Government

Some argue that aid to people in other countries is a government responsibility, and thus individuals have no obligation to be involved directly. And by making contributions it could signal to the government of the donors that citizens consider it an individual responsibility and thus cause the government to reduce or eliminate aid as a priority. Singer argues the opposite; that private contributions signal to governments that foreign aid is a concern of the citizens and thus it should be given a priority. And he argues that those who don't give are refusing to prevent a definite harm for the sake of a very uncertain more positive outcome (i.e., hoping that the government will handle it more effectively). Those who are able should give privately *and* become politically active by lobbying their government to give more foreign aid.

I don't believe it is critical to resolve the empirical debate about the psychological effect of private donations on government programs. Although we should urge our governments to address poverty more comprehensively, we should make individual moral decisions based on the world as it is, not what we hope it will become. Until governments or supranational organizations step into the breech and address world poverty, our moral concerns of beneficence for the poor of the world belongs on our Hierarchy of Moral Concerns.

Too High a Standard?

Perhaps the most common objection to Singer's position is that it is too demanding. As discussed above, his CMI principle can be interpreted as not demanding at all, but the intent Singer has in mind is very demanding – giving until giving more does more harm than good. This would require a huge sacrifice that, as Singer describes the objection, "none but a saint could attain it."[55] He discusses three versions of this general objection:

First Version

The first version of the objection is that human nature resists impartiality and it is absurd to demand that we do what we cannot do. If we are impartial, and thus don't give priority to our own offspring and kin, then our line of descendents will not flourish as well as those who are less altruistic. Garrett Hardin makes the point in his 'lifeboat ethics' that altruism can exist over time only "on a small scale, over the short term, and within small, intimate groups."[56] And Richard Dawkins has written that "universal love and the welfare of the species as a whole are concepts which do not make evolutionary sense."[57]

If Hardin and Dawkins are correct, then those people, families or societies who adopt an impartial ethic will not survive over time, and thus such an ethic is self-defeating if survival of our own future generations is a concern. There is a "very strong tendency for partiality in human being" which seems to promote the survival of our own line of descendants. Taking these considerations into account,

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[55] Ibid., 242.
[56] Ibid., 243. Hardin quoted by Singer.
[57] Ibid., Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene* quoted by Singer.

Singer observes that "we would be foolish to expect widespread conformity to a standard that demands impartial concern, and for that reason it would scarcely be appropriate or feasible to condemn all those who fail to reach such a standard."[58]

Yet this does not hold Singer back from his central message. He goes on to argue that while being impartial is difficult, it is not impossible and the 'ought' implies 'can' objection, which would tell us it is absurd to try to save *all* the poor, does not apply to his principle because we *can* save *some* of the poor by giving up luxuries and thus it is not absurd to hold that we *ought* to.

Singer fails to answer the Hardin/Dawkins objections. If we follow Singer's CMI principle are we less likely to flourish, both in this generation and succeeding ones? Does Singer recognize this possible consequence but deem it less important than doing the ethical thing? Is he saying we should be willing to sacrifice ourselves, our families, and our future generations in pursuit of the ethical life? This is another debate that is outside the scope of my dissertation. My position is that we should act on our moral intuitions, our ordinary moral thinking, which tells us to save the child in the shallow pond and also to do what we can to help others dying of preventable causes.

Second Version

The second version is that a principle with such a high standard is undesirable. This argument was put forward by Susan Wolf in her article "Moral Saints" where she suggests that the purely ethical life (that of a "moral saint") is

[58] Ibid., 243.

not desirable on several counts. Singer focuses on whether a purely ethical life can also be a good life in the fullest sense. As has already been made clear, if we adopt and apply Singer's CMI principle in the way he seems to intend, we would give up luxuries that, according to Wolf and enumerated by Singer, make life interesting: "opera, gourmet cooking, elegant clothes, and professional sport, for a start."[59] In a world of plenty for all, Singer would agree that the rich and varied life described by Wolf may be the most desirable, but if financing this sort of life means that others must endure avoidable suffering it is not, according to Singer, a good life. By analogy, a doctor treating dying victims at a train crash would not be justified, while some victims remain in desperate need of medical care, in going to the opera as part of his plan for a well-rounded and full life. But the analogy Singer makes is incomplete, since it fails to include an iterative function. A more complete analogy would be to position the doctor in the midst of thousands of victims, such that if the doctor attempts to attend to them all he will *never* go to the opera nor will he ever do anything more self-interested than treating the victims. It will not seem ethical to stop at any particular point, since the next victim may be just as deserving as all prior ones, but on that rationale the doctor never stops working. A mechanism for a balance between the ethical life and the personal life is needed, which I address with my PPP and HMO.

Singer discusses the human need for personal relationships based on love and friendship, which obviously require some amount of partiality. He says that to give up on those relationships would be to "sacrifice something of great moral significance. Hence no such sacrifice is required by the principle for which

[59] Ibid., 244.

I am here arguing."[60] Returning to Singer's analogy of the doctor at the train wreck, it now seems that Singer would allow the doctor to stop treating victims if doing so is necessary to maintain close personal relationships, because the relationships are of "great" moral significance. Does this mean they are of "comparable" moral significance to the victims needing medical treatment? It is not clear when the doctor would stop treating victims and go home to his friends and family if he was trying to follow Singer's CMI principle.

Extraordinary events may require extraordinary duties of beneficence, and the doctor may be morally obligated to continue treating train wreck victims until he has done all he can for them, even if it means temporality ignoring his family and friends. But urgent rescue should be the exception and not the rule. A doctor working in an emergency room, where emergencies are commonplace, would not have a similar duty. A doctor following my PPP and HMO suggestions would plan in advance how to allocate his time, leaving sufficient time for family and friends in his inner circle of concern as well as time for the ordinary demands of his job in the emergency room. If he came across a train wreck, then the extraordinary duties of direct rescue would supersede normal duties – both to the hospital and to the family – because of the immediacy of the situation and his unique ability to help.

Third Version

The third and final version of the "too high a standard objection" is that people may do nothing if the principle requires too much. Applying Singer's

[60] Ibid., 245.

analogy from above, if the doctor is told he must treat all the victims in order to fulfill his moral obligation under the CMI principle, he may decide not to get involved at all and refuse to treat any. The demandingness of the principle would have caused the principle to fail. Thus Singer argues that public advocacy of the CMI principle is undesirable if it would lead to less reduction in absolute poverty. But he maintains that "we ourselves – those of us who accept the original argument, with its higher standard" ought to privately continue to follow the CMI principle.[61]

This 'public-private morality' suggestion comes from Sidgwick, although Singer does not mention Sidgwick in this particular discussion. He justifies this approach on consequentialist grounds, "The consequences of a principle are one thing, the consequences of publicly advocating it another."[62] This is a variant, according to Singer, of the two-level "intuitive-critical" morality suggested by R.M. Hare. The intuitive level morality would be publicly advocated, but the critical (more demanding) morality ought to be privately followed. Singer suggests that this dual approach will lead to the best consequences, that is, "the largest amount being given by the affluent to the poor."

Singer then considers what should be publicly advocated, since anecdotal evidence suggests to him that the CMI principle is too demanding for public consumption. He settles on ten percent of one's income – "more than a token donation, yet not so high as to be beyond all but saints." Some families will find this too high, while others can give more without a strain, so Singer allows for

[61] Ibid., 245.
[62] Ibid.

some individual judgment and flexibility, but concludes that those of average or above incomes in affluent societies ought to give a tenth unless there are special circumstances. But he says this is minimum and "we do wrong if we do less."[63]

It seems now that ten percent of income (except as to those with special circumstances) is what Singer says we should publicly advocate, and that those I will call 'on the inside' should follow the CMI principle. And to be 'on the inside' means to "accept the original argument, with its higher standard." The challenge now is to determine if we should accept the original argument.

Summary and Conclusions

A first reading of Singer's views on famine and world hunger have the effect of impressing most readers that the affluent are not doing nearly enough to help their fellow humans who happen to be poor – particularly those who are *absolutely poor*. And his proposed solution – application of the CMI principle – is also hard to resist if the reader believes that a human life is more valuable (specifically, of more moral importance) than luxuries or the inconvenience of doing what is necessary to help the poor. The pond case reinforces this moral intuition. How could we ever walk by a shallow pond and not save the life of a drowning child? Only a moral monster would keep on walking.

And although subsequent readings may confirm this conviction, a further study of Singer's proposed solution and the repeated application of pond case scenarios begin to demonstrate that something is wrong with this solution. In isolated cases we would be moral monsters to not save the drowning child, but

[63] Ibid., 246.

what if there were endless children drowning right before our eyes – so many that we would *never* leave the pond if we tried to save them all? Then the choice is no longer making a simple choice between saving a child and indulging in personal luxuries, now the choice is between saving as many children as we possibly can versus living our own lives. This iterative process reveals the basic flaw in Singer's proposal.

The Pond Case is brilliant for its ability to focus the reader's attention on the relevant importance of life itself compared to other priorities. And the analogy to the plight of the world's absolute poor is morally persuasive despite its disanalogies. Singer focuses our attention on the fact that people are dying and that is bad, that we can help and that is good, and thus we should help. The logic is understandable to all, even those who, as a policy matter, disagree that we should be saving the desperate poor and instead think, for instance, that we should be limiting population. The message is clear and persuasive, we should save the absolute poor that we can, or work to achieve sustainable populations, or do something else of similar urgent importance. Singer's strong or CMI principle seems to follow from the pond case, but the CMI principle is too demanding because of the iteration problem. If one could save a person with a modest donation, they should do so, end of story. But the story doesn't end because of the massive numbers of absolute poor. If one strictly followed Singer's CMI principle that person would live a life of financial poverty, and that just can't be a moral obligation for most people. Singer's himself doesn't do it,

and it is unreasonable to propose it as a moral requirement, either privately or publicly.

Singer's weaker or AMS principle has another problem. It fails to produce the sacrifice that Singer has in mind, although it does provide a useful way to think about priorities when making life-plan decisions. While considering one's various obligations during my proposed Periodic Personal Plan (PPP) process, we should challenge ourselves to ask the question whether our spending priorities are of "moral significance" compared to the plight of the absolute poor of the world. If this question is considered seriously, many people will give more than they otherwise would have, thanks to Singer's inspiration.

Similarly, his suggestion that readers can supplement the CMI principle with "the ethical view one accepts"[64] has the effect of releasing the reader from the demanding grip of the CMI. Again I observe that Singer's views best serve as inspiration for those serious about moral obligations to investigate further and to find a workable moral system. His comparisons and analogies focus attention on the severity of world poverty, and now we are inspired to devise a reply that is reasonable and responsible as to all relevant parties in our lives.

People who make the life choice to serve mankind (Mother Theresa, Gandhi, and Jesus come to mind) are generally regarded as moral saints, and are generally very highly regarded as models of what a pure moral life would entail. For those inclined to give up their lives in service to their fellow humans, Singer provides a roadmap of a rational argument to justify that choice. But what about most readers who want to do the right thing but also want to have a life,

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[64] *Practical Ethics*, 2nd, 232.

friends, a family, a career, and experience the pleasures and joys that life has to offer? Then Singer's CMI principle is not a viable solution.

And although Singer's fall-back position, annual contribution of 10% of income to the poor (which he later modifies to 1%)[65], as a public policy position is more palatable, it loses the urgency that his CMI principle creates. There is something very noble about the CMI principle (even if it is unrealistic for most) but that nobleness fails to carry over when a 10% or 1% solution is substituted. Once we are released from the grip of the nobler and more urgent moral calling, then any other standard seems arbitrary and not urgent. If 10% or 1% is ok why not some other percentage, especially when the budget is tight, the family needs money, the kids want bikes or are going to college, and so on?

But this is certainly not to dismiss Singer entirely. He makes many other useful points that will be helpful in constructing a viable solution, and perhaps more importantly he creates the inspiration to find a viable solution. Even though we find fault with his proposals, the overwhelming suffering of the absolute poor that he describes inspires those with moral intuitions to help others to search for solutions, even if the solutions are long term and involve trade offs between current suffering and even greater suffering by future generations. The influence of Singer will be evident in my own proposals.

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[65] Singer, Peter, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*, 2nd Ed. (Yale University Press, 2002), 194. In a 2006 article he suggested a range of 10% to 33.3% of annual income for the wealthiest of Americans (the top 10% to the top .01%). Singer, Peter, "What Should a Billionaire Give – and What Should You?" (A philosopher's case for donating more than you're comfortable with), *The New York Times Magazine* (December 17, 2006), 58, 80.

Chapter Two – John Arthur

"Rights and the Duty to Bring Aid" (1977)

Summary of Singer

In a 1977 article, and subsequent articles, John Arthur responded to Peter Singer. I will discuss the articles in chronological order, indicating where Arthur's thinking may have changed in the later articles. In the first article, "Rights and the Duty to Bring Aid," [66] Arthur critiques Singer's 1972 article, argues against certain of Singer's conclusions, and offers a substitute moral principle of benevolence, which would apply to world poverty as well as more broadly.

Arthur takes no issue with Singer's proposition that "suffering and death from lack of food, shelter and medical care are bad."[67] He then recites the two formulations of Singer's principle; the strong position which I call the "CMI Principle" (for Comparable Moral Importance, and which Arthur calls "the greater moral evil rule" in a subsequent article), and the moderate or weak position, which I call the AMS Principle (for Anything Morally Significant). He questions how either the strong or the weak principle can be established. One method would be to show, by philosophical argument, that Singer's principles follow from "reasonably well established premises or from a general theory" and another would be to show that the principles "underlie particular moral judgments the

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[66] Arthur, John, "Rights and the Duty to Bring Aid" in Aiken, William and Hugh LaFollette, eds, *World Hunger and Moral Obligation* (Prentice-Hall, 1977), 37- 48. [Arthur 1977]. This article was reprinted in the second edition by Aiken and LaFollette (but with a different book title): Aiken and LaFollette, eds, *World Hunger and Morality*, 2nd Ed. (Prentice-Hall, 1995), 39 – 50.

[67] Arthur 1977, 38, citing Singer 1972, 231.

truth of which is accepted."[68] Arthur claims that Singer does not specifically follow either of these methods, but he observes that Singer "seems to have the second in mind,"[69] and thus he challenges Singer on the basis of general moral reasoning and not on the basis of any particular moral theory.

Response to Singer's principle – weak version

Arthur first considers the moderate form of Singer's principle and concludes that it fails to be effective, primarily because the phrase "morally significant" (or of "moral importance")[70] is not analyzed by Singer, and thus the interpretation is left with each individual, resulting in very little moral force for the principle. Arthur argues, referring to the shallow pond case, that some may consider dirtying one's clothes or not being well-dressed (because of wet and dirty clothes) to be of moral importance. To emphasize his point, Arthur argues that if all the unhappiness and embarrassment caused by poor dressing in the world could be eliminated at trivial cost, then it would be good to do so, "perhaps even wrong not to" and thus of moral importance.[71] And if fashion or occasional dirty clothes are morally important then even more so are many other things in life, and duties to the poor under Singer's moderate principle could easily be avoided. For these reasons, according to Arthur, the weak principle "does not generally establish a duty to provide aid to starving people," and he elaborates

[68] Arthur 1977, 39.
[69] Ibid. And Singer also specifically says he was not making a utilitarian argument. As we see later in this chapter, Richard Miller calls this second method "ordinary moral thinking."
[70] Both Arthur and I, and apparently Singer, consider these two phrases to be synonymous. Arthur 1977, 39 footnote 5.
[71] Arthur 1977, 40.

further to say that *either* a loss of something valuable or a loss that results in increased unhappiness or decreased happiness would defeat such a duty.[72]

Response to Singer's principle – strong version

Arthur next considers the strong ("CMI") Singer principle. The importance of the meaning of "moral importance" is even more crucial in this evaluation, since the test of "*comparable* moral importance" requires both recognizing moral concerns and also weighing them. Arthur presents an "obvious" interpretation of CMI and then argues it is inadequate. The "obvious" interpretation is that Singer's strong principle is (or "resembles") an act utilitarian principle.[73] Arthur argues that Singer's principle fails to account for the "apparent right to give added weight to one' own choices and interests, and to ownership."[74] The concept of rights, as well as deserts, are key to Arthur's criticisms.

Arthur uses examples to make his point. He argues, for instance, that one should not be required to give away extra body organs (e.g., eye or kidney) just because such an act will benefit the recipient more than it will harm the donor when "comparable" moral importance is the only test. Even if extraordinary situations may call for such sacrifices, "this is not true in every case where (slightly) more good would come of your doing so"[75] and so CMI should not be a principle that applies without exceptions. And another example explains that important personal reasons (such as life goals and projects) should weigh more

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[72] Ibid.
[73] Even though, as I have already mentioned, Singer claims in a later paper that a utilitarian argument was not his intent.

[74] Arthur 1977, 42.
[75] Ibid.

than otherwise equal non-personal reasons in making decisions, even if the non-personal reasons affect family members. He says, it is "after all, *her* life and *her* future and she is entitled to treat it that way" and if the welfare of one's family is secondary to one' own goals and well-being, then the welfare of the global poor is *a fortiori* secondary. These examples serve to argue that legitimate ownership and important personal priorities should be given extra weight in applying the CMI principle, contrasted with Singer's *impartial* application of the principle. Just as Singer reached his conclusions using ordinary moral reasoning, Arthur reaches different conclusions using similar reasoning. Based on a common moral intuitions and ordinary reasoning, Arthur reasons that "blind" weighing of relevant interests is not required for morality, since our own personal ownership rights and important interests are entitled to special consideration. He concludes that "Servility, though perhaps not a vice, is certainly not an obligation that all must fulfill."[76]

Arthur's argument against a purely utilitarian interpretation of the phrase "moral significance" is summarized as "it is far too simple to suggest that *only* the total good produced is relevant."[77] He argues that personal goals (such as quality education for one's children) and legitimate ownership rights (ownership of the college funds) should be given additional weight against other impartial considerations such as the total good. These non-utilitarian arguments are meant to refute Singer, even though Singer did not specifically argue for a utilitarian interpretation in his 1972 article. But Singer did seem to intend that the

[76] Ibid, 43.
[77] Ibid.

CMI principle be applied impartially, although he later made allowances for personal relationships.[78] It appears that thinking similar to Arthur's may have had an influence on Singer's evolving position.

Arthur concludes this portion of his discussion with the concept of a range of cases, bounded on either end of the range by two limiting cases, and with the cases between these two extremes falling within "an acceptable principle of benevolence."[79] On one end is the case where one fails without reason to consider the interests of others (e.g., the failure to rescue a drowning child, due to lack of interest). This callous position is wrong (and presumably falls short of morality) per Arthur. On the other end is the case of one who fails to consider her *own* interests (e.g., the failure to consider one's own life goals in making marital decisions). This servile position is beyond what morality should require. Now the task is to better specify the cases between the extremes.

Duties and Rights

In the next discussion Arthur distinguishes types of duties and corresponding rights. A positive duty is one that arises even though the actor "did not *do anything* that created the situation" such as an innocent passer-by who observes a child in a shallow pond. A contractual duty is one where the actor is called on to act in accordance with an agreement, such as the case of a lifeguard who observes a child drowning in a swimming pool where the lifeguard is on duty. A negative duty arises where the actor is called on *not* to act, such as

[78] Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 2nd, 233-4.
[79] Ibid, 44.

a the duty not to *cause* a child to drown. Not all duties entail corresponding rights of the other party, but some do. In the examples given above, the positive duty to save the child does not necessarily entail a right of the child to be saved, but both the contractual duty and the negative duty cases entail corresponding rights of the child (and/or the child's parents). In general, acts of benevolence are positive duties and do not entail rights of the other party. As Arthur explains: "Obviously, one ought to aid a drowning child (at least) in cases where there is no serious risk or cost to the passer-by. This is true even though there is no obvious right that the child has to be aided."[80]

But he goes further and says that if saving the child requires using someone's boat without permission, still it ought to be done. In this case duties to bring aid override duties not to violate property rights, but "depending on the circumstances, duties to aid and not to violate rights can each outweigh the other."[81] In one sense the passer-by has a right not to act (to be left alone), but he is "obligated not to exercise that right because there is a stronger duty to give aid."[82] Similarly, owners of food (or money) have the right to use their food or money as they see fit, but that right could be overridden by the duty of benevolence to aid the hungry in some situations, as Arthur will explain. And this duty may exist even though the hungry have no specific rights to food.

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[80] Ibid, 45.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

Arthur's "No Substantial Cost" Principle of Benevolence

Arthur is now positioned to propose his own "adequate" principle of benevolence, which is as follows: "If it is in our power to prevent death of an innocent without sacrificing anything of *substantial* significance then we ought morally to do it."[83] He proposes a similar principle in subsequent articles:

> "a reasonable code would require people to help when there is no substantial cost to themselves, that is, when what they are sacrificing would not mean significant reduction in their own or their families' level of happiness."[84]

The critical issue is to determine the meaning of "substantial significance." Arthur says that one has no duty to act under this principle unless his own physical and psychological needs have first been met. Physical needs include, for example, food, clothing, health care, housing, and sufficient training to provide these things. The concept of psychological needs is explained in the negative as "if the lack of x would not affect the long-term happiness of a person, then x is of no substantial significance."[85] Lack of "long-term happiness" means unhappiness over an extended period of one's life, not momentary unhappiness. For example, dirtying one's clothes to save a drowning child is not of substantial significance, and so the duty of benevolence would apply. Giving up something of substantial significance for others would be an act of charity, not fulfillment of a duty, according to Arthur. Thus the order of priority under Arthur's principle of

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[83] Ibid., 47.
[84] Arthur, John, "Equality, Entitlements, and the Distribution of Income, [Arthur 1981], 368, and repeated in Arthur, John, "Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code" [Arthur 1996], 823.
[85] Arthur 1977, 47.

beneficence would be: first, satisfy your own physical and psychological needs, second, act on duties of benevolence to others (if no significant cost), and third, act on charity if so inclined (a voluntary matter, not a duty).

A consequence of Arthur's principle, as interpreted by Arthur himself, is that "duties of benevolence increase as one's dependence on possessions for living a happy life decreases."[86] Thus, considering two people with equal wealth, the one with the more modest needs for happiness will have greater duties of benevolence and the one who requires greater expense on self to be happy will have less duties of benevolence. There is something disconcerting about this consequence, but Arthur doesn't elaborate on the point.[87] He suggests, however, that his principle does have the capacity to be demanding - "My own feeling is that if the principle were to be applied honesty, those of us who are relatively affluent would discover that a substantial part of the resources and time we expend should be used to bring aid."[88] The hard question of whether anything is of substantial significance, and thus avoids duties of beneficence, is "a question between each of us and our conscience."[89] Thus the individual judgment aspect of Arthur's principle may be summarized as "let your conscience be your guide."

In summary, Arthur claims that he has proven Singer's CMI principle to be inadequate to establish obligations to the starving, but that his own principle distinguishes and clarifies circumstances of duty from those of charity.

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[86] Ibid., 48.
[87] Others have discussed this point, including Richard Miller, Ronald Dworkin, and Garrett Cullity.

[88] Arthur 1977, 48
[89] Ibid.

"Equality, Entitlements, and the Distribution of Income" (1981)

In a 1981 article, "Equality, Entitlements, and the Distribution of Income"[90] Arthur continued his discussion of this topic.

Equality and the Duty to Aid

He first addresses the issue of equality, in consideration of the views of other philosophers who have argued, for instance, that all humans have "equal rights to the necessities of life."[91] Arthur considers two views of equality. One is the view that Thomas Jefferson expressed in the *Declaration of Independence*, that "all men are created equal" which Arthur interprets as meaning that no man is the moral inferior of another, and that all men share certain rights equally, such as life and liberty. The other view of equality he explores is the view of Peter Singer, which Arthur expresses as follows: "like amounts of suffering (or happiness) are of equal significance, no matter who is experiencing them…equality demands equal consideration of interests as well as respect for certain rights."[92] Thus we have at least two concepts of equality; equal rights (Jefferson's meaning) and equal interests or moral equality (Singer's meaning).

Arthur derives Singer's meaning of equality from an analysis of Singer's strong (or CMI) moral principle, which Arthur now calls "the greater moral evil rule" because the rule as interpreted by Arthur says that "people are entitled to

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[90] Arthur, John, "Equality, Entitlements, and the Distribution of Income" © 1981 by John Arthur, in Vincent Barry, ed., *Applying Ethics: A Text with Readings*, 2nd Ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1985). [Arthur 1981]

[91] Arthur 1981, 359, referencing and quoting Richard Watson, "Reason and Morality in a World of Limited Food" in Aiken & LaFollette – 1977, reprinted in Vincent Barry – 1985, 352.

[92] Arthur 1981, 360.

keep their earnings only if there is no way for them to prevent a greater evil by giving them away".[93] Equal consideration of interests, or impartiality, naturally leads to the "the greater moral evil rule."

Rights and Desert

Arthur agrees with Singer that "giving equal consideration to equally serious needs" is part of our moral code and that we are right to conclude that we should prevent harm to others if we can without sacrificing something of comparable moral importance.[94] But he says Singer, and others with like views, have failed to fully consider other competing interests – i.e., entitlements, which includes rights and deserts.

As a demonstration of rights trumping equal interests, Arthur argues that our common moral instincts tell us it is your right to keep your own body parts (e.g., eye or kidney) and to withhold sexual favors, even if another person would benefit more if you gave these things away. Giving away a body part to save a life may be heroic, but our intuitive moral code does not require such heroism.

He distinguishes negative, positive and contractual rights; negative rights are natural and require noninterference, positive rights are not natural and require recipience, and contractual rights arise by consent. Although both the needy and the non-needy may have any or all of these rights, Arthur is concentrating here on the rights of the non-needy.

Desert is explained with an example of two farmers, one industrious and the other lazy. Arthur argues that the industrious farmer may be entitled to keep

[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.

the products (the deserts) of his hard work, even if his lazy neighbor may benefit more from the products.

Singer's CMI principle is forward-looking (considers consequences) while entitlements are backward-looking (considers past ownership, efforts, transgressions, etc.). Arthur argues that *both* consequences and entitlements belong in our shared moral code, as concluded from ordinary moral thinking, and thus we should not ignore either expected future results or relevant events in the past.

Arthur considers whether Singer's CMI principle could operate effectively if entitlements were considered to have moral significance, but he rejects this on grounds similar to his earlier rejection of Singer's moderate principle, because it lacks force. He says Singer's strong principle, as so modified, would become an "almost empty platitude, urging nothing more than that we should prevent something bad unless we have adequate moral reason not to do so."[95]

Arthur seems to be substituting the phrase "adequate moral reason" for Singer's phrase "comparable moral importance," which has the effect of converting Singer's strong position to a position very similar to his weak position. It is no surprise that Arthur deems this amended principle toothless, as he did Singer's weak position. In reaching this conclusion, Arthur is tacitly admitting that entitlements are not of comparable moral importance to the lives of starving people, and he assumes that Singer has the same view, i.e., "that entitlements

[95] Ibid, 362.

are not among the sacrifices which could balance off the suffering caused by failing to help people in need."[96]

Arthur briefly considers the possibility that entitlements are an unnecessary vestige of past moral codes, considering that past codes can be wrong (e.g., codes that condoned racism and worse) and thus need to be challenged. But he concludes that entitlements rest on even more fundamental moral values that we continue to value highly; fairness, justice and respect. For instance, failure to honor positive deserts (e.g., for earned wages) is unfair, failure to enforce negative deserts (e.g., for past wrongs) is unjust, and failure to honor basic rights is disrespectful. Thus, he argues, entitlements deserve a place in our moral code. Others may argue that these values of fairness, justice and respect (and thus the derivative entitlements) are less important than preventing suffering, but Arthur says this is not obvious. Since there is no clear reason to give preference in a moral code to either entitlements or the CMI principle over the other, Arthur claims we are at an impasse at this stage of reasoning.

The impasse arises because Arthur wants both entitlements and moral duties to the poor to count, but he knows that in an isolated head-to-head contest, the poor seem to have the better argument because of the greater and more urgent need. The problem arises when the starving are compared head-to-head with other moral considerations. In such a contest, the starving will almost always win, just as the duty to rescue the child in the drowning pond will trump most other obligations. But I suggest this is not a reasonable or rational way to make life decisions. The dramatic situation of the desperate needs of the

[96] Ibid.

starving or the drowning will trump competing interests, when considered in isolation, but life should not be lived entirely based on “snap-shot” or “time-slice” comparisons, extrapolated and expanded to suggest a complete way of life, as Singer suggests. Arthur is correct that entitlements need to be considered but his own recommendations for an “ideal moral code”, which I will soon examine, fails to integrate entitlements into a life view that also gives adequate consideration to the poor and starving.

Universalizability

Some fundamental moral principles are generally considered basic to all moral rules, and universalizability is one such principle. Kant’s categorical imperative and the Christian “golden rule” are examples of universal principles. Arthur discusses two ways to think of universal principles. The first is that we not make exceptions for ourselves. Thus assuming that we accept at this point either Singer’s CMI principle or the notion of entitlements, then whatever rule we accept should apply to all parties. Thus the rich advocate of entitlements must acknowledge them for the poor as well, and the advocate of the CMI principle must not carve out an exception for himself by claiming entitlements as an excuse. If so applied, then both rules pass the universalizability test.

But universalizability can also be expressed as, must be “equally happy with the result were the roles reversed.”[97] Arthur argues that both rules fail to meet this view of universalizability since our nature is to want the best for ourselves, and thus we will not be happy when the rules don’t favor us. But he

[97] Ibid, 363.

then argues that being *happy* in a role reversal may not be the right test, but instead that we agree that the result is *right.* This analysis fails to indicate whether the CMI principle or the notion of entitlements is more universalizabile, and thus we remain at an impasse.

In summary, the discussion thus far has not resolved if Singer's CMI Principle or entitlements or some combination belong in our moral code. Universalizability does not provide the answer and both of the contending moral rules have significant support in our ordinary moral thinking; the ideal of equal consideration of interests supports Singer's CMI Principle and the values of fairness, justice and respect support the notion of entitlements (rights and desert).

Entitlements and the Ideal Moral Code

Arthur now considers other reasons for entitlements to belong in an ideal moral code by focusing on morality as a whole and the role of a moral code in society. He first compares moral codes with other universal codes such as law, etiquette, and custom. Arthur observes that in some respects moral rules are objective, but not in the same sense as scientific laws which are discovered, not invented by society. But whether a moral code serves its purposes or not is a matter of objective fact, and thus Arthur says that "In important respects morality is not at all subjective."[98] We should support a code which is able to accomplish the purposes of morality, which Arthur argues are, one, to promote our own welfare and two, to promote the welfare of family, friends, and others. Thus the ideal moral code will promote general welfare. To accomplish that purpose the

[98] Ibid, 364.

moral code must be practical, "it must actually work," and for it to work it must "gain the support of almost everyone."[99] A practical moral code must consider certain characteristics of humans; we are sometimes selfish, we are not objective as to matters that we care about (we tend to rationalize to get our way), and we don't have perfect knowledge and thus can't accurately predict consequences of acts.

Thus an ideal moral code will have the practical effect of promoting general welfare. The question Arthur is left to consider is whether entitlements belong in such a code. His short answer is that they belong because a moral code without them will simply not work. We may even agree that the general welfare would be served if we strictly followed Singer's CMI principle, but considering the nature of humans we are unlikely to follow that principle for reasons related to the characteristics of humans mentioned above.

First, we are not generally inclined to be so altruistic that we are willing to give away our savings or our body organs even if others need them more desperately. If the code attempted to require the CMI principle, the results would likely be guilt by those who don't follow it, and conflict between those who abide by the principle and those who don't. Setting a less demanding (i.e., more realistic) moral goal for people may produce a better result because people will be more likely to comply. Arthur suggests we condone people claiming their entitlements, but also praise those who voluntarily give up entitlements for the

[99] Ibid, 366.

benefit of others. He says this strikes a good balance; the rules are practical yet reasonably effective.[100]

Second, a moral code without deserts will fail to provide incentives for people to work, resulting in less earnings and less general welfare.

Third, a general rule encouraging total welfare with a de-emphasis on rights assumes that people are more objective (unbiased) and more knowledgeable than they really are. In certain circumstances it may, for instance, be appropriate to violate a property right to accomplish a greater good, such as taking someone's boat to save a drowning child. But a moral code that allowed rights to be violated whenever one could claim it served the general welfare would be unworkable. A shoplifter, because of his bias toward himself, may try to justify taking an item from a large store based on the reasoning that the general welfare is better served since his improved wealth is relatively greater than the store's loss. A moral code without respect for rights would be unworkable, and thus would not serve the purpose of promoting the general welfare. A particular act of theft may sometimes be welfare maximizing, but it does not follow that a principle calling for welfare maximization in every situation belongs in an ideal moral code. Rights and deserts discourage the tendency to rationalize acts such as shoplifting in the example recited by Arthur.

[100] Ibid, 366-7.

"Sensible stab at an answer"

Because an ideal moral code will include entitlements, Arthur concludes that it is "not always wrong" to invoke rights or deserts to justify not giving aid to the poor. An ideal, or welfare maximizing, code "would not require us to maximize welfare in each individual case."[101] Balancing entitlements against moral obligations to the poor remains the crucial final argument. Arthur "draws the line" with a "sensible stab at an answer" as follows:

> It seems to me, then, that a reasonable code would require people to help when there is no substantial cost to themselves, that is, when what they are sacrificing would not mean significant reduction in their own or their families' level of happiness.[102]

This "no substantial cost" principle is deemed by Arthur as "not that different from our current moral attitudes.[103]

"Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code" (1996)[104]

In a 1996 article, Arthur "refines and extends" some of the arguments in his 1981 article discussed above. The basic arguments of his 1996 article are

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[101] Ibid., 367.
[102] Ibid., 368.
[103] Ibid.
[104] "Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code" © 1996 by John Arthur, in Cahn and Markie, eds., *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues* (2002), pp. 813-825. Arthur states the following on page 824 – "This paper refines and extends some of the arguments in an earlier paper of mine, "Equality, Entitlements, and the Distribution of Income."

the same as this 1981 article, so I will not review it in detail, but I will note some additions.

He notes that as a practical issue distance does matter, so a distance distinction belongs in an ideal moral code. Helping the drowning child but not giving to Oxfam may seem morally arbitrary, but it seems to make good sense in an ideal moral code. He further observes that "entitlements are not absolute – we all have some duty to help."[105] But he does not further elaborate on that duty.

And he notes in a footnote that it "may be more practical to expect people to provide welfare when undertaken collectively, by government, than to do so on their own in the form of private charity enforced only by morality's informal sanctions."[106]I tend to agree with Arthur that the solution to world poverty is a policy matter that probably should be addressed collectively. But the focus of my concerns in this writing is to consider what morality requires of each of us individually and not what constitutes justice in society, although the two subjects will probably be compatible in most situations. Lobbying for a collective solution probably should be undertaken, but until those efforts bear fruit and collective solutions are instituted, we need to know what morality requires of individuals, and that is my subject.

Arthur concludes that our social moral code teaches that although passing by a drowning child whom we can easily save is wrong, "we need not ignore our

[105] Arthur 1996, 824.
[106] Ibid., 824, Footnote 17.

own rights and give away our savings to help distant strangers" solely on the basis of Singer's CMI or greater moral evil principle.[107]

> An ideal moral code must not only be one that can hope to win public support but must be practical and workable in other important ways as well. The ideal code is one that works for people as they are, or as they can be encouraged to become.[108]

Conclusions

Singer inspires us and Arthur brings us back to earth. He reasons that a moral code must be practical for it to work and Singer's CMI principle is not practical because it fails to give consideration to the entitlements of rights and deserts. For example, people have the right to keep both their eyes, even if giving one away could give a blind person sight and thus produce an overall good result. And people have the right to keep what they have earned and to enjoy the fruits (deserts) of their efforts.

Arthur says we must consider entitlements in our moral code, which give recognition to the *past*, in addition to the *forward* looking consequences that Singer advocates. Without entitlements people will lack incentives to work toward personal goals and concepts of justice may be violated. Respect for property rights gives stability to society and discourages people from rationalizing to the position that they are morally entitled to others' property because they will benefit more from it. A moral code for a well-lived life will include entitlements and respect for property rights.

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[107] Arthur 1996, 816.
[108] Ibid., 821.

Although Arthur recognizes a duty of benevolence in regard to others, his proposed principle (which I named the “no substantial cost” principle) may move too far in the direction of self-interest. His principle would not require one to help others, regardless of their absolute poverty, if the cost is substantial, meaning that it would cause a significant reduction in one’s own or one’s family’s level of happiness. If happiness is diminished because one must give up important life goals such as education, worthwhile projects, etc., then Arthur’s principle seems justified. But in our affluent society, many people could make substantial contributions to benefit others without reducing their overall standard of living, and without significantly reducing any objectively real reasons for happiness. Many people in the world have excess wealth, which I describe here as more wealth than is necessary for a fulfilling life. A reduction in level of happiness resulting from a decrease in one’s level of *excess* wealth, because it is used to help the desperately poor, is not a moral reason to avoid duties of beneficence. Thus Arthur’s principle seems to primarily protect those who really can’t afford to give substantial amounts away because their own life would suffer. My fear is that his principle can easily be abused by those who claim (and may really believe) that any substantial reduction in their wealth significantly reduces their happiness, even though their standard of living doesn’t diminish and they may still have excess wealth. If one’s standard of living is well above that necessary for a fulfilling life, even a reduction in standard of living is not a moral defense against a duty to practice beneficence.

Arthur himself says that his principle is “not that different from our current moral attitudes.”[109] Our current attitudes seem to allow for excessive accumulation of wealth by some while others in the world starve, and this is not a morally satisfying conclusion.

Although Arthur introduces the concepts of rights, deserts, and property not as absolutes but as balancing factors in reply to Singer’s demanding principle, my concern is that his focus on entitlements can overshadow the duties of benevolence that he also advocates. My PPP procedure calls for a focus on the obligations and needs of all, with the goal of adequately satisfying one’s personal obligations but then turning to general duties of beneficence, taking into consideration the desperate needs of so many in the world. An overemphasis on entitlements is likely to justify the status quo, with no change in attitudes in the direction of beneficence - a change that the world needs and morally requires.

Arthur’s principle meets his criteria of “working in the world” but only for the wealthy. The absolute poor of the world are unlikely to benefit from Arthur’s principle, and thus I believe if is morally inadequate.

[109] Arthur 1981, 368.

Chapter Three - Richard Miller

Introduction

In his writings Richard Miller has assessed the arguments and the proposed principles of Peter Singer regarding world poverty, provided an alternative and less demanding principle using logic similar to Singer's[110], and he has engaged Singer in vigorous (but apparently friendly) face-to-face debate.[111] Citing the "moderate" or "weak" version of Singer's principle, Miller refers to Singer's principle as "The Principle of Sacrifice" which leads to what Miller calls the "Radical Conclusion." Miller calls his alternative principle the "Principle of Sympathy."

Singer derives the radical from the obvious, according to Miller. It is obvious, for instance, that we should spend money to save a person's life before we spend money on a luxury item for ourselves. And it is obvious that we should save a child who we encounter drowning in a shallow pond even if it is inconvenient. Miller refers to this obvious reasoning as "ordinary moral thinking."[112] But as I discussed in Chapter One, and as Miller discusses in both

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[110] Richard W. Miller, "Moral Closeness and World Community" in Chatterjee, Deen K., The Ethics of Assistance: Morality and the Distant Needy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 101-122 (hereinafter R. Miller 2004a). Miller, Richard W. "Beneficence, Duty and Distance" Philosophy & Public Affairs, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Fall 2004), pp. 357 – 383 (hereinafter R. Miller 2004b). Per 11/27/06 email from Richard Miller, "Moral Closeness" was written a year or so before the final version of "Beneficence." Beneficence reflects his more recent thinking.

[111] Debate at Cornell University on April 4, 2003, "What Duties Do People in Rich Countries Have to Relieve World Poverty," sponsored by the Center for the Study of Inequality and the Atlantic Foundation, Moderator: David Grusky, a transcript of which is available at the following website: http://inequality.cornell.edu/events/CAITranscripts.html (hereinafter Singer – Miller 2003 Debate).

[112] Miller uses the phrase "ordinary moral thinking" in R. Miller 2004a and 2004b and also "ordinary moral convictions" or some variation thereof in R. Miller 2004b. The two phrases seem to have the same meaning for Miller (although it is hard to be entirely sure since he does not

his articles, this *obvious* and *ordinary* moral thinking can have a dramatic impact on the thinker's life if it is acted on consistently. Singer provides no obvious stopping point for the application of his principle, resulting in a *reductio ad absurdum* in the opinion of Miller (as well as many other writers). He believes that Singer has misconstrued ordinary moral thinking. Miller proposes to employ ordinary moral thinking to reach a less demanding conclusion (and avoid the *reductio*) and thus a less demanding principle than Singer's. Miller's goal is to ground a case for extensive foreign aid "that could be believable to the vast majority of non-philosophers" who don't believe in a strong duty of impartial concern for needy strangers.[113] Miller's "Principle of Sympathy" is as follows:

> One's underlying disposition to respond to neediness as such ought to be sufficiently demanding that giving which would express greater underlying concern would impose a significant risk of worsening one's life, if one fulfilled all further responsibilities; and it need not be any more demanding than this.[114]

The essence of this principle can be more simply stated as follows: one should be disposed to give to the needy up to the point where giving more would impose a significant risk of worsening one's own life. In my analysis of Miller, I

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cross-reference these two 2004 articles). I will use the phrase "ordinary moral thinking" or "OMT" to attempt consistently and avoid confusion.

[113] R. Miller 2004a, 101.

[114] R. Miller 2004b, p. 359 and (with very minor differences) R. Miller 2004a, p.111.

will first discuss his "Beneficence, Duty and Distance" article ("Beneficence" or Miller 2004b).

Beneficence, Duty and Distance

Observations on Miller's "Sympathy" Principle

Miller claims that his principle occupies an intermediate position "in which it is typically wrong to fill vast closets with designer clothes in a world in which many must dress in rags"[115] but not wrong to occasionally purchase non-essentials or even luxuries for oneself (or for those with whom we have special relationships, such as our children). Ordinary moral thinking does not require us to be ascetic, according to Miller, and occasional luxuries do not violate his Sympathy principle.

Miller advocates equal *respect* for all people, but he distinguishes such respect from equal *concern*. For example, we should treat all the children in our neighborhood with equal *respect*, but our own children should receive special *concern* beyond the concern given to other children. We are entitled to pursue our own worthwhile goals, which may entail the best interests of ourselves, our children, and others with whom we have special relationships, even if this means not being "a more productive satisfier of others' urgent needs."[116] The break with Singer is clear – our own *normal* (but worthwhile) goals may supersede the *urgent* needs of others. Singer advocates impartiality as a basic moral principle, but Miller tells us we can be partial to our own interests and still be moral, while both claim that "ordinary moral thinking" supports their own respective views.

[115] R. Miller 2004b, 360.
[116] R. Miller 2004b, 362.

Although Miller has provided a stopping point to avoid Singer's *reductio*, it seems clear that the stopping point is subjective and thus will be relative to the subject's conception of worthwhile goals. He poses the hypothetical of a person with "an extremely expensive, worthwhile goal of ultra-refined savoring of food and drink." [117] Such a person might need to retain much more for himself to avoid worsening his life and thus "Sympathy reduces the demands of general beneficence in such cases" but it does not "coddle high-fliers in ways that violate ordinary moral convictions."[118] Miller makes clear that the "high-flier" is not be considered *needy* in the sense of the Sympathy principle if his expensive tastes are not fulfilled, but it does seem that the high-flier may be able to justify satisfying his lifestyle before considering the interests of the truly needy. In such cases, the stopping point Miller is attempting to provide to remedy Singer's principle may be moot since the high-flier may never even reach the "starting" point of beneficence. Miller's analysis is unsatisfying on this particular aspect of specifying worthwhile goals. Indulgences should be discouraged, and focusing on the various needs of the world in the context of an HMO model during one's PPP process will move a person of ordinary morality to broaden their scope of concern beyond themselves and their own.

Setting Limits

Another aspect of limits concerns what I have called in Chapter One the "iteration" problem. A solicitation from Oxfam to save the life of a child for a modest amount of money is almost irresistible in its appeal to beneficence,

[117] Ibid, 363.
[118] Ibid.

observed in isolation. But what about the repeated solicitations? The next child to be saved is no less deserving than the first, and the next, and the next … almost *ad infinitum*. At some point the appeal loses its salience and the donor suffers what may be called donor fatigue, and becomes immune to further appeals. Singer argues that we should push through this phenomenon and continue to give until giving does more harm than good (when something of comparable moral significance must be sacrificed in order to continue giving). Miller argues that we can stop when we risk worsening our own lives. But Miller acknowledges that the life-worsening point is difficult to identify since our evaluations are not that fine-grained. He proposes a more general approach to applying his principle; "the Principle of Sympathy is about the basic concern for neediness that characterizes a whole personality, regulating personal policies in the course of a life."[119] Armed with a personal policy of beneficence, Miller suggests that if a person is "sufficiently well-disposed in [his or her] underlying attitude toward the needy" she may cogently resist the additional appeal from Oxfam because it would not create a greater underlying concern for the needy. [120] Miller places emphasis on a personality or attitude of beneficence, rather than on a precise calculation of the boundaries of beneficence. If we agree with Miller, Singer's more objective but "radical" Sacrifice principle is rejected in favor of Miller's subjective but carefully worded "let your conscience be your guide" Sympathy principle. I propose to adopt Miller's thinking but also infuse it with more structure or objectivity by arguing for levels or hierarchies of moral concern.

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[119] Ibid, 365.

[120] Ibid.

Miller argues that in addition to the Sympathy principle's flexibility in resisting repeated solicitations it is also flexible in demanding more in cases of extreme peril or other unexpected circumstances. The principle is designed to require sacrifice at a normal level in normal circumstances, but it requires great sacrifice when circumstances are not normal. Miller's examples of circumstances demanding greater sacrifice are, a fire that destroys the facility of a favorite charity and catastrophes that strike a friend, and quoting Liam Murphy, "catastrophe on an unprecedented scale."[121] Thus Miller would seem to argue for greater sacrifice in the event of suffering caused by a hurricane, but for only normal sacrifice in the normal and everyday circumstances of extreme poverty that claim thousands of lives each and every day. Thus we have a duty to act in the rare event of encountering a drowning child, but if drowning children became commonplace we would be able to limit our duties, at some point (i.e., when we risk worsening our own lives), under the Sympathy principle. If this position can be supported, it provides a welcome relief from the demandingness of Singer's position, but Miller does not provide a clear rationale for distinguishing our moral responses to the everyday versus the extraordinary, except that it aligns with our ordinary moral thinking as he interprets such thinking. This seems to violate Hume's "can't derive an *ought* from an *is*" principle – i.e., the fact of our feeling/intuitions tells us, without warrant, what we ought to do. Are we justified in following our ordinary moral thinking without reconciling like cases where our thinking suggests different levels of duties? Are our intuitions reliable? I propose that these distinctions are more

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[121] Ibid, 365-366.

defensible if they are considered in the context of what I call a Periodic Personal Plan (PPP) wherein the urgent needs of the distant poor are considered and reflected upon alongside other needs and obligations of a well-rounded and obligation-prioritized life. Miller and I have similar goals, I believe, but I suggest a process and a structure to make these ideas practical and workable and more morally reliable.

Grounding Sympathy in Respect

Miller observes that "most of us are committed to vague yet comprehensive principles of moral duty" that generally include such general precepts as equal respect for all persons and equal worth to everyone's life.[122] These precepts are vague and need further interpretation, according to Miller, and he proposes his Principle of Sympathy as an "adequate expression of the fundamental general perspective of moral equality."[123] It is not internally inconsistent, per Miller, for one to respect the equal worth of everyone's life through sensitivity to their needs and yet to limit sensitivity when it threatens to worsen one's own life. Miller begins his analysis with the general precept of moral equality, argues that there are various interpretations of equality depending on the circumstances (which we derive from ordinary moral thinking or OMT), gives these vague interpretations structure and dimension in his Sympathy principle, argues that the principle is not internally inconsistent, and thus fortifies his interpretation of our moral intuitions. But fortifying is not the same as justifying, so if our OMT is faulty, then our fortified

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[122] Ibid, 366.

[123] Ibid, 367.

OMT in the form of the Sympathy principle is likely to be faulty as well with this line of argument. We can't claim that our moral intuitions are justified, but we can say that they are capable of being clarified and coherently argued for, thanks to Miller as well as Singer.

I will not further investigate or attempt to justify the validity of our moral intuitions, but I will continue to assume that the intuition to save a child drowning in a shallow pond is morally valid, and reasonable extensions of that basic intuition are arguably also morally valid, within reasonable limits. Along with Miller, I argue that the demands of concern for others may morally be limited to avoid worsening one's own life. But in addition I propose a procedure and a visual model describing levels of moral concerns to facilitate the prioritization of moral obligations.

Another possible challenge to Miller's position (and mine) is to assert that moral equality *does* entail equal concern for all. This appears to be Singer's position, with some caveats for valuable personal relationships, but Miller argues that Singer "misconstrues ordinary morality."[124] Miller argues that equal respect, which he says does not entail equal concern, is all that is required for moral equality. OMT tells us that a neighbor's daughter deserves respect equal to that shown to our own daughter, but not equal concern.[125] Although Singer would condone unequal concern if it leads to overall well-being (the ultimate goal of impartial concern, per Singer)[126], Miller argues that unequal concern is moral whether or not it produces overall well-being. Miller would save his daughter from

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[124] Ibid, 358.
[125] Ibid, 367.

[126] Singer, One World, 2nd Ed. (2004), pp. 154-67.

a burning building even if it meant he could not save "a surgeon with exceptional life-saving skills" and he would justify this act as compatible with equal respect for all even though it does not necessarily contribute to overall well-being.[127] In another example, Miller argues that a doctor working long hours in an emergency room is justified in quitting to set up a suburban practice if that move expresses his concern for his family life. Such a move is compatible, he argues, with equal respect for all (although perhaps not equal concern) and is morally justified even if society would benefit more if he stayed in the emergency room.[128]

My prioritization of moral obligations would also allow the personal autonomy suggested by Miller. In my model of moral priorities one is entitle to give first priority to oneself and one's important personal goals and projects, such as career choice, along with a priority and an obligation as to those one is directly responsible for, such as one's young children.

Although he says it would be wrong to invariably show partiality to his daughter over others, Miller justifies spending money for his daughter's excellent college education (versus a cheaper but not as good college education) when the extra money could have been given to Oxfam to save lives.[129] He asserts that this choice does not "manifest unequal respect or show that I attribute less worth to some lives than to others."[130] This is not surprising, considering Miller's arguments,

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[127] R. Miller 2004b, 368 and Singer- Miller 2003 Debate, 8-9. In their 2003 debate (Singer-Miller 2003 Debate), Miller suggests that Singer's principles would require him to save the surgeon in this situation, which Miller finds "distasteful" (p. 14) but Singer says he would save his daughter even though he is not sure he could justify that choice (p. 16).

[128] R. Miller 2004a, 103 and R. Miller 2004b, 368.

[129] R. Miller 2004a, 103 and R. Miller 2004b, 369.

[130] R. Miller, 2004b, p. 369.

but he goes further. He says he can justify spending on his daughter's clothing so she can exercise her sense of style because it "expresses an appropriate valuing of our special relationship, and not the horrendous view that her life is worth more than the life of a child in a village in Mali", and he specifically relates the badness of plain clothing for a typical child as "not so different" from the badness of going to a cheap mediocre college.[131] Both would apparently impose a significant risk of worsening her life, and thus the Sympathy principle allows this spending for the daughter. This view *may* indeed express our OMT, or at least express how we usually act (whether or not we are thinking morally), but it is surprising to see it argued for as moral. I suspect that this view does *not* express our OMT, but instead expresses our desires for personal well-being and involves a rationalizing away of stronger moral demands. Expensive clothing is not, in my view, of comparable moral importance to a quality education, but my PPP process would not necessarily prohibit expensive clothing. My PPP only requires that one focus and reflect on moral obligations and duties of beneficence considering all the facts, and not that we arrive at particular conclusions.

Imposing one's moral priorities on others, even one's own children, may be a more serious matter than imposing those values on oneself. I may choose, without negative moral consequence, to forego a more expensive education for myself, choosing instead to give the saved tuition costs to those in dire need. But to make that choice on behalf of my child raises a serious moral question. In this sense, my child's education carries more moral weight than my own, according to my own moral intuitions. Although I personally consider wardrobe (mine and my

[131] Ibid, 370.

child's) as significantly less important, the same priority between me and my child (as with education) seems to apply. I can limit my wardrobe spending in order to further benefit the poor, but imposing that value on my daughter's "sense of style" does seem to pose a moral question. Thus I don't fault Miller's conclusion regarding wardrobe, although I think it tests the limits of family obligations.

Rejecting Singer's Principle

Singer's principle requires an evaluation of the moral significance of every purchase, and since it would be highly unusual that a purchase of a luxury or a frill will ever be morally significant (and certainly not comparable in moral importance to a human life), a strict adherent to Singer's principle will always choose instead to give to the poverty stricken. And thus luxuries will be abstained from for an entire lifetime, and would make it impossible to pursue worthwhile goals that involve non-essential purchases. This is the iteration problem. Each individual purchase is not morally significant, but the "loss imposed by enduring commitment to the principle" is morally significant, according to Miller, and this justifies a less demanding commitment, such as the Sympathy principle.[132]

But Miller argues that his Sympathy principle will also influence one not to make regular luxury purchases, although it will allow occasional luxury purchases. Reasons he provides for the Sympathy principle adherent to avoid the luxury purchase include the following: the purchase violates a personal policy (such as only buying fancy clothes on sale); or it violates a personal policy he should adopt, but hasn't yet, to resist departures from Sympathy; or life is not worse without the

[132] Ibid, 371.

purchase.[133] Because we humans are so vulnerable to inadequate general sensitivity to the needs of others and are often inclined to violate the principle of Sympathy, Miller says we should abstain from luxury purchases (in the absence of special considerations) and instead make donations "now"[134] (supposedly while we are properly motivated and before our selfish nature takes control again). Here I depart from Miller. I propose that we not act on impulse, even if the impulse is for a beneficial cause. Instead I propose that our various obligations be considered in a calm, deliberate fashion away from the influence of an appeal of a charity or the appeal of our child for the latest fashion. Once these priorities are established, in broad terms, individual decisions are easier to make and are also more likely to reflect our overall goals and priorities in a well-lived moral life.

Rescue and Distance

Miller next considers if Singer's shallow pond case exposes a conflict between Sympathy and OMT. The pond case does appeal to OMT, but Sympathy would not seem to require a response to the child in the pond if it significantly risks worsening one's life (e.g., missing a plane to a make an appointment that will make or break one's career). Yet Miller explains how Sympathy and nearby rescue (as in the pond case) are not incompatible.

Miller analyzes the grounds for adopting a policy of special responsiveness to those in urgent peril who are near: one, we have a strong impulse to help in such circumstances and there is usually no good reason to suppress this impulse, two, this impulse plays a distinctive coordinative role in

[133] Ibid, 372.
[134] Ibid.

society for dealing with disasters, reducing the probability of disastrous delay in meeting urgent needs, and three, the mutual duty of reciprocity upon encounter makes us feel less lonely and vulnerable in the world and thus serves a deep social purpose.[135] Miller's Principle of Nearby Rescue is as follows:

> One has a duty to rescue someone encountered closeby who is in imminent peril of severe harm and whom one can help to rescue with means at hand, if the sacrifice of rescue does not involve a grave risk of harm of similar seriousness or of serious physical harm, and does not involve wrongdoing.[136]

Miller argues that the Principle of Nearby Rescue is justified and should be adopted because no one who equally respects all could reject such a moral principle, and even though responding to such a principle may result in a worsening of one's life (such as the person whose rescue duties cause him to miss a plane that will ruin his career). Miller's main argument seems to be that we would have no valid basis to reject such a principle in advance (ex ante), because the potential benefits (to the rescuee, who could be ourselves) are enormous and the potential for great costs are slight. And if the great costs (such as the missed plane) are realized, the rescuer is merely unlucky, which is no reason to have rejected the principle in advance. This reminds me of what someone once described to me as the "chasm problem" – the chance of falling in the chasm are

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[135] R. Miller 2004b, 375-6. The second and third reasons, 'coordination' and 'encounter,' also appear in "Moral Closeness," R. Miller 2004a at 116. The first reason, 'strong impulse' does not appear in "Moral Closeness" but instead the reason 'trusteeship' is included, which will be discussed later.

[136] R. Miller 2004b, 378 and R. Miller 2004a, 114 (with a very minor difference).

very slight because the chasm is very narrow, but if you do fall you will fall a very long way. Thus the duty of nearby rescue, as in the pond case, can be reconciled with the Sympathy principle because, due to the very slight chance of actually being called on to rescue, such a duty does not impose a significant risk of worsening one's life. My Periodic Personal Plan would also be flexible enough to allow for the unlikely event of the need to engage in nearby rescue, and I see no fault in Miller's proposed principle. The plan I propose need not specifically allow for nearby rescue, but the moral intuitions already agreed upon would dictate that we provide assistance in such situations. The plan is not designed to deal with the the very *unlikely* nearby rescue, but instead to the extension of the underlying moral presupposition to the *guaranteed to be present* (and enormous) needs of the poor.

Beyond Nearness

Miller next considers whether nearness is a necessary condition of rescue. He describes a situation where the potential rescuer is made aware of a distant peril by radio (based on a Peter Unger example in *Living High and Letting Die).* If the rescuer has a duty to respond, as both Miller and Unger believe he does, then the requirement of nearness may be superfluous for rescue. But the setting of the Unger hypothetical must be considered, which is apparently a sparsely settled territory. In such a setting, the duty of rescue expands geographically because of the paucity of potential rescuers. In more densely populated areas, a distant plea over the radio would not compel the same moral intuitions requiring rescue, because professional rescuers (such as fire and police men) are generally

available, and if not, other people who could rescue are likely to be closer to the person in peril. Thus nearness retains its importance in the principle of rescue under normal (non-remote) circumstances. Miller has, I believe, provided a very useful response to Unger. If we are not morally required to respond to *every* emergency, then neither should we be required to respond to *every* appeal from UNICEF or Oxfam.

Requests via television or mail solicitation to aid people in faraway poor countries can rejected (at least sometimes), according to Miller, since a consistent positive response to the pleas would impose a significant risk of worsening one's life, considering the large amount of global poverty and the large volume of solicitations. Presumably one could also sometimes reject appeals for nearby aid if they are so voluminous as to worsen one's life if consistently responded to.

Beyond Beneficence

In the final paragraph of his "Beneficence" paper, Miller ponders the "duties to repair defects in specific transnational relationships."[137] These duties combined with the principle of Sympathy could require global transfers to poor countries that go far beyond current aid, suggests Miller, even if luxuries and frills are not prohibited for those able to buy them. Miller seems poised to advocate greater global aid, but true to his Sympathy principle he is not prepared to advocate a duty to give which would worsen the lives of the donors. I agree with this suggestion that major public policy changes may be necessary to adequately address world

[137] R. Miller 2004b, 383.

poverty. Implementation of these policies would most likely require coordination among nations and supranational organizations. Perhaps when such policies are in effect the average citizen of developed countries will no longer have reason to fret about obligations to the poor, near or distant. But we seem to be far from that day, and thus we need to continue to struggle with our individual obligations in the face of massive world poverty.

Further thoughts

Miller's Sympathy principle is more reasonable to accept than Singer's principle, and it is a principle that can be advocated both publicly and privately. And Miller says it will result in more aid going to the destitute because a focus on the priority of close by concerns will have the secondary effect of benefiting the far off, as explained below.

In his 2003 debate with Peter Singer, Miller claimed that people who are less anxious about their own financial security are more likely to be generous toward others. The generosity of the Scandinavian countries regarding world poverty, relative to other countries, reinforces the thesis that a more secure domestic social safety net will promote generosity.[138]

This rings true to me psychologically and rationally. When there is no one but yourself to make sure that your children will be educated and that you will have enough money in your old age, the natural tendency is to put away as much money as possible to provide security against not having enough. As a result, it is likely that many people keep resources to themselves that they would

[138] Singer – Miller 2003 Debate, 17-18.

more willingly give to benefit others such as the absolute poor if their own security was more certain. But promoting a society with a broader safety net is not the subject of my dissertation. What I do promote is my Periodic Personal Plan (PPP) where we think hard about our needs and obligations, and if we can become comfortable that we have responsibly satisfied our inner circle obligations then we can responsibility give to others, including the desperate, absolute poor of the world.

Moral Closeness and World Community

In Miller's other 2004 paper, "Moral Closeness and World Community" he explains how domestic duties, such as duties of loyalty, are also applicable globally. But he begins this analysis by reinforcing the moral importance of political and literal closeness, which discriminates in favor of compatriots (versus the foreign poor) and children drowning in ponds in our presence (versus children dying in distant foreign villages). He intends to show that these biases "express a deep commitment to moral equality" but that a proper understanding of their justification will establish substantial duties to help the foreign poor, although less demanding than duties to compatriots.[139] And, as I have already stated, he wants to establish a case for extensive foreign aid that is not based on moral impartiality (as in Singer's "Sacrifice" principle) and which he argues reflects ordinary moral thinking (OMT) more accurately than impartiality. In describing Miller's arguments in "Moral Closeness" there will be some repetition from his "Beneficence" paper, but this is necessary to properly frame his further thoughts

[139] R. Miller 2004a, 101.

A Morality of Equal Respect

He argues that morality, as reflected in our OMT, requires equal *respect* for all, but this does not entail equal *concern* for all. Special relationships, such as with family members and friends, require more moral concern than that owed to strangers. For example, it is moral to send your child to college even if the college money could have been used by Oxfam to save lives. OMT tells us that, and we shouldn't try to deny this valid intuition. He goes further when he argues that as to such special relationships, expression of impartial concern is not only non-obligatory, but can be wrong if the relationship is sufficiently important. Thus it would be wrong to donate your daughter's college money to Oxfam, although not wrong (but also not obligatory) to give to Oxfam instead of sending a deserving but non-related local student to college. Our special relationships deserve priority if they are to continue to be special. If we don't give preference to our friends, we will likely not retain those friendships, and if we don't express extra concern for our children we will likely lose their affection. The goal of maximizing good in the world is a worthy goal, but OMT tells us that we are not required to turn away from our special relationships to achieve that goal. This represents a major break from the impartiality espoused by Singer, and in my view a welcomed alternative view. If one were to place two children, unrelated to oneself, side by side and apply the Singer "comparable moral importance" test, our ordinary moral thinking would usually reveal that the life of one child is comparably more important than the college education of the other child. But our ordinary moral thinking changes if the second child is our own, because that child is in this world as a result of our actions

and is dependent on us for the essentials of life as well as higher education (in most cases). Miller argues that our moral thinking appropriately favors putting the needs of our own child ahead of the other child, even if the needs themselves are not comparable (e.g., life vs. education). I agree with Miller's assessment and will employ it in my conclusions.

Miller makes three further related observations. First, if OMT tells us it is moral to give preference to the lives of special others such as our children to allow them to pursue worthwhile and important personal goals (and thus avoid worsening their lives), then we can also give such preference to ourselves. For example, a doctor is morally justified in leaving his highly demanding but worthwhile job in an inner-city emergency room to practice dermatology in a less-demanding suburban office in order to spend more time with his family and thus avoid worsening his own life.[140] We are not morally required to plan and live our life in a way that will most benefit society, even though such a life is usually morally praiseworthy. It would not be praiseworthy, however, if we neglect our own children in the process.

Second, Miller refers to his next observation as a "certain primacy of rules."[141] It addresses what I have called the iteration problem. An appreciation of the equal worth of all is a feature of one's character which will influence the disposition one expresses when confronted with opportunities to help others. And because of appeals from Oxfam and other relief agencies, one is often confronted with the opportunity to save the life of others at a small cost to oneself and without

[140] Ibid, 103 and R. Miller 2004b, 368 (as previous mentioned).
[141] R. Miller 2004a, 103.

worsening one's own life (or the lives of special others). But a "standing commitment" to always respond with a donation does have the capacity to worsen our lives, and thus we are morally justified in not giving on a particular occasion. Miller does not address specific guidelines here, but considering his Sympathy principle, presumably we should give until there is a "significant risk" of worsening our life.

My Periodic Personal Plan proposal addresses the practical aspect of this issue. Analogizing and iterating the drowning child scenario into an endless need to save the distant poor will most certainly worsen one's life (assuming one's lack of financial security will worsen one's life). But ignoring the drowning child and, analogously, ignoring every appeal from aid agencies such as Oxfam is not the moral answer. A plan that balances one's competing moral obligations is needed, and this is provided by my HMO and PPP.

Third, since moral rules serve a social as well as private function, we must consider if the rules we adopt can be universalized. Miller argues that a social moral code embodying the concept of equal respect will include self-respect as well as respect for others; "One respects all in seeking to live by a moral code that all could self-respectfully share," and one disrespects others if the moral code is incompatible with self-respect.[142] Respect for all others is consistent with self-respect and self-dignity.

Similarly, I argue that we should place our own selves in the top category of our HMO along with our children and any others we may be directly responsible for. We are responsible for ourselves in respect to our own needs as well as our

[142] Ibid, 104.

obligations to others. In this sense each individual is a "significant other" in the hierarchy of obligations of that individual.

Tax-Financed Aid

In exploring the basis for duties to strangers, Miller begins with compatriots, toward whom we have a favorable political bias derived from OMT even if; one lives in a per-capita rich country, one knows that the poorest live abroad in countries lacking adequate resources, and one thinks it is cheaper to help the foreign poor than the compatriot poor.[143] This bias does not seem to reconcile with the moral concept of equal worth of all people which Miller espouses, so he explains further.

As compatriots we willingly and jointly participate with our compatriots in the creation of laws and policies that we are all forced to obey, which Miller calls "justifiable participation in a project of coercion." If we well-off citizens could benefit our disadvantaged or poor compatriots through means whose burdens to us are not as great as the benefits to our compatriots, Miller says there is a "powerful moral reason" to do so.[144] In general, we can show respect for our compatriot in this way while refusing to worsen our own life. But we show disrespect for our compatriots if we force them to live by rules that are life-worsening for them and oppose changes that are life-worsening for us (by reducing benefits of social advantage) if the changes are necessary to relieve more serious burdens (which we help to impose) of our compatriots. Thus we are justified in resisting requests for help from our poor compatriots if our helping will worsen our

[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid, 105.

own lives, but we are not so justified if we are responsible (through rule-making participation), for causing or contributing to their poverty. Miller is suggesting we have "negative duties" (without using that phrase) to our compatriots to compensate for any harm we may have participated in causing through the political process. And this moral judgment would seem to hold even if the process and our participation were entirely legal. Miller has thus argued why we have duties to our compatriots that we don't have as to those with whom we share no political "project of coercion."

Presumably this argument would not apply if our government was not a form of collective self-rule.

This duty of special concern for compatriots has the effect of limiting the pursuit of self-interest as well as the pursuit of global impartial beneficence. Our moral priority should be to change unfair domestic laws before aiding foreigners, even though the latter can be done more efficiently. Failure to reduce burdens from domestic laws places value on political subordination, or as Miller says, fails to "disvalue political subordination."[145] To demonstrate the idea, he says favoring the foreign poor is as disrespectful as a manor lord telling his own serfs he must exploit them so he can use the exploited gains to benefit the more miserable serfs of a fellow-baron.[146]

But the patriotic bias manifests itself in other contexts. Were there no coercion and no subordination of any compatriots, the bias would still arise in the case of natural (as opposed to social) disasters. The devastating effects of a

[145] Ibid, 105-6.
[146] Ibid, 106 and Singer-Miller 2003 Debate, 10.

tsunami (or a contagious disease) in Louisiana provokes more feelings of duty toward those affected than a similar or even more devastating tsunami in Southeast Asia. OMT tells us, according to Miller, that it would be wrong to neglect "our" afflicted people in favor of those in Asia, even if we could more efficiently come to the aid of the Asians.

Miller explains this phenomenon as "loyalty" on which a "life-determining collective project depends."[147] This special loyalty among the loyal participants expresses special concern for each other in times of special need. This patriotic loyalty, like friendship loyalty, "while responsive to beneficial sharing, is not simply a consequence of gratitude and is not always required for fair play."[148] This intuition toward special concern for unfortunate compatriots is based on something other than mere reciprocity, since we are inclined to honor this duty even to those who are unlikely to ever be able to reciprocate, such as those born with a debilitating disease which will permanently prevent their political participation. Otherwise governments could not provide stable and effective justice. Miller expresses the intuition of patriotic loyalty as follows:

> If you are born in the territory of a government worthy of loyalty, then you have a duty loyally to participate in the shared political process *if you can*, unless you emigrate. If people did not generally recognize this duty, governments could not be stable and effective vehicles of justice. [149]

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[147] R. Miller 2004a, 106
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid, 108, italics added.

The faculty of a philosophy department is an example of a shared cooperative activity. If a colleague were to become ill and not be able to teach classes, it would be wrong, according to Miller, for the other colleagues not to take up the slack. But the duty of loyalty is a joint duty, so if the majority voted not to take up the slack no individual member would be required to use his own salary to reduce the burden to the colleague.[150] This possibility of disloyalty and the resulting vulnerability of potential benefactors reflect the need for an institutional response to reinforce or backup this otherwise unenforceable duty.

Applying this analogy to domestic poverty obligations, an institutional response is necessary as a policy matter in order to effectively and comprehensively address poverty, and to back up the efforts of individuals. Because domestic poverty has been addressed in the United States, although imperfectly, the moral obligations of individuals have lessened. In general, it is not necessary for individuals to concern themselves with starving Americans because food programs are in place, both governmental and via volunteer aid agencies. A domestic social safety net is in place, despite reports of significant gaps or holes in the net. There is no comparably international welfare safety net, and thus residents of certain poor countries starve and die of preventable diseases in very large numbers. But Miller's point is that if there were no welfare safety nets, domestic or international, our obligations to our compatriots come before those of other societies.

Miller concludes that discriminating against compatriots who are physically unable to participate in our political project would be arbitrary and would violate

[150] Ibid, 106-7.

moral integrity because it fails to properly value the loyalty of joint citizenship. But he says no arbitrary distinction is made by withholding the same concern from needy foreigners, who also cannot participate in the domestic political project. What is missing for the foreigners is a "duty of loyal participation."[151] This argument does not, of course, remove all grounds for benefiting the foreign poor. It merely provides an additional ground for aiding a compatriot over others, all other relevant factors being the same.

Foreign Aid

The rationales above justifying a bias toward compatriots can also imply reasons for foreign aid, although less weighty reasons than for compatriots. (1) Political coercion also affects needy foreigners since it keeps them out of the territory and it excludes them from exploitation of domestic natural resources. Miller claims that poor foreigners "ought to receive what they would enjoy in an impartially justifiable scheme of access"[152] but he offers no argument for this notion, other than the fact that foreigners have been excluded from access to domestic natural resources. I will not address this socio-economic policy issue, but instead I will continue to address our moral obligations considering the current (and immediately foreseeable) absence of adequate public policy addressing world poverty. (2) Mutual loyalty also has an international aspect. The world would be unstable and insecure, even for the rich, if fear of retaliation were the only check on aggression. International norms that provide loyal self-respectful and mutual support among all are desirable for morally responsible citizens of rich countries,

[151] Ibid, 109.
[152] Ibid.

and foreign aid from the richer countries is the first step in establishing a system with those norms.

But Miller says that these appeals dictate less aid than for their domestic analogues. In reaching this conclusion, he makes the following contentious statements:

> Suffering due to transnational political coercion that could be supported by someone who has equal respect for all is a relatively small part of world poverty. For example, sovereign control over natural resources is rarely a major determinant of national prosperity or poverty, which largely depends, instead, on commercial and technological capacities.[153]

Others[154] have argued that political coercion by rich democratic countries, in concert with the ruling elite of poor counties, is a significant cause of extreme poverty in poor countries. Citizens of these rich countries, such as the United States, may value equal respect but nevertheless allow their governments to coerce less powerful poor countries, negatively affecting the poorest in those poor countries. And in later writings, Miller himself modifies his position. In the introduction to a book not yet published he writes the following:

> The right political stances toward needy compatriots *and* toward needy foreigners rest on duties not to manipulate weakness, to seek equity and trustworthiness in shaping frameworks for self-advancement and to accept responsibility for consequences of

[153] Ibid, 110.
[154] Thomas Pogge, for instance.

> coercive imposition and violent intrusion. Despite the real limits of the efficacy of foreign aid, the resulting transnational responsibilities of people in developed countries will turn out to dictate demanding sacrifices for the foreign poor, whose extent may be no less than for disadvantaged compatriots.[155]

Because international institutions are less demanding of their members and have less impact than their domestic analogues, Miller has argued until recently that duties of loyalty generate less concern for fellow-participants in international institutions than for compatriots.[156] Duties of loyalty to compatriots could however be overridden by stronger duties to foreigners based on greater need or on negative duties because of past and ongoing coercion of poor countries through international institutions and otherwise (such as outright invasion and intervention in foreign government regimes for political purposes). These matters form another ground for aid to the foreign poor, which I will not explore here, but which has been explored by others.[157] Miller hints at larger obligations to the foreign poor based on "a grain of truth in the idea of world community."[158]

Private Aid

Before moving to a new topic, Miller summarizes his discussion in the last two sections as follows:

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[155] Miller, Richard, Globalizing Justice: The Ethics of Poverty and Power, 4-5, (Book is not yet published. Draft introduction was emailed to me by the author on November 27, 2006.)
[156] R. Miller 2004a, 110.
[157] See, for instance, Pogge, Thomas, World Poverty and Human Rights (Polity Press, Blackwell Publishing, 2002)
[158] Ibid, 111.

> My case for patriotic bias in tax-financed aid concerned the avoidance of disrespectful political coercion and the use of shared political institutions to express a proper valuing of institutional loyalties. So no guidance concerning the question of voluntary giving results – and fortunately so.[159]

Now Miller considers the general duty to respond to neediness, specifically private aid, which will involve consideration of the importance of closeness and nonpolitical choices about aid. He sets forth his "Principle of Sympathy" which is, with minor differences, the same principle in his "Beneficence" paper, quoted above.[160] This principle expresses "the general importance one ascribes to relieving others' burdens, apart from special relationships and circumstances."[161]

He specifically avoids a "precise and determinate" principle.

Miller clarifies that a reduction in funds for personal use does not necessarily translate to "life worsening" just because it may make it more difficult to satisfy desires consistent with worthwhile goals. For instance, a life goal of eating well is not ruined because one has a mediocre meal, or even "fairly frequent disappointment" of this kind. But if one with such life goals could "hardly ever afford to eat at a restaurant serving interesting and delicious meals" one's life would be worse.[162] This example well demonstrates the iteration problem. No single meal is more important than another's life that could be saved with an

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[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid and R. Miller 2004b, 359.
[161] R. Miller 2004a, 111-2.
[162] Ibid, 112.

Oxfam donation, but a lifetime of poor meals certainly can make one's life worse (thus violating Miller's "Sympathy" principle), probably is of "moral importance" (thus violating Singer's "moderate" principle), and may even be of "comparable moral importance" (thus violating Singer's "strong" principle).

Miller makes clear that "fear of trivial expected costs to oneself" is not an excuse under his Sympathy principle, because such an attitude expresses lesser importance to others' lives and thus violates the moral precept of equal respect upon which the Sympathy principle is based. Yet Miller reminds the reader not to forget to "fulfill all further responsibilities" which includes responsibilities to dependents and "one's ultimate dependent, oneself." He thus makes clear a priority in the Sympathy principle; first take care of "responsibilities" and then act on the precept of equal respect while avoiding a significant risk of worsening one's life. Consistent with Miller, my Hierarchy of Moral Obligations (HMO) places oneself and dependents (especially one's children) at the center of our circle of concerns, which is the thickest level of obligation. And my Periodic Personal Plan, if carefully planned and executed will allow for equal respect for all, and concern for an expanded circle of others, without an undue risk of worsening one's own life.

Let me now consider a question Miller does not address – Is it appropriate to worsen one's life to fulfill responsibilities, such as to one's children? My inclination is that it is appropriate. As to one's children, the responsibility is great, so that if one had to give up a life goal so that one's children could eat, that would be the moral thing to do. A harder queston would be whether one should

forego a desired career if necessary to make enough money at a much less enjoyable job to finance the college education for one's child. My inclination here is that a compromise should be worked out – a compromise requiring some sacrifice by both the parent and the child. But if a hard decision must be made because a compromise is not feasible, I will not hazard a moral answer. Instead, as always, I for argue for consideration of this issue in the context of a Periodic Personal Plan, when the various obligations of one's life (including one's own life goals) can be comprehensively considered.

Mere Closeness

There is a stark contrast in our OMT regarding duties to rescue those who are in some sense close to us as opposed to those who are not close. Peter Singer says that aspect of our OMT is wrong.

> If we accept any principle of impartiality, universality, morality or whatever, we cannot discriminate against anyone merely because he is far away from us.[163]

But Miller seeks to show that our natural bias in favor of closeness is moral, justifying a stronger duty to rescue, from the perspective of "respect for all."[164] He first deconstructs the nearby rescue duty. The strong duty of nearby rescue presupposes normal background circumstances, such that in unusual situations (e.g., iterations of drowning children) even the most obvious duties of nearby rescue have moral exceptions. If the proverbial drowning toddlers in the shallow

[163] Singer 1972, p. 232.
[164] R. Miller 2004a, 113.

pond were frequently encountered, Miller says it might even be morally permissible to neglect the toddler if necessary to take adequate care of loved ones and one's own life.[165] This is similar to the situation of the emergency room doctor who may find it morally unacceptable to neglect each successive patient in dire need, but will eventually be able to morally draw the line on such duties if continuation would worsen the doctor's life. The well thought out PPP will allow for unusual situations as well as the commonplace iterations of the world's desperately poor.

Miller next proposes his Principle of Nearby Rescue, which is the same (with a very minor difference) as the principle, quoted above, from his "Beneficence" paper.[166] It should be noted that this Principle *would* require the rescue of drowning toddlers in shallow ponds, even if they were encountered constantly. Miller allows for this possibility because of the extreme unlikelihood of such an occurrence. Miller considers potential objections to the principle and then he offers reasons why this, or a similar principle containing a special connection between closeness and duty to rescue, belongs in a moral code based on equal respect.

The first potential objection is that the reference to closeness (i.e., "encountered nearby") should be deleted, presumably on the basis that there is no moral difference between the near and the far (a la Singer). This raises the demandingness issue, since a standing commitment to follow the Principle, without regard to distance, would call for regular, and probably constant, aid.

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[165] Ibid, 113-4.

[166] Ibid, 114 and R. Miller 2004b, 378.

This would pose a serious risk of a worse life since little time or money would be left to pursue worthwhile goals, and thus the proposed deletion of "encountered nearby" from the principle can be rejected.

But the principle as proposed poses no such serious risk of demandingness, and thus should be accepted by all who value everyone's life equally. Miller says the expected net cost of a shared commitment to Nearby Rescue is "trivial at most, in the course of a morally responsible person's life"[167] and thus would not likely worsen one's life. Also, the tradeoff is reasonable since one may gain as a beneficiary of shared commitment to the principle, but the "*ex ante* probability of substantial net loss in the course of a life in normal circumstances is nil or minute."[168] This is what I earlier called the "chasm problem" where the probability of encountering a cost (falling in the chasm) is very small, but if so encountered the cost is great (the fall to the bottom is very far). On the basis of this analysis, Miller says the principle cannot be morally rejected on the grounds of demandingness.

Another potential objection is that "encountered closeby" in the principle is arbitrary. Why should we single out nearby victims for special consideration any more than we should single out cancer victims over all other disease victims? The answer, Miller says, appeals to special values of closeness that provide reasons for Nearby Rescue. He offers three such reasons, the first two of which were offered in "Beneficence" (pp. 375-6) and thus were already mentioned.

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[167] R. Miller 2004a, 114.

[168] Ibid. But in "Beneficence" he says that '"Nil," as opposed to "no more than trivial," would be an exaggeration" since some people have some net risk of serious loss, such as the extremely well-guarded rich who are unlikely to need the aid of others but who could very well be called on to come to the aid others. R. Miller 2004b, 379, FN 20.

(a) The relationship of encounter. Personal encounter is our "minimal special relationship," according to Miller. Life goes better when people have some assurance that those in our presence would come to our aid if we should need them. We can live more at ease if we know that people will not simply step over us if we should suddenly collapse on the sidewalk of a busy street.[169]

(b) Coordination. The pervasive inclination to help those in our presence serves as a way of assigning responsibility, avoiding buck-passing and inefficiency, normally without imposing excessive demands.[170]

(c) Trusteeship. We normally expect people not to intrude into our personal physical space (our "spatial prerogative"), and if that space is so respected by others then we have some responsibility for that space. And if we have equal respect for all, this responsibility applies both to ourselves and to others ("trusteeship"). Thus arises a duty to "pay special attention to events within this space" which would include a duty of nearby rescue.[171]

These reasons, based on specific values of closeness, explain why closeness is not an arbitrary element in the Principle of Nearby Rescue. So when the priority of closeness over distance is defended on the basis of avoiding excessive demands, the question of arbitrariness can be responded to and these reasons seem to justify the closeness priority. But these reasons lack the

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[169] R. Miller 2004a, 116 and R. Miller 2004b, 376.
[170] Ibid.
[171] R. Miller 2004a, 116. This reason does not appear in "Beneficence" but instead the reason 'strong impulse' is included, which was earlier discussed under the heading "Rescue and Distance." R. Miller 2004b, 375.

purpose or the power to justify total neglect of the dire, distant needy. A fully integrated hierarchy of personal moral obligations will include both the distant and the nearby needy.

From Closeness to Distance

Closeness considerations can also support duties of concern for distant strangers. This support can be direct, when the closeness values of encounter and coordination are considered, such as encounter by long-distance telephone when the foreign person on the other end has a heart attack. Because of the 'verbal closeness' via telephone you have a duty to do what you can for your fellow conversationalists, although your abilities may be limited because of physical distance. Miller acknowledges that this direct support concern is limited and is likely to affect few foreigners.

The most important considerations are "less direct" and rest on the universal value of "willing cooperation" analogous to how the values of encounter, coordination, and trusteeship justify the 'closeness' element in Nearby Rescue. To see how this thinking works, we first imagine a person who, because of his wealth (and not unusually demanding personal goals, relationships, and special responsibilities), has a duty to provide substantial aid to help needy others under the Principle of Sympathy. In the absence of further considerations, one must not conclude, according to Miller, that the person has a duty to aid foreigners, even if foreign aid is the most efficient way of relieving the most desperate needs. Reasons include; (a) there is no general requirement that private aid for needy strangers be channeled to the most serious needs; (b) there is no moral reason

not to allow people to choose their charitable donees based on special values or special relationships that enrich the lives of the donor, such as donations to an alma mater; (c) some people give to the opera and ballet for such reasons and for the worthwhile goal of avoiding cultural deprivations; (d) a preference to aid needy compatriots or the poor in one's own community is justified by a variety of considerations such as; expression of civic friendship, commitment to continue an inherently valuable tradition, expectation of sharing, and affirmation of the importance of underlying values of political respect and loyalty.[172]

Considering these many justifiable reasons to keep charity "close to home" or "close to the benefactor's heart," Miller asks the obvious question; "what compelling moral reason could there be for such a person to allocate a substantial portion of his aid to needy people in poor countries?"[173] The more important answer to this question suggests a new way of justifying foreign aid.

Even though considerations of equal worth of all people suggest that efficiency be a consideration in aid, and this is the first answer Miller gives, it is not the strongest. The poorest people, who are found in the poorest countries, could most likely be helped the most with the least amount of aid. While this appeal to efficiency has great merit and deserves consideration, Miller concludes that this logical argument will not play an important role in the ordinary moral thinking of benefactors, given the many good causes closer to their hearts.

The more important answer to the question of how to morally justify foreign aid is phrased by Miller as follows: "a more specific obligatory concern,

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[172] R. Miller 2004a, 118.
[173] Ibid.

the proper valuing of willing cooperation, entailing a concomitant disvaluing of exploitation."[174] This requires some unpacking and explanation.

Equal respect, the moral precept underlying the Sympathy Principle, leads one to value cooperative relationships in which one party does not exploit the other by benefiting from severe bargaining advantages, especially if this exploitation would deprive the other of a good life. These bargaining advantages sometimes come from the dire need of the other party to reach an agreement, on almost any terms. Miller argues that if one benefits from others agreeing to work on terms incompatible with a good life because of their inferior bargaining power, then a proper valuing of willing cooperation requires a special disposition to use the gains to help relieve the other parties' disadvantages, "at least if this does not impose a significant risk of worsening my life or interfering with my special responsibilities."[175] And it is wrong (an "expression of contempt"), according to Miller, to use benefits gained from exploiting some (e.g., the foreign poor) to benefit others (e.g., the domestic poor), unless, perhaps, the use more effectively relieves comparable needs or effectively relieves more urgent needs.[176] For example, using the profits of Southeast Asia sweatshops (where the workers have little bargaining power and are working to escape grinding poverty) to help the needy in one's hometown would be "wrongful channeling of beneficence, like

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[174] Ibid, 119.

[175] Ibid, 119. The last portion of this sentence which is marked with quotation marks deserves more discussion, which I will postpone to avoid an interruption in Miller's argument. Briefly, it seems that if one has exploited another then the exploiter has a "special responsibility" to the one exploited. Thus the duty to "relieve the disadvantages" of the one exploited would seem to exist even if this imposes a significant risk of worsening the life of the exploiter or interfering with his other special responsibilities.

[176] Although Miller does not mention this point, it would obviously be even more wrong to not benefit any needy with the exploited gains, which is the most likely scenario.

rushing past a toddler sinking into quicksand in order to visit a lonely sick friend before the end of hospital visiting hours."[177]

The affluent in rich countries most likely derive considerable material benefits from the bargaining disadvantages of poor foreigners. These benefits are realized, for instance, in low product prices due to cheap labor and cheap raw materials. And because of the amount of poverty and the large numbers of desperate workers, the prices are driven even lower out of fear of even greater concessions from even more desperate foreign workers and sellers. Because of these circumstances, affluent people ought to give substantial and distinctive consideration to the neediest foreigners (those whose desperation contributes to the prosperity of the affluent) according to Miller.[178] This line of argument is reminiscent of the Pogge-style "negative duty" argument for foreign aid based on past and current transgressions of developed countries against poor countries. Miller's argument here is less specific than Pogge's and thus requires less empirical documentation to support the argument. Miller's argument seems to require only the often reported observation that some workers in foreign countries work for mere subsistence wages (and sometimes less) to produce products that we in the developed world enjoy at a corresponding lower cost to ourselves. And the further observation that even these jobs are sought after and not available to all poor foreigners reinforces the disparity in wealth and

[177] Ibid, 119-120.
[178] Other writers, Thomas Pogge for instance, refer to these obligations as negative duties.

opportunity in the world, and connects our well-being to the misery of the foreign poor.[179]

These reasons for personal duties of aid to the foreign poor contribute to a political duty to support tax-financed aid as well. Those who are adequately responsive to foreign needs have reasons to favor significant reliance on taxation as a means of discharging their responsibilities. The reasons for tax-financed foreign aid include; scale and coordination in the development of infrastructure in a poor economy, absence of adequate voluntary aid, and fairer allocation of the burdens among the affluent. In principle, according to Miller, increases in tax-financed foreign aid could end the moral pressure on the affluent to make private contributions in support of the foreign poor.

Equal Respect in a Worldwide Moral Community

Impartial concern, such as that of Peter Singer's, is a false diagnosis for neediness in poor countries according to Miller, diverting attention from the arguments most apt to help the world's poor. The "authoritative moral perspective" (i.e., Miller's) is one of equal respect, not equal concern. There is no need to debunk ordinary biases toward closeness, since they uncover powerful rationales for concern for needy strangers who are not close. The avoidance of disrespectful coercion and valuing of loyalty that justify the political bias toward needy compatriots also, by analogy, provides important reasons for tax-financed aid to needy foreigners.

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[179] As already mentioned, Miller intends to more fully explore this reasoning in a future book – Globalizing Justice: The Ethics of Poverty and Power.

The strength of these moral reasons to aid distant strangers reflects the nature of current transnational interactions, for example:

- The importance of global institutions
- The significance of immigration restrictions
- The existence of far-reaching transnational facilities for aid, public and private.
- The extent of transnational benefits from neediness abroad.[180]

Miller argues that because these interactions give rise to such important transnational duties, both public and private, the world is now a moral community. And finally, Miller holds that a proper appreciation of the moral importance of closeness illuminates the moral importance of transnational interactions and moral obligations among all people.

The moral community of the world described by Miller may be compared to the United States or any other developed country before the implementation of welfare safety nets. Our personal moral obligations toward the poor are greater when institutional structures addressing poverty do not exist. The global interactions listed above reinforce the notion of a global moral community, as opposed to the common notion of separate moral communities based on political, geographical, and cultural boundaries. My Hierarchy of Moral Obligations model takes these matters into consideration, giving a priority based on the stronger connections within local, regional and national communities, but acknowledging

[180] Miller 2004a, 121.

and making provision for the larger circle of concern which encompasses the distant and foreign poor.

Conclusions

Miller concludes that Singer misconstrues ordinary morality and that Singer's "radical" conclusion is not justified by ordinary moral thinking. Miller's alternative Principle of Sympathy would allow us to avoid worsening our own life on behalf of others, and is more in line with ordinary moral thinking. He doesn't argue that luxuries are justified when compared with starvation, but that a lifetime with no luxuries (e.g., *never* an expensive restaurant meal) is not a moral requirement because it *would* worsen our lives. He advocates an "attitude of beneficence" that will guide our conscience in making decisions. We can resist some, but not all, appeals from aid agencies because responding to all will eventually worsen one's life.

Miller distinguishes equal respect from equal concern, saying that we should respect everyone equally, but we are not morally required to show all an equal amount of concern. He respects his neighbor's daughter and his own daughter equally, but he justifies showing more concern for his own daughter. In their 2003 debate, Singer admits that he is also partial to his own, but he is "not sure he can justify" this partiality.[181] Partiality to your own children is morally justifiable, as I discuss below, and I find it perplexing that Singer is uncomfortable with this. My argument for thicker obligations to those, such as our children, in

[181] Singer – Miller 2003 Debate, 16.

our inner circle of concern is bolstered by Miller. He says we must tend to our special relationships; otherwise they will lose their special quality.

He makes a case for compatriot favoritism based on "joint participation in a project of coercion" and he argues that helping foreigners over compatriots is analogous to a manor lord benefiting the more miserable serfs of another manor at the expense of his own serfs.[182] But he also argues that it is wrong to use the benefits gained from exploiting the foreign poor (e.g., via sweatshops) to benefit the domestic poor.[183] I conclude that we probably have justified reason to favor our compatriot poor over foreign poor based on shared institutions and perhaps other reasons such as nationalism and patriotism, but the greater needs of the foreign poor morally balance or even outweigh domestic needs. This is a matter for each person to contemplate when constructing their own HMO during the PPP process.

And finally, Miller very usefully separates the pond case from normal obligations of beneficence by proposing a Principle of Nearby Rescue. In those rare situations when we happen to be in a position to directly help in a rescue, we have demanding duties that could possibly cause our lives to worsen (e.g., while performing the rescue we miss a plane flight for an important job interview, or a critical business transaction, etc.). Miller justifies this demandingness because of the unlikelihood of being called on for such a rescue, and if our life is worsened as result it is mere bad luck. I think of this as the "chasm" problem – we are unlikely to fall into a chasm, but if we do we can fall a long way. I endorse

[182] Miller 2004a, 106.
[183] Ibid., 119.

Miller's concept of nearby rescue and believe it belongs on our Hierarchy of Moral Obligations, perhaps in the center circle because it will take precedence over most other obligations due to its urgency.

My main difference with Miller is that he seems to allow for those with expensive tastes to satisfy those tastes despite the much greater needs of others. I would not specifically prohibit expensive tastes, but I suggest that when self-indulgent expenses are put on the table, alongside the crying needs of the desperately poor of the world, the indulgences are very difficult to justify. My PPP process provides a mechanism to consider these serious matters.

Chapter Four – Garrett Cullity

Overview

In his 2004 book, *The Moral Demands of Affluence,* Garrett Cullity bases the argument for aid to the poor on beneficence, which he grounds on "helping the poor directly in their pressing need for assistance" and which he claims is the "simplest and the most forceful" argument.[184] His starting point is Peter Singer's comparison of giving money to aid agencies with saving a drowning child from a shallow pond, which he calls the "life-saving analogy."[185] He argues that the analogy is "not only simple, but simplistic" and observes that others have argued that the analogy is misleading and that it is demeaning to compare the destitute of the world to drowning children.[186] Nevertheless, he concludes that despite these and other objections the analogy contains an important truth – "there is help that we can give, and there is no excuse for not giving it."[187]

Part I of Cullity's book defends the view that we have obligations to the poor, but concludes that the life-saving analogy leads to an extremely demanding view (he calls it the "extreme demand"[188]) which he finds untenable, not morally required, and even "absurd."[189] The extreme demand would include Peter Singer's CMI principle as well as views such as those of Peter Unger expressed in *Living High and Letting Die.* Cullity summarizes the extreme demand as:

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[184] Cullity, Garrett, *The Moral Demands of Affluence,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). [Cullity 2004], 1-2.
[185] Ibid., 10.
[186] Ibid., 2.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid., 78.
[189] Ibid., 2, 141.

> The view that each of us is morally required to renounce spending on practically all of the things from which we currently get enjoyment and fulfillment, in order to do as much as possible to help people who have nothing.[190]

He later calls these worthwhile things of enjoyment and fulfillment "intrinsically life-enhancing goods"[191] and describes them further as "the range of goods – above and beyond the basic good of being alive – that ground requirements on us to help each other."[192] Cullity proposes and argues for seven categories of intrinsically life-enhancing goods ("IL-EG"), but does not claim to defend this list as "exactly correct" but instead as a "plausible first sketch."[193]

Because I think it is helpful to keep in mind what Cullity views as reasons not to continue giving, and thus avoid the extreme demand of Singer, et al, I list the categories here:

1. Close personal relationships – relationships of friendship and love
2. Achievements in the pursuit of worthwhile personal projects
3. Enjoyment
4. Understanding of oneself and the world
5. Autonomy
6. Involvement in the life of culture or community

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[190] Ibid., 2.
[191] Ibid., 129.
[192] Ibid., 2.
[193] Ibid., 162.

7. The freedom to live in accordance with one's fundamental beliefs and commitments.[194]

Specific examples help to further understand where Cullity draws the line. He would allow the following under his beneficence standard: spending on ones own education (even an expensive higher education available to few people globally), private tuition and equipment to develop outstanding sporting or musical talent, holiday travel (it if contributes to personal development or life-enhancing personal relationships), spending on your own children (up to the point necessary to avoid compromising the full commitment of a parent to a child).[195] He considers the following "usually morally wrong" under his beneficence standard: buying expensive clothes or furniture, a new car, or books for a private library.[196] Investing money (and presumably earning money) is morally neutral according to Cullity – the moral issue concerns what the money is spent on after it is invested or earned.[197] These are not rigid guidelines, but only illustrations of where one might reasonably make distinctions following the principles that Cullity establishes. You or I may reasonably draw different lines and still be in compliance with Cullity's principles.

In Part II of his book, Cullity argues for a moderately demanding obligation of beneficence to replace the extreme demand of Singer et al. Although it is moderate, it is still demanding, a point which Cullity repeatedly emphasizes: "The conclusion I defend does still demand more of us than many of us find

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[194] Ibid., 162-3. In footnotes he credits James Griffin, T.M. Scanlon and others for inspiring ideas for this list.
[195] Cullity 2004, 183-5.
[196] Ibid., 183.
[197] Ibid., 185.

comfortable, but it is moderately rather than extremely demanding."[198] I will refer to Cullity's proposal as the "moderate demand." Contrasted with Singer's extreme demand which requires comparing the importance of saving lives with alternative uses of money (presumably whenever we face a spending decision), Cullity's moderate proposal would allow a range of spending for intrinsically life-enhancing goods (as described above) without having to agonize if the spending is comparable in moral importance to saving another's life. Building on Cullity's suggestions, I will later describe how such decisions can be made in a rational and yet moral fashion. But first I want to provide an account of Cullity's thorough analysis of moral obligations to the poor. I will describe Cullity's arguments which defend the life-saving analogy but then argue against the extreme demand and for the moderate demand. His analysis is detailed and sometimes complicated.

The Life-Saving Analogy

There are various ways of arguing that it is wrong for affluent people not to contribute privately to helping the poor. There are two broad classes of such arguments, according to Cullity: *collectively* based arguments and *individually* based arguments.[199] The most familiar collectively based arguments are arguments from justice, such as rectificatory justice (redress for past injustices), distributive justice (duty to make more equitable the otherwise inequitable distribution of resources of the world, and regulative justice (reform of rules that unfairly cause or sustain the poverty of some for the advantage of others).

[198] Ibid., 3.
[199] Ibid., 8-9.

Cullity's argument is not collectively based, and thus is not an argument from justice and is not focused on dividing up a collective obligation such as is found in 'fair share' arguments.[200] Cullity's argument is individually based, and by his own account *threatens* to produce a conclusion that is "extremely demanding."[201] The threat is later diminished to a *moderate* demand.

Cullity's argument begins, as did Peter Singer's, with what Cullity calls "the life-saving analogy." Simply stated, it is "the claim that there is a morally relevant analogy between saving lives directly and contributing to aid agencies."[202] He argues that the analogy shows why not giving to aid agencies is wrong, although it is not *as* wrong as not saving a life directly. The reason he gives for why these things are wrong is that they involve "a failure to take adequate account of other people's interest."[203] As a starting point, Cullity assumes that readers agree that it is wrong to let someone die right in front of you if you could easily have saved them. He doesn't try to persuade those who might disagree with this modest point of departure.

Like Cullity and the other philosophers I have discussed, I also begin with a simple premise – that our ordinary moral thinking or intuitions instruct us to help those in desperate situations if we can easily do so. This point of departure does not require agreement on more comprehensive and complicated moral theories such as utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, or even virtue ethics, although concepts from those theories will be employed along the way. Those readers who

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[200] Liam Murphy has recently made fair share arguments in articles and in a recent book, *Moral Demands in Nonideal Theory* (2000).
[201] Cullity 2004, 10.
[202] Ibid., 11.
[203] Ibid.

disagree with this simple point of departure must simply be left behind. They may possibly be persuaded by some more foundational argument for why we should care for one another, but I will not try to make that more fundamental argument here.

Singer's argument for poverty relief is based on the general moral principle that I have called the *comparable moral importance*, or CMI, principle (or alternatively his weaker version, the *anything of moral importance*, or AMI, principle). By contrast, Cullity claims not to rely on such a general principle, but instead to "characterize the attitudes" towards those in need, after considering "two simple points" – (1) other people's need provides a clear reason to help them, and (2) failure to respond to this need can be morally wrong. When it *is* wrong, it is a failure of *beneficence* – "a failure to display an adequate practical concern for other people's interest."[204] Cullity thinks this is "the most natural and straightforward way" to develop the analogy between failing to save a life directly and failing to save indirectly by contributing to aid agencies. He looks only to the "plain fact of the acute need of the world's poorest people" and does not base the obligation to help on either the *responsibility* in creating the need (as in rectificatory or regulative justice arguments) or on the *rights* of the poor. This non-complicated approach can "plausibly claim to capture the straightforward force of the analogy" according to Cullity.[205]

Cullity is concerned that the building of an argument the way Singer did can be misleading because the initial stage (it is wrong not to save a drowning

[204] Ibid., 13.
[205] Ibid.

child in a pond in your presence) will underdetermine the second stage (i.e., the initial stage one *could* lead to the CMI principle, *or* it could lead to a more narrow principle such as "it is wrong to not to save anybody *in our presence"*). Under the later route, the plight of the distant suffering never gets considered. Cullity's plan is to avoid this problem by setting forth the *reason* for the judgment at stage one, which he argues is beneficence (i.e., adequate concern for the needs of others generally). Then beneficence will also serve as the *reason* for reaching the further moral judgment that, when we can easily do so we have a duty to help *anyone* who is in peril.[206] This approach dodges the issue of distance, but both he and I will later consider the relevance of distance.

An Argument from Beneficence

As earlier indicated, Cullity grounds the duty to aid the poor in beneficence. As he uses the term, *beneficence* means, "the morally appropriate furthering of other people's interest…a practical concern for other people's interests…acting appropriately to help other people when they will benefit from it,"[207] and in distinguishing beneficence from *kindness* (a mild or weak form of beneficence) and *actions of humanity* (a stronger subset of beneficence), he says beneficence is "the general quality that is shared by dramatic actions such as saving someone's life and the more ordinary friendly gestures and good turns that are kind."[208] And the "core of beneficence" involves "helping other people, and doing so because you regard the fact that it will be good for them as a good reason for

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[206] Ibid., 13-15.
[207] Ibid., 16.
[208] Ibid., 226, fn 3.

helping them."[209] And the beneficence Cullity has in mind is sensitive to time, place, and circumstance so that it is not exercised in an irresponsible, unjust, or imprudent fashion. For example, giving to the poor while your own children are starving would not be appropriate beneficence.

I also argue that beneficence must somehow be prioritized among our various relationships and obligations. Beneficence is owed to both our children and to the distant poor, but the magnitude or "thickness" of the beneficence is dramatically greater for our children. I will explore this further when I describe my proposed Hierarchy of Moral Obligations (HMO) and Periodic Personal Plan (PPP).

Because he claims beneficence is concerned with facts about those in need, and not facts about those who can help, non-immediacy and indirectness are not countervailing considerations, according to Cullity.[210] Thus a starving child in a foreign country is as worthy of beneficence as the drowning child right in our presence. However, immediacy and directness do affect *our relationship* to the person in need, and *that* has moral significance.[211] Richard Miller would express this as all people being entitled to equal respect, but not equal concern from each other individual. Beneficence, to be effective, must be prioritized by each person motivated to be beneficent.

Cullity describes the immediate situation (such as the drowning child) as "more salient", "motivationally engaging", "more vividly inescapable" and thus the

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[209] Ibid., 16.
[210] Ibid., 26. Beneficence would seem to be a two person relation, but I will not argue this point since it will not change the conclusions either Cullity or I will argue for.
[211] Ibid.

failure to help the drowning child in our presence exhibits a greater depth of indifference, and thus is more blameworthy than failing to help the distant starving child. It is not reasonable to criticize ourselves for being psychologically less engaged by the distant child, but neither should we ignore the distant child completely.[212] And Cullity gives a second set of reasons why immediacy might make a moral difference. These further reasons are not reasons of beneficence, but instead are reasons of relationship - "relationships of immediacy create *further* reasons for helping people."[213] Just as it may be appropriate or moral to give preference to family relationships, it may also be appropriate or moral to give preference to relationships of immediacy.[214] Although Cullity's form of beneficence is indifferent to immediacy and independent of facts about the moral agent, for the separate reasons described above (psychological and relational), we moral agents are plausibly less blameworthy and less wrong to ignore the distant starving child than to ignore the drowning child in our presence. As a practical matter distance *does* matter.

Cullity's approach is not a 'virtue-ethical' normative moral theory, despite being based on beneficence which is a quality or virtue of both character and action. He states these reasons for this claim; (1) his argument gives no priority of character over action, (2) his argument can be phrased without using virtue terminology (e.g., failure to easily save someone's life is an insufficient concern for others' interests). He observes, however, that his *beneficence* is a "virtue-

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[212] Ibid., 29.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Richard Miller goes even further by setting forth a Principle of Nearby Rescue, as already discussed.

term" and is interdependent with other virtues (such as justice, honesty, and non-capriciousness) so that beneficence that violates these other virtues makes an action wrong. His beneficence can more accurately be thought of as "those forms of beneficence that it is wrong for us not to pursue."[215] It is more action oriented than the aspiration of living a virtuous life because it requires considering the quality of life of others as well as oneself.

Because he is not presupposing an "undeclared moral theory" Cullity claims that his argument needs to be seriously engaged with, regardless of the reader's theoretical moral orientation. This strategy is similar to Singer's in its attempt to avoid complicated theory and to appeal to a wide variety of readers. Cullity's arguments will later get complicated, as we will see, but the foundational beneficence argument is indeed simple and appealing.

In summary, Cullity claims the following features make his argument attractive; (1) it captures the intuition that failure to help those in desperate need when we can easily do so is wrong, (2) its theoretical neutrality can appeal to a broad group of thinkers and avoids complications of general moral theories, and (3) the conclusion is reasonably qualified, holding that failing to contribute to aid agencies is wrong, but not as wrong or as blameworthy as failing to come to the aid of someone dying in your presence. He admits that his methodology does not completely avoid the criticism of underdetermination that he alleges against Singer, because more than one conclusion can follow from his initial judgment based on beneficence. But, he argues, what is important is that no other

[215] Ibid., 31.

conclusion is more *plausible* than his conclusion that we should contribute to aid agencies.[216]

But his conclusion is based on two assumptions; that aid agencies are effective in saving lives, and there are no countervailing considerations, other than non-immediacy and indirectness, that distinguish direct aid (e.g., child in the pond) and indirect aid though agencies. Common challenges to these assumptions include the following:

- By feeding the world's surplus populations now, we are simply contributing to worse problems in the future
- Responsibility for the relief of poverty belongs to governments rather than to individuals
- The absence of proper birth control practices in poor countries makes them responsible for their own plight
- Charity degrades people as objects of our pity
- Aid agencies do economic damage, collude with corrupt governments, and are more interested in their own survival and growth than the long-term interest of the world's poor.
- Even if aid agencies are effective in averting threats to people's lives, it is doubtful whether any one individual's contribution has that effect.[217]

Cullity addresses these concerns in the next two sections.

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[216] Ibid., 32.
[217] Ibid., 32-33.

Objections to Aid

In addition to the objections stated in the last section, Cullity continues the list with the following:

- The life-saving analogy is simplistic
- The analogy is worse than politically and economically naïve, it is pernicious
- It infantilizes the poor, treating them as victims to be acted upon.
- And perhaps the strongest objection, it perpetuates the problem it is supposed to be addressing. The real answer lies in genuine political reform, but the aid industry "simply feeds resources into the structures of manipulation and injustice that enforce the subjugation and disempowerment of the poor."[218]

Despite these forceful objections, Cullity responds with the hopeful statement that they do not undermine his argument that we are morally required to help the poor.

Cullity's response begins with a discussion of the charge that aid is counter-productive because it aggravates the population problem. This objection to aid, which is usually attributed to Thomas Malthus (1766-1834), argues that feeding the hungry allows them to live and continue to procreate, thus ensuring that their populations will continue to grow, while the rate of growth in food production is unlikely to keep up with the rate of population growth, thus leading

[218] Ibid., 35.

to even more starvation in the future.[219] Modern advocates of the Malthusian argument have suggested that the best and most humane course of action is to let nature restore populations to their sustainable levels. The result will be that some will die of starvation today, but even more will be saved from starvation in the future. And as a further argument, the attempt by the affluent to save the starving today will only result in the affluent bleeding their resources down to the same miserable level as the starving. This last argument is sometimes known as "lifeboat ethics" since it poses the analogy of the earth as a lifeboat in a sea of poverty, with only a limited supply of resources.

Referencing the work of Amartya Sen and others, Cullity recites facts that strongly suggest that "food scarcity is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the existence of famines."[220] His conclusion is as follows:

> Global food production, if distributed across the world's population, would currently be more than sufficient to meet everyone's nutritional needs, and in the second half of the twentieth century its rate of increase comfortably outstripped that of global population.[221]

The real problem is economics, according to Sen. His famine explanatory strategy is to investigate, within the famine-affected population, the 'exchange entitlements' – which is the amount of commodities which can be acquired in exchange for what a person owns. If, for instance, food prices become inflated but wages stay constant, then people on the margin may not be able to buy

[219] Ibid., 36. Cullity references Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798)
[220] Ibid., 38.
[221] Ibid., 37.

enough food despite not otherwise being destitute. The food may be available but the poorest merely don't have the resources to acquire it. These explanations are currently being further studied and recommendations for averting famine during food shortages are likely to be political ones, such as a commitment to "measured intervention" by governments, according to Cullity. These commitments are more likely to be met if the government fosters political responsibility and freedom. Sen explains with historical examples that democratic countries with a free press have averted famines while dictatorial countries without the free flow of information have often not averted them. His conclusion is that "It would not be unreasonable to conclude that democracy can be a very positive influence in the prevention of famines in the contemporary world."[222] Cullity summarizes the views of Sen and others with similar views as "the best form of famine prevention is democracy."[223]

Cullity concludes that these arguments "puncture the apocalyptic neo-Malthusian view"[224] concerning the pointlessness of international aid, but in doing so opens up another objection. Sen and others argue that a politically driven social and economic restructuring is needed, but private contributions to non-governmental aid organizations are very unlikely to have the power to produce such structural changes. Some have argued that private aid is the wrong kind of intervention – pouring resources into an unsound economy is not only ineffectual, it actually makes things worse.[225] For instance, shipping free food into a

[222] Sen, Amartya, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 184.
[223] Cullity 2004, 39.
[224] Ibid., 38.
[225] Ibid., 39.

struggling economy can undercut local commodity prices by competing with the local produce and can cause ignorance and complacency concerning indigenous agriculture. And aid can also produce adverse social effects – "the motivation to work is undermined, community structures disrupted, and corruption encouraged."[226] Private aid without fundamental structural change in impoverished countries is not helpful, and it may cause harm by supporting those already in power who are likely to block the needed structural change.

Even if it could be accomplished, it is not always clear what form the structural change should take (although democracy and free press seem to be leading candidates), and Cullity cites a variety of recommendations ranging from communist land reform to market economies. And if we could agree on the needed changes and could bring them about, it is not clear that it would be right to impose these changes from outside. Thus it is not clear how private aid can do political good, but it *is* clear how political harm can result. Aid is sometimes alleged to be an instrument of political domination over the developing world by the more affluent countries and the international organizations they dominant, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. Some claim that foreign aid is "simply imperialism dressed in new clothes."[227]

Cullity reports from other sources a bleak picture of the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in this process. They are described as "organized around the commercialization of pity", purveyors of "disaster

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[226] Ibid., referencing Jackson, Tony and Deborah Eade, *Against the Grain: The Dilemma of Project Food Aid* (Oxford: Oxfam Publications, 1982).
[227] Ibid., 41, citing Teresa Hayter, *Aid as Imperialism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971)

pornography", condescending, driven by commercial imperative, and selling to donors the "illusion of help," and collaborators with the oppressors of the poor. Considering these numerous and serious objections to aid, it is almost surprising that Cullity can mount a credible response, but he does.

Before actually responding to these objections to aid, Cullity first organizes them into logical conclusions.[228] The first conclusion that could be drawn is that "(1) NGO aid is politically and economically useless"[229] because these organizations do not have the power to address the underlying causes of poverty, they can only address the symptoms. Cullity questions whether NGOs really are powerless to affect systemic change – "there is little reason to believe that this general claim is true"[230] – but he admits that it is possible that they are powerless. But if that is so, NGOs could still provide aid to individuals that can save the lives of those individuals, and drawing on the life-saving analogy, this is a good thing to do and wrong not to do. Not saving lives today because of possible future threats is wrong – "the fact that these further questions remain to be addressed is not a good reasons for me to do nothing for the person who needs my help now."[231]

By analogy, the child drowning in the shallow pond, if saved, might grow up to father (or mother) several children who also find themselves at risk of drowning because of their carelessness, but that is no reason not to save the

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[228] Ibid., 42- 46.
[229] Ibid., 42.
[230] Ibid., 43.
[231] Ibid., According to Cullity the concept of helping people in desperate need *today* is called the "humanitarian imperative," which distinguishes it from the political and economic task of preventing the need for humanitarian assistance in the *future*.

child in front of us today, even if the future children do in fact drown for lack of a rescuer. Thus, Cullity concludes that even if humanitarian aid is politically and economically useless (which he has not conceded), the "humanitarian imperative" of saving lives today is still worthwhile and is morally required. But a more troubling allegation awaits us.

A second conclusion is that NGO aid is not just useless, but regressive – "(2) NGO aid is politically and economically regressive."[232] Some NGOs have become so large and powerful in relation to the governments of the poor countries where they operate that the NGOs have become a major political and economic force standing in the way of those countries becoming self-sufficient. For example, they undermine the local economy and replace it with an artificial aid economy by flooding the countries with below market goods and services, they work with unaccountable political structures which counteracts attempts to establish democratic processes in these countries, and they fail to support concerted efforts at international political action to bring about needed structural changes. The "humanitarian imperative" of saving lives today is not a satisfactory response because, if these charges are true, the quality of lives are simultaneously being undermined, for the current *and* the future poor. But Cullity says there had better be a "very strong case" for the conclusion that aid is regressive to justify withholding humanitarian aid.

Cullity argues that effective aid agencies exist that do good for the poor and also minimize adverse effects on the local economy and political structure, but that *even if there were no effective aid agencies*, (1) effective aid strategies

[232] Ibid., 44.

can be devised, (2) if such strategies can't be devised, aid should be phased out gradually and not suddenly, and (3) if aid is not the answer, we should find other ways to help the poor.

Cullity's own summary of his arguments is even briefer: "at least some forms of aid are helpful, and help need not take the form of humanitarian aid."[233] His further thought is that the ultimate goal should be to withdraw all aid because all societies become self-sufficient and thus aid is not needed. But the withdrawal of aid prematurely can result in massive suffering. Until the time comes when aid is not needed, he proposes that an independent watchdog should oversee aid agencies to help avoid the problems that critics have cited. He says we should seek out and support the better aid agencies and also support efforts to scrutinize and improve them.

What is our moral status if we don't contribute to aid agencies because we *believe* they are counter-productive? My conversations with several friends reveal that many people have the perception that aid agencies are inefficient, laden with administrative costs, and sometimes even corrupt. Are they wrong not to give? But I argue, along with Cullity, that we have a duty to investigate the facts before dismissing foreign aid. Drawing again on the life-saving analogy, if we came across a child drowning in the ocean but we can't swim, some may say there is nothing we can do. But we have a duty to investigate further. Perhaps there is a life-buoy nearby that we could toss to the child, maybe we can find someone who can swim, or some other possibility, but it is wrong to do nothing until we have diligently investigated the situation. By analogy, we should

[233] Ibid.

investigate the international aid situation to learn the facts. Cullity says that if we do not investigate we are both blameworthy and wrong. If we thoroughly investigate and conclude that aid agencies are counter-productive, then we are not blameworthy, even though we could still wrong.[234] And if we have other more morally important commitments then we would not be wrong or blameworthy for tending to those other commitments.

Cullity distinguishes blameworthiness from wrongness in the following way: wrongness reflects the force and kind of *reasons* against doing something, blameworthiness reflects the extent to which blame attaches if you fail to act on those reasons. For example, we generally consider that slaveholding is wrong, regardless of when it takes place, because there are good and forceful moral reasons against slaveholding. But because slavery was an accepted part of the social fabric in some past times, people had *reasons* to believe it was morally acceptable, and thus they are less blameworthy than would be a slaveholder in modern times.[235] If we fail to investigate the facts of international aid, and fail to give because of unsubstantiated beliefs, we are both wrong (if the facts are as Cullity concludes) as well as blameworthy.

Even if we agree with the life-saving analogy and agree with Cullity that the better international aid agencies do good and are not generally economically and politically counter-productive, does the analogy call for aid agency contributions to the exclusion of other good causes? Cullity acknowledges that the conclusions of the life-saving analogy are broader than that. There are other

[234] Cullity states that Michael Maren, author of *The Road to Hell,* has obviously investigated (p. 237, FN 75). So Maren may be wrong, but he is not blameworthy.
[235] Cullity 2004, 50 (FN 76, p. 237), slavery example at p. 28.

causes of comparable importance, both domestic and international, that address extreme needs. So more generally stated, the life-saving analogy leads to the broad conclusion that it is wrong to do nothing, not *just* the narrower conclusion that we should give to international aid agencies. Cullity states the broader, more technically accurate, conclusion as follows: "if you are not making a serious effort to find an effective way to help the poor, or contributing to some other comparably important cause, then you are acting wrongly."[236] But for convenience Cullity (and I) will continue to state the conclusion of the life-saving analogy in the simpler, less accurate, form – that it is wrong not to contribute to international aid agencies.

Cullity finishes this stage of discussion with the conclusion that, once the important points made by aid critics are taken into account, the life-saving analogy is viable and creates a powerful case for a moral obligation to help the poor. This discussion helps establish the distant poor on our circle of concern (or our HMO, but it also makes us aware that effectively helping the distant poor can be complicated. Some forms of aid are counterproductive, some aid agencies are inefficient and possibly even corrupt, the underlying economic and political causes of poverty are unlikely to be solved by even the best aid agencies, and our individual contributions are unlikely to have a large impact on the enormous amount of poverty in the world. Nevertheless, these are not sufficient reasons to not try to help. We should ideally educate ourselves on these issues to make our efforts more effective, or at least identify the best aid agencies to support. My

[236] Ibid., 51.

proposed Periodic Personal Plan will suggest a time to reflect on these issues and decide which causes belong on the outer tiers of our HMO.

Saving Lives

Cullity has been emphasizing the obligation to save lives, but he also acknowledges that quality of life is important and is probably more important than mere existence. He argues that aid agencies that make people's lives better should be preferred to those that merely prolong lives and since he has concluded that giving to life-saving agencies is morally required, giving to life-enhancing agencies is required *a fortiori.*[237] Although this logic is debatable, the idea of enhancing life in addition to merely saving lives is laudable.

In this section of discussion Cullity has addressed whether aid agencies avert threats to people's lives. He observes that no *individual* contribution to an aid agency is literally analogous to saving a life directly. However, this does not really matter because contributions, taken *collectively*, do avert threats to people's lives. Thus the life-saving analogy is defensible. Collective contributions are morally required because they are analogous to the direct saving of life, and for reasons of fairness each of us is morally required to contribute to the collective action. This completes Cullity's defense of the claim that failing to contribute to aid agencies is morally wrong. More fully and carefully stated, his conclusion is that "you are acting wrongly if you are not making a

[237] Ibid., 68.

serious effort to find an effective way to help the poor, or contributing to some other comparably important cause."[238]

This discussion broadens the implication of the life-saving analogy. We have moral obligations based on beneficence (and on fairness when collective action is required) to save lives directly, to directly participate with others to collectively save lives, to contribute to collective efforts to save lives as well as prevent the loss of lives, and to contribute to life-enhancing agencies (such as blindness prevention programs). The needs of the world's poor and desperate take on many forms, and our forms of response to those needs can be flexible to allow for individual preference and judgment as to how best to help. As Cullity suggests, doing nothing seems to be the only truly unacceptable option. Setting priorities for one's beneficence can best be handled comprehensively on a periodic basis, rather than spontaneously as one is appealed to for poverty aid or other uses of ones resources. The implications of the life-saving analogy belong in our moral circle of concern (or HMO) along with obligations to oneself and dependents, and other intermediary obligations.

The Extreme Demand

The moral demand that Cullity considers at this stage could be demanding in the extreme by requiring that we renounce spending on ourselves except for the basic necessities. Beneficence requires that we act to benefit the many in the world who desperately need help, and that can easily be demanding. He

[238] Ibid., 69.

considers two demanding obligations that respond to the duty of beneficence – the *Severe* Demand and the *Extreme* Demand.

Iterating the life-saving analogy leads to the Severe Demand. Applying the life-saving analogy in the way "encouraged by its best-known advocates"[239] requires saving the life of a desperately needy person if we can do that by giving a small amount of money to aid agencies. In isolation and in one-on-one comparisons of how we should spend our money, this test is compelling and seems reasonable. The severity (and most say unreasonableness) of this interpretation results when we focus on the sheer number of desperately needy people in the world. Consider, by analogy, walking past an endless number of children in shallow ponds. It would be morally outrageous to not save the first child we come across in these circumstances, and perhaps even the thousandth child, but at some point the time required for the life-saving tasks will crowd out everything else in life except the rudiments of existence for the rescuer. When can we morally stop saving drowning children? Similarly, when can we morally stop making donations to life-saving aid agencies?

Cullity addresses the latter question by considering (1) how much does it cost to save a life, and (2) how great a sacrifice excuses the failure to save a life. The aid agencies offer estimates of what it costs to save a life, which vary considerably depending on the assumptions – from a low of $1 per child to treat the dehydration caused by diarrhea with oral rehydration therapy (ORT) to a range of $20 -$30 for vaccination programs to a range of £50 to £150 providing emergency supplies of food and other basic necessities per person for six

[239] Ibid., 70. Cullity is here referring especially to Peter Singer, Peter Unger, and James Fishkin.

months. But resolving which, if any, of these estimates represents the "cost of saving a life" is not critical to the arguments because they are all small when considered in isolation. Furthermore, Cullity says we should doubt whether giving $1 or even a much larger amount to a charity will save a life. As previously discussed, individual contributions to aid agencies do not literally save lives.

But the second question presents a substantial moral question, which the argument for the life-saving analogy sidesteps by taking as a starting point "our ordinary 'common-sense' understanding of what is required to save another person's life."[240] The so-called 'understandings' range from the *not controversial* ("merely inconvenient" sacrifices of time and money) to the *more demanding* ("very substantial financial sacrifices") to the *heroic,* which is more than can be morally demanded and not wrong to refuse ("risking death, permanent injury, or the impairment of your life prospects").[241] Thus the 'common-sense' moral level for giving seems to be somewhere short of impairment of life prospects, but otherwise varies according to the source. Because the Severe Demand focuses on the cost of saving a life (which we can't adequately define) and the level of financial contributions required to save a life (individual financial contributions don't literally save lives), he says the Severe Demand is "not the right conclusion to draw from the life-saving analogy."[242] As concluded in the last section of discussion, contributions to aid agencies *collectively* save lives, and thus we are *collectively* required to support these agencies, and *fairness* requires that we

[240] Ibid., 72.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid., 73.

each contribute toward this collective effort. The question then becomes, what does fairness mean in the context of out current discussion?

Cullity calls “fair share views” the “most natural” way to determine fairness, but argues that they are wrong. This view calls for the following steps; (1) define severe poverty in material terms, (2) specify a threshold of affluence to determine the pool of people required to help, (3) supply a principle for fairly distributing the cost among the affluent in the specified pool. We then calculate the amount needed to alleviate severe poverty worldwide (add up the amounts by which each of the world’s poor are below the poverty level), and then divide this amount (method to be determined) among the world’s affluent *assuming* every affluent person were actually contributing. Cullity observes that the resulting burden on each affluent person will not be extremely demanding because, according to reliable figures, there are as many people above the poverty lines as below them, and the amount required to bring the poor above the line is only $1 to $2 per day[243] in the worst case scenario (i.e., assuming each of the poor have no income and no assets). Thus if the affluent in number were at least as many as the severely poor (there are actually more people above the poverty lines as below them in the world), and the costs were divided equally among those above the line, the maximum costs would be $365 to $730 per year per person.[244] This amount does not seem to be overly burdensome, and presumably the burden

[243] This assumes that the severe poverty level is either of the two most common levels cited in the literature, $1 or $2 per day.

[244] This is a very rough calculation, meant only to plausibly assert that the burden on the affluent under this methodology is unlikely to be overly burdensome. It does not address at what point a person is no longer subject to the kind of deprivation that grounds requirements of beneficence, nor does it consider at what point a person is affluent enough to have duties of beneficence toward others.

would not be shared equally but instead would be graduated according to ability to pay, which would make the amount per person even less burdensome for the lower 50% of the affluent. But refining this calculation may not be worthwhile because one of the main assumptions is not true – i.e., not every affluent person will voluntarily contribute. Some say that obligations are capped according to the calculation described above,[245] but Cullity argues that that a *new* calculation is required to allocate the total costs among *only those contributing*.

Liam Murphy argues that all requirements of beneficence derive from a basic collective requirement, and thus these requirements are agent-neutral (i.e., not linked to other specific individuals the way agent-relative duties such as promise keeping are linked). Under this reasoning the individual requirement of aid to the poor is satisfied by each affluent person when he or she performs his or her fair share of the collective requirement, even if the collective requirement is not thereby satisfied because some affluent people fail to do their part. Murphy says it is not morally required to help beyond this level, although failure to rescue people we could easily help displays bad character, even if we have already done our fair share.[246]

Cullity is unconvinced by this analysis. He argues that the object of the duty of beneficence is a particular individual (or individuals) and not some abstract portion of a collective duty. In regard to direct rescue, it would be wrong to ignore drowning children even if others fail to do their part in the rescue.

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[245] Ibid., 74. Cullity mentions that Liam Murphy "has given the most thoroughly argued presentation of a Fair Share View to date." He cites in a footnote (FN 12) Murphy, *Moral Demands in Nonideal Theory* and Murphy, "The Demands of Beneficence."
[246] Ibid., 75.

Others' wrong actions are irrelevant to what I should be doing because my duty of benevolence applies as a result of the child's need to be rescued and the fact that I can easily do so. Cullity says the beneficent reason for direct rescue comes from "what I could do for him [e.g., a drowning child], and not from what we can all do for other people collectively."[247]

Cullity clarifies that his arguments specify an individual, non-collective-based duty as to direct rescue, and a collective-based duty as to contributions to aid agencies. Thus even if his argument as to aid agency contributions should lead to a fair share view (which it doesn't), it would not have the implausible implications for direct rescue (i.e., no duty to rescue a child in your presence after your fair share of saving) that he observes in Murphy's approach. [248]

Cullity argues that the Fair Share View is wrong because, if not everyone contributes who should, then some who still desperately need help will go unaided. He demonstrates the point with an example of three potential rescuers and three people in the water needing rescue. In this case, there is a collective requirement to rescue from which an individual duty is derived. But if one of the three rescuers walks away, that does not relieve the two remaining rescuers from their now greater duty of rescuing all three victims, not just their proportional share of the original collective obligation. This new greater duty is what Cullity calls a "new collective requirement" which he says beneficence requires because the remaining victim desperately needs help and the two rescuers can easily help. In Cullity's view we collectively ought to *continue* helping people in

[247] Ibid., 76.
[248] Ibid.

desperate need when we can easily do so, even when others fail to do their part. This expresses the essence of beneficence, and is his reason for rejecting Fair Share Views.

In summary of the above discussion, the Severe Demand is not the conclusion we should draw from the life-saving analogy because it fails to recognize that individual contributions to aid agencies do not literally save lives but instead the collective contributions save lives and the individual obligation derives from this collective effort on the basis of fairness. And the Fair Share View is not the conclusion we should draw because it fails to address the needs of those victims of poverty who would be left out if every affluent person did not participate in the effort. Cullity now discusses what conclusion we *should* draw from the life-saving analogy.

We have established that as long as the cost is small, the individual is morally required to contribute a one-person share toward the collective effort to save lives. Now the question is, when is this cost no longer small, but instead is large enough to justifiably stop contributing? A case-by-case evaluation seems to be dictated by the life-saving analogy. The case of each drowning child should be separately evaluated, and if we can save the child at small cost we should do so. And analogously, if a small contribution will contribute toward saving more lives it seems that we should continue to contribute even though we have already contributed. This is the iterative approach, and results in what Cullity calls The Extreme Demand, which I will state here:

> *The Extreme Demand*. I am morally required to keep contributing my time and money to aid agencies (or some other comparably important cause), until either:
>
> a) there are no longer any lives to be saved (or comparably important goals achieved) by those agencies, or
>
> b) contributing *my share of the cost* of our collectively saving one further life (or doing something comparably important) would itself be a large enough sacrifice to excuse my refusing to contribute.[249]

This demand is similar to the Severe Demand, and requires a similar evaluation of asking two questions: (1) how much would it cost us collectively to provide a person with life-saving help, and (2) what can be demanded of me as a contribution towards a *collective* action of saving someone's life. The first question and its answer is the same as in the Severe Demand – the average cost can be calculated but it is misleading to suggest there is a direct correlation between a specific amount of money and a life saved. The second question is similar for both the Severe and the Extreme Demands, but the answers are different. The Severe Demand requires large financial sacrifices but not risks of death, permanent injury, or the impairment of life prospects. The answer to the second question for the Extreme Demand seems to be our share (divided among all affluent people) of the estimated, average cost of saving a life, which is a very small amount. The highest estimate from above was £150 (about $300 US), which would require a very small fraction of a penny per affluent person. This

[249] Ibid., 78-79.

amount is obviously not burdensome, but when the amount is iterated for all the desperately poor people in the world, it would become burdensome and would leave very little money for personal fulfillment. Cullity comments that under this analysis Albert Schweitzer, who dedicated most of his adult life to helping the poor of Africa, would be morally wrong to spend time on his Bach scholarship.[250] Although Cullity earlier rejected the Severe Demand, he now tentavely arrives at a conclusion, the Extreme Demand, which is even more severe than the Severe Demand.

Most people are not capable of meeting such a demand, and Cullity observes that a life completely dedicated to the poor, even if one could achieve it, would probably not be the best for the poor and thus would not be morally required.[251] The poor would benefit more if the affluent engage productively in highly paid jobs and give substantial portions of that money away, rather than engage in a single-minded focus on helping the poor every day. Thus the conclusion that it is wrong not to meet the Extreme Demand should be modified to say that it is wrong not to *get as close* to meeting the Extreme Demand as you *productively* can. This line of thinking suggests that we should do what is necessary to stay motivated in our own productivity, using the fruits of our productivity to benefit the poor.

The iterative approach that has been assumed allows one to stop contributing when the cost of helping the *next needy person* is excessive, a level we would not reach until our own resources were very meager. But an

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[250] Ibid., 80

[251] Ibid., 81. Cullity is obviously applying consequentialists standards here, and he cites both Singer and Unger as sources for this position in his footnote 21.

alternative approach is available, which allows one to stop contributing when the *aggregate cost* of successive contributions is great enough to excuse giving further. This aggregate can be measured as the aggregate of what has been given or the aggregate of what is retained, and there may be other variations of how to apply this approach, but Cullity observes that "practically all aggregative approaches to the life-saving analogy will yield less severe demands that an iterative approach."[252]

According to Cullity, the 'common-sense' application of the iterative approach assumes that "only a permanently life-impairing harm would justify refusing to save one person's life" and thus our duty would be extremely demanding.[253] The life-saving analogy is based on intuitive ethical convictions ("confidently endorsed moral judgments"[254]), but the logical extension of the analogy via the iterative approach pits two intuitions against one another:

- The iterative approach calls for the extremely *intuitive* conclusion that failing to easily save someone's life right in front of us is morally wrong.
- The iterative approach calls for the extremely *unintuitive* conclusion that we are morally obligated to abandon almost all of our everyday personal lives in order to benefit the poor.

This dilemma cries out for an alternative approach, such as the aggregate approach which would allow one to stop aid to the poor when a personal *overall* sacrifice is made. This more reasonable view of how to balance moral sacrifice against personal fulfillment has the potential of a "more intuitively attractive

[252] Ibid., 84.
[253] Ibid., 85.
[254] Ibid., 13.

view."[255] And yet the force of the intuition that it is wrong to walk away from anyone we could easily save, even if we have saved many already, does not go away. And beyond mere intuition, beneficence seems to demand that we help the next person for the *reasons* that the person is in great need and that we can easily help.

Cullity concludes this portion of his discussion with the conclusion that we should *get as close as possible* to productively meeting the Extreme Demand, which would entail the iterative approach. But few people meet this demand or even attempt to, not solely because of moral weakness, but primarily because we do not intuitively believe the Extreme Demand is true. It may be plausible to disregard the Extreme Demand even if we can't identify the problems in the arguments that lead to it, as expressed by David Lewis in his critique of Unger, "even if we cannot diagnose the flaw, it is more credible that the argument has a flaw than that its most extreme conclusion is true."[256] But Cullity does not choose to dismiss the Extreme Demand and the iterative approach on the basis of their incredibility. Instead, in Part II of his book he develops arguments for refuting the iterative approach and defending a certain aggregate approach, which is itself very demanding but more moderate than the iterative approach.

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[255] Ibid.

[256] Ibid., 88, citing in FN 32, Lewis, David, "Illusory Innocence?", *Eureka Street,* 5 (1996), 36, reprinted in David Lewis, *Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 155. In an earlier footnote (FN 1, p. 240), Cullity says Lewis misreads Unger: "Unger's argument does not proceed by iterating the life-saving analogy for each needy person who could be helped at a distance. (For this (mis)reading of his argument, see David Lewis, 'Illusory Innocence?", 35.)

Problems of Demandingness

The problem of the extreme moral demand suggested by the preceding discussion can take on a variety of forms, and Cullity describes three. It can be a problem of (1) the content of morality (2) morality itself, or (3) a personal type. Assuming one finds the extreme demand too demanding, an appropriate response would need to address the form of the problem. A response to (1) would say something like; the moral outlook as applied to this particular problem is absurd, and I am justified in rejecting this application or reading of morality. A response to (2) would say something like the following; morality is not compatible with practical reason, and since morality says to strip my life of personal fulfillment I am justified in disregarding morality and following a non-moral standard instead. And a response to (3) might say something like this; morality and its application to this particular problem is indeed very demanding and following it will make my life much more difficult, or at least less focused on self-fulfillment than I would like it to be.[257]

Cullity chooses the first response as his approach to the problem of demandingness, and thus he challenges the *content* of morality as applied to the problem of world poverty. The second part of his book is devoted to explaining how the Extreme Demand is wrong, although his own conclusion about our moral obligations is itself demanding.

Peter Singer chooses the third response, which seems to be the reason for all the controversy since his 1972 article. He lays out his view of morality as

[257] Ibid., 90. In footnote 3, Cullity attributes this last response to Peter Singer, Peter Unger, James Rachels and others. As will be discussed, Cullity instead chooses the content of morality response (1), and this indicates a major difference in approach.

applied to world poverty, acknowledges that it is demanding, and then leaves it up to the reader to decide whether or not to be "moral." This causes great discomfort to those people who take seriously his arguments and find no avenue of escape. The choice seems to either be moral and to live an ascetic life devoted to giving most of what you have to the poor, or to be "immoral" and not do what his CMI principle requires. This characterization of Singer's view is plausible, I believe, but it may be less nuanced than his own characterization. He has indicated that he personally does not strictly follow the CMI principle, and that other personal considerations can overrule morality,[258] which seems to be a response of the first type (moral content) or even of the second type (morality itself).

The arguments of John Arthur and Richard Miller are also of the first kind. They do not try to disproved morality (2) or to merely conclude that morality and it's application is difficult and leave the reader to squirm (3). Along with Cullity, they also try to find rationale arguments to reconcile the application of moral duties to world poverty with common sense and respect for personal fulfillment. Cullity offers a summary of the essence of what he and others argue;

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[258] "On my view, I could recognize that if I were totally committed to doing what I ought to do, I would give away my wealth up to the point indicated in my article; but at the same time I may, without any irrationality, choose to be less than totally committed to doing what I ought to do. My own interests, or those of my family, may counteract the demands of morality to some degree, and I may think it reasonable to give in to them, while recognizing that it is morally wrong for me to do so." Singer, Peter "A Response" in Jamieson, Dale, ed., *Singer and His Critics* (Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999), 309.

"I freely admit to not doing all that I should do; but I could do it, and the fact that I do not do it does not vitiate the claim that it is what I should do." Singer, Peter, "Outsiders: our obligations to those beyond our borders" in Chatterjee, Deen K., *The Ethics of Assistance: Morality and the Distant Needy* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 29.

> Morality must leave us room to lead a fulfilling life, rather than a life emptied of fulfillment in the service of others. And if leading a fulfilling life is justifiable, then we are justified in rejecting the iterative accumulation of small demands into large ones, since it is incompatible with having such a life.[259]

If any of these authors is successful, the burden put on us by Peter Singer will be lightened at least a bit, and hopefully we can become "moral" again.

Although every significant author on this topic has a different approach, many are similar. Cullity seeks to locate his argument in relation to those of other philosophers, and to compile a list of the difficulties and problems that his argument will have to overcome if it is to be convincing.

Cullity first aims to identify and categorize the source of the problem. He claims that most theoretical sources for problems of moral demandingness have in common the impartial point of view, and impartiality applies to consequentialism as well as to other moral ways of thinking. But the argument for the Extreme Demand does *not* require impartiality, but only "less than complete partiality."[260] Because of its iterative effect, the Extreme Demand only requires that we be prepared to do *something* for others, even if it is minor and significantly less than what impartiality would require (i.e., what we do for ourselves). For instance, most of us would say it is reasonable for us to be prepared to give one dollar to a starving person to allow that person to buy enough food to live another day. But when this is iterated to the world's starving,

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[259] Cullity 2004, 91.
[260] Ibid., 93.

and no one else is available to help at the moment, we may be surprised that we seem to have found it "reasonable" to give away something like $2.4 billion. Iteration can take your breath away with its startling effect, given the size of the poverty issue in the world. Well before most of us reach a monetary level of giving that would make a significant dent in world poverty we would have decimated our financial resources. In addition to the financial loss, Cullity describes the types of losses this would entail including, *inter alia*, compromise of important personal attributes, such as personal relationships, fulfillment and commitment to personal projects, integrity and self-respect, agency and identity, autonomy, and standing as a bearer of rights.[261] Conjuring images of Hobbes, Cullity says "It would mean going to war against your own humanity: setting yourself against the kinds of good that shape a human life at its best."[262]

Cullity then suggests the general form of objection to the Extreme Demand he plans to undertake. Each of the sacrifices in the sequence may be *insignificant* (i.e., one dollar or failing to be on time for a meeting regarding an important personal project), but if one makes the sacrifice in every case (i.e., give a dollar to all the starving, or try to rescue all who are in peril) that will involve a different kind of sacrifice that *is* significant. And if one can legitimately refuse to bear that more significant loss, then that might itself justify refusing to think in the iterative way.[263]

Cullity bases his argument against the Extreme Demand on a clever interpretation of beneficence and impartiality. The form of his approach involves

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[261] Iblid., 94.
[262] Ibid, referencing Susan Wolf and John Cottingham in footnote 15.
[263] Ibid., 94.

analysis of an assumption underlying the Extreme Demand, and then showing that the assumption involves presuppositions that compel the rejection of the Extreme Demand. Generally stated, the assumption in question is that others' interests give us reason to act, but that assumption "involves presuppositions that themselves compel the rejection of the Extreme Demand."[264] This causes a contradiction which then provides a logical reason to reject the Extreme Demand. He gives two examples to demonstrate the form of his argument.

The first example is from *The Metaphysics of Morals* by Immanuel Kant, where Kant argues, based on the universalizability of moral reasons, that benevolence to myself must be permissible if benevolence to others is to be required. Cullity quotes the following from Kant, "…a maxim of promoting others' happiness at the sacrifice of one's own happiness, one's true needs, would conflict with itself if it were made a universal law."[265] Kant based duties for the welfare of others on benevolence (*willing* the good of others) rather than beneficence (*doing* good to others), according to Cullity.[266]

A second example comes from Bernard Williams' argument in "Persons, Character and Morality" where Williams argues that recognizing reasons to pursue personal projects is a precondition of recognizing reasons to do anything. He argues that commitments to personal projects and relationships are the condition of one's existence because they give life its significance, and thus it is

[264] Ibid., 103.
[265] Ibid., 103, citing Kant in Footnotes 42-44.
[266] Ibid., 103.

not sensible to abandon these commitments, which impartiality would seem to require.[267]

The advantages of this argument form as touted by Cullity include the following: no global argument about morality in general is required; egoism is presumed to be false so it seems to avoid a conclusion that is too strong; and because the argument focuses on beneficence and not global moral claims it will not offer resistance to moral requirements of substantial self-sacrifice or to supererogation that arise from sources other than beneficence.

Impartiality, Fairness, and Beneficence

As a brief recap, the Extreme Demand has two simple ingredients; (1) the life-saving analogy, and (2) the iteration of that analogy. Together they lead to the conclusion that we are morally required to get as close as possible to the Extreme Demand. Cullity now begins his attack on the Extreme Demand. His strategy is to show that the Extreme Demand can be rejected from an "appropriately impartial point of view"[268] and the key notion he uses to undermine the Extreme Demand is that *a certain amount of personal partiality is impartially acceptable.*[269]

The Extreme Demand drew on two sources of moral requirements; beneficence and fairness. Beneficence is invoked for the conclusion that we are *collectively* required to help the desperately poor at small cost, and fairness is invoked for the conclusion that each of is *individually* required to contribute to the

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[267] Ibid., 104, citing Williams, Bernard, "Persons, Character and Morality" in his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1-19.
[268] Ibid., 112.
[269] Ibid., 114.

collective requirement of beneficence, and then iteration leads to the Extreme Demand. Since there is a close connection between impartiality and both beneficence *and* fairness, if the Extreme Demand can be rejected from an "appropriately impartial point of view" then impartiality cannot be the requirement of either beneficence or fairness. The first task is to show the connections of impartiality with both beneficence and fairness, beginning with fairness.

There is a close conceptual connection between fairness and impartiality, and even stronger than that, Cullity says that "kinds of fairness *are* kinds of appropriate impartiality."[270] To argue this relationship, Cullity discusses the various types of fairness to show that *appropriate* impartiality is an essential quality. For instance, fairness in deciding sports awards requires judging ability *impartially*, fairness in deciding who gets welfare handouts requires judging need *impartially*, fairness in deciding the winner of a foot race requires judging *impartially* who first crosses the finish line, fairness in deciding court trials requires applying *impartially* the procedural rules and substantive laws, fairness in family and personal obligations requires fulfilling legitimate normative expectations *impartially*, and restorative and retributive fairness require application of normative or legal rules *impartially* (i.e., without regard to the identities of the victim or the perpetrator of an offense).

Based on these observations, Cullity concludes that requirements of fairness *are* requirements of appropriate impartiality, and that unfairness is the failure of appropriate impartiality. Thus, "if the Extreme Demand can be rejected from an appropriately impartial point of view, it cannot be claimed to correspond

[270] Ibid., 115.

to a requirement of fairness."[271] If, as previously argued, the Extreme Demand is a requirement of fairness (i.e., the personal contribution aspect), it is a claim about appropriate impartiality, and if the Extreme Demand can be *rejected* from the point of view of "appropriately impartial concern for others' interests" it can be rejected compatibly with fairness (i.e., a fair concern for others' interests). And thus the Extreme Demand is *not* a requirement of fairness after all, despite what was previously argued. The claim that fairness could require individuals to contribute *to the extent* required by the Extreme Demand would be undermined.[272]

A similar analysis applies to the relationship between impartiality and *beneficence*. Beneficence involves a practical concern for other peoples' interest and it requires one to make an overall *compromise* in pursuit of one's own interest in order to respond to the interests of others. The range of such compromise extends from the extreme of no compromise (i.e., no beneficence) to the other extreme of self-abnegation (i.e., *greater* concern for others than for self). Since beneficence is assumed by Cullity from the beginning, the no compromise position can be dismissed, and so can self-abnegation, according to Cullity, by arguing that requiring one person to damage her own interests for the sake of conferring a lesser benefit on others is untenable.[273] His argument against self-abnegation is not thorough and not entirely clear, but since self-abnegation is not a serious contender in this discussion of moral requirements of compromise, I won't investigate it further. For purposes of this discussion two

[271] Ibid., 117.
[272] Ibid., 117-8.
[273] Ibid., 120.

serious contenders for the level of required compromise need to be considered: complete impartiality and the compromise required by the Extreme Demand (which requires something less than complete impartiality). Cullity's strategy is to show that the Extreme Demand is excessively demanding, even if we *assume* the Extreme Demand requires *complete* impartiality. If this is true it will also be true of any lesser degree of impartiality.[274]

Cullity describes various conceptions of impartiality that could be considered *appropriate,* but ultimately "sidesteps" making a choice among them because it is unnecessary to do so. If he can reject the Extreme Demand while assuming a *completely* impartial point of view, then the Extreme Demand can be rejected on the basis of *any* plausible conception of impartiality (i.e., because all other *plausible* conceptions of impartiality are less than completely impartial). If the Extreme Demand can be rejected while assuming that complete impartiality is morally required, then it can be rejected *a fortiori* from the point of view of some lesser level of impartiality.

And if the Extreme Demand can be rejected on the basis of impartiality, then the two-level foundation upon which the Extreme Demand is built – beneficence and fairness – is undermined.

Rejection of the Extreme Demand

Cullity wants to show what is *wrong* with the Extreme Demand, not merely claim that it is too burdensome so we are justified in disregarding it. Nor does he

[274] Ibid., 121.

want to say that it is valid but other interests can override it (as Singer claims) or that it is valid but we are too morally weak to follow it. The purpose of this discussion is to show what is wrong with the Extreme Demand.

His strategy is to show that certain forms of personal partiality are impartially acceptable, and because the Extreme Demand can't allow for this, it must be rejected. These forms of permissible personal partiality come from presuppositions of beneficence itself, similar to the presuppositions employed by Kant and Williams, earlier discussed.[275]

Beneficence is concerned with the lives of others, and the value these lives have to their possessors. According to Cullity, the value of life can be identified in certain "goods" in life, what he calls "intrinsically life-enhancing goods" (ILEG). Examples of such goods include friendships, worthwhile personal projects, and involvement in the life of a community or society, and these all essentially involve attitudes of personal partiality. These goods are partial in the sense that the possessor has reason for acting "out of proportion to the impartial value" of these goods.[276] It is not that these goods are more objectively valuable that other people's, but that they have more value to the *possessor*. My interests in pursuing my own goods have importance to me just as someone else's interests in pursuing their own goods have importance to them. Mine are not necessarily more important than anyone else's (except to me), but if I don't show some partiality to my own goods (friendships, projects, etc.) they will cease to have *any* value because I will lose them and their value which resides with me.

[275] Ibid., 103-4, as previously discussed.
[276] Ibid., 131.

Cullity argues that this attitude of partiality and the maintenance of these goods of personal partiality are "surely" impartially acceptable.[277] This basic premise, not the *amount* of partiality we are morally allowed, is all that is required at this stage of the argument.

As earlier noted, the Extreme Demand does not require *complete* impartiality, but it *would* compromise the most important goods in our lives such as friendships, projects, etc. Considering the amount of poverty in the world today, it would require giving away almost everything and reducing ourselves to close to the level of mere subsistence. We would not be able to develop skills or talents except those that are instrumental to the service of the poor. And we would have to give until giving more "would itself be bad enough for you to justify refusing to do so."[278] This would require sacrifices in friendships, although it would not necessarily require going without friendships altogether.

The life devoted to the Extreme Demand (or trying to get as close as possible to complying with it) is described by Cullity as the "altruistically focused" life (the "AF" life). Such a life would be constrained "as much as I bearably and usefully can, for the purpose of contributing to helping others."[279] He observes that such a life would be unattractive to most people, although the lives of some are already oriented to projects of aid, public welfare, and community service and such lives can be as deep and as valuable as any others. But the issue is not whether such a life is attractive, but whether it is morally required.

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[277] Ibid. One reason extreme poverty is bad is because it deprives the poor of many of these intrinsic life-enhancing goods.
[278] Ibid., 133.
[279] Ibid.

A non-altruistically-focused life (a "non-AF" life) would be one with an overall non-altruistic focus, as well as one with that lacks a *single* overall focus. He observes that *most* of our lives lack a single overall focus (altruistic or otherwise) and thus would be considered non-altruistic for purposes of this discussion.

Beneficence and the Extreme Demand ground the requirement of saving others' lives on the straightforward reason that it is in other people's *interests* to have their lives saved. Life itself is non-instrumentally good for its bearer, but life is also the vehicle for the fulfillments that a well-lived life can contain. Cullity argues that the requirements of beneficence extend not just to lives themselves, but also to the fulfillments of life. Thus beneficence would apply to helping one attain not only a well-lived life, but perhaps surprisingly, would also apply to helping one attain a non-altruistically-focused life (i.e., a normal life). But if this is so, the Extreme Demand has a serious problem according to Cullity.

Cullity's argument against the Extreme Demand has three main claims, as follows:

1. Helping people is morally required in response to their interests in the fulfillments of a non-altruistically-focused life.
2. The Extreme Demand implies that non-altruistic interests are wrong to have.
3. Someone's interests in getting what it is *wrong* to have cannot be a good reason for requiring another person to help.[280]

[280] Ibid., 137-8.

If 1 and 3 are correct, then the logical conclusion of their combination is that it is not wrong to lead a non-altruistically-focused life. But the Extreme Demand says this it is wrong (2), and thus Cullity says the Extreme Demand should be rejected. He examines each of the three main claims, but in reverse order.

The principle that we have no moral obligation to help others achieve what it is wrong for them to have, the third main claim, is widely recognized. For instance, we are not required to help people achieve their sadistic or malicious interests, and we are not required to help a gangster fix his gun when it malfunctions. Interests that are wrong in the sense we are discussing are morally unacceptable, and thus by definition are not moral interests. A moral requirement to help someone pursue immoral interests makes no sense (unless there was a previous binding promise or some other extenuating circumstances). A second argument, based on impartiality, can also be made. One person cannot be required to help another further an interests that the first person is not morally allowed, unless there is some relevant difference between the two people. If it is wrong for me to rob a bank, it would be wrong for me to help you rob a bank (even if I don't keep any of the money). And the converse would also apply - it cannot be impartially acceptable to *forbid* one person to pursue for himself what he is required to help others to pursue (again, unless there is some relevant difference between the two people).[281] If I am required to help save someone's life if I can easily do so, then it would be absurd to say I have no right to live myself. And if I am required to help save someone's non-altruistically-focused

[281] Ibid., 139.

life, then it must be acceptable for me to live such a life (at least within some limits which have yet to be discussed).

The second main claim concerns what the Extreme Demand allows. The Extreme Demand requires an altruistically-focused life, but beneficence requires us to come to the aid of people whether or not they are meeting the Extreme Demand (very few people are). This in itself is not a problem for the Extreme Demand; the problem arises when we focus on the particular interests of the people needing help. If those interests are not altruistic-focused, as required by the Extreme Demand, then the Extreme Demand, along with the third main claim just discussed, lead to the conclusion that there are no morally compelling reasons for us to help people achieve those interests. For instance, there may be nothing wrong in itself with me helping you repair your gun, but it would be wrong for you to use the gun to rob a bank and, under the third claim just discussed, I have no morally compelling reason to help you repair your gun for this purpose (in fact it would be wrong for me to help you, considering your purpose). The Extreme Demand is committed to the position that it is morally wrong to pursue non-altruistic-focused interests, considering the current circumstances of world poverty, and the third claim adds that, because it is wrong, we have no morally compelling reason to help. Cullity calls this conclusion absurd.[282]

Cullity's first main claim in this discussion was that other people's interest in the fulfillments of a non-altruistically-focused life obviously *does* provide us with morally compelling reasons to help them. Beneficence requires us to help

[282] Ibid., 140.

people because they need the help, and there is no requirement that the person needing help be a moral saint – that is, that she is following the Extreme Demand and strictly following an altruistically-focused life. If that were a condition, beneficence would impose a moral obligation to help very few people, and they probably don't particularly want nor need it because of their focus on altruism toward others. This claim directly contradicts the Extreme Demand (as applied in the second claim), and thus Cullity says the Extreme Demand should be rejected.

To support his conclusion, he further argues why the Extreme Demand is wrong. For instance, it leads to two counter-intuitive conclusions: (1) the requirements of beneficence in respect of people far away are much *greater* than we ordinarily accept (without taking into consideration their life focus) , and (2) the requirements of beneficence in respect of people we routinely encounter are much *less* than we ordinarily accept (because they are leading non-AF lives). If we accepted these conclusions they would overturn our conceptions of beneficence altogether. It is would be "deeply problematic" for us to conclude that we have no morally compelling reason to help the average person needing help, because their life interests are not altruistic enough. The problem relates back to the starting point of deciding who we should be helping. We had assumed that the need of the person was sufficient, but now the Extreme Demand would restrict our concern to saving actual lives (if we deem the bare existence of life itself to be an intrinsic good) and assisting with altruistically focused fulfillments.[283] All other needs of people would lack morally compelling reasons for us to help. Another person's non-altruistic pursuits such as

[283] Ibid., 143.

friendships, fulfilling personal projects, and the ability to participate in the life of the community would not provide moral compelling reasons to help that person.[284] Rather than drastically revise our conceptions of what beneficence requires, Cullity says there is good reason to reject the Extreme Demand.

Cullity doesn't make this explicit, but it seems that this argument would not discredit the Extreme Demand completely. The internal consistency would not be jeopardized in regard to the basic acts of saving lives (because of the intrinsic worth of a life) or in regard to providing assistance to those leading pure altruistically-focused lives. But the mere saving of a life with no concern for further consequences of that life (e.g., saving the child in the pond but then leaving the child on the shore to fend for himself) and assisting others with *only* their altruistically-focused pursuits if of limited value. Thus I would agree that the Extreme Demand has been discredited, but perhaps not to the degree Cullity claims.

By rejecting the Extreme Demand, we can live with less guilt. We now have reason to think that living a non-altruistically-focused life is morally defensible. But that merely establishes that we need not be moral saints in order to be moral. We now need to determine what kind of *non*-altruistically-focused life is morally defensible, which is the subject of the next discussion.

Permission

Cullity divides his discussion of the limits on a non-altruistically-focused life into two concepts; permission, which represents the upper limit (the place

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[284] Ibid., 146.

where one has moral *permission* to stop spending on the poor and *permission* to stop restricting one's personal spending), and requirement, which represents the lower limit (the *required* level of spending on the desperately poor, or on some other equally important cause). Not surprisingly, however, the permission level and the requirement level are ultimately described as being at the same, less than precisely described, level. He first addresses permission.

Questions about what is and is not required of beneficence can be divided into questions about the kinds of *life* and the kinds of *goods* one can morally pursue. In answering these questions he uses the bootstrapping technique previously discussed – if others are morally required to help one get something, then it cannot be wrong for one to get it directly. He asserts that it would be "absurd to deny" that non-altruistically-focused fulfillments ground requirements on others to help.[285] He uses the term *absurd* in the following way; "it would involve radically departing from our ordinary judgments about the range of interests that can ground requirements of beneficence."[286] So he is again relying on and building on our ordinary concepts of morality, and of beneficence in particular. He treats the following phrases as essentially equivalent concepts: "morally compelling reasons," "requirement grounding," and "absurd to deny." Thus, when it would be *absurd to deny* that your interest in pursuing a good can ground requirements on others to help (i.e., there are strong *morally compelling reasons* to help), then that good is *requirement grounding*.[287]

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[285] Ibid., 148
[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid., 150-1.

In describing goods that are requirement grounding, he makes another important distinction. He distinguishes (1) goods we are required to help another retain or gain from (2) goods we are obligated to help another pursue *instead of* other alternative goods. Examples of the first type include simple acts of kindness which it would be "mean-spirited" not to do since they require little effort – inform another that he has dropped his keys, has left his umbrella, or is standing at the wrong bus stop,[288] warning a private collector that his art collection is in danger of being destroyed, and stopping an antique champagne glass from falling from another's yacht.[289] Other examples, more central to the discussion, include helping one develop a musical talent and helping to reunite a long-separated family.[290] The second category comes into play if one good is better by a "requirement-grounding-margin"[291] than the alternative. Thus, while beneficence may require you to prevent your friend's champagne glass from dropping into the ocean, it most likely would not require you to help him purchase these expensive champagne glasses when much cheaper alternative are available. Justifying more expensive alternatives requires showing that the cheaper alternative would be *substantially worse* for the person – that is, that it would worsen his life in a requirement-grounding way.[292] This reasoning may seem circular or question-begging, but Cullity addresses this concern later.[293]

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[288] Ibid., 150.
[289] Ibid., 153
[290] Ibid., 150.
[291] Ibid., 153-4. "A margin big enough to make it absurd to deny that others can be morally required to help you pursue it."
[292] Ibid., 154, 182.
[293] Ibid., 192. I will also discuss this concern.

Certain goods occupy a sort of "safe-haven" and as such they don't usually have to run the gauntlet of the requiring-grounding test. These Cullity calls "commitment goods" and include goods such as friendships, living in conformity with one's convictions, and achievements derived from worthwhile personal projects.[294] These goods have the features of being "life-enhancing" as well as requirement-grounding, and because they are requirement-grounding they are morally permissible even if cheaper alternatives would not be substantially worse. This is not to say there are no moral limits on spending on friends and projects and other fulfillment goods, but only that we are allowed to have these things without further justifying them. The spending itself will be subject to scrutiny, but in a more relaxed way than that applied to non-commitment goods. Cullity summarizes this direct argument concerning goods as follows; "I can justify pursuing a good when either there is no cheaper alternative that would not be substantially worse for me, or it is a commitment good."[295]

He then argues that this conclusion regarding goods entails justifying a certain kind of life. He has already argued for the permissibility of a non-altruistically-focused life (non-AFL), but now he argues that two slightly less-demanding lifestyles are also not morally required by beneficence – a "minimally non-altruistic life" and an "altruistically-directed life" (ADL). The first would require doing as much as possible to help other people compatibly with having *some* non-altruistic focus (he calls this ascetic), and the second, which is almost

[294] Ibid., 155-6.
[295] Ibid., 157.

as altruistic, is "governed by attitudes of constraint that are incompatible with the possession of goods that obviously do ground requirements of beneficence" (i.e., requirement-grounding goods).[296] He says we can justifiably refuse to live by either of these standards, and thus we are justified in living non-altruistically-directed lives or anything more altruistic than that (e.g., in increasing order of altruism required - a minimally non-altruistic life, an altruistically-focused life, a life of complete impartiality, or a self-abnegating life). It is not clear that making these fine distinctions is critical to my conclusions. But I briefly include this discussion in the interest of more fully explicating Cullity's reasoning.

Now having established the type of life that is permissible, he argues for the permissibility of the goods implied in such a life. If a living a certain life is requirement-grounding and thus permissible, then the constituent goods it contains are justified, even if the goods themselves are not requirement-grounding. For example, if the life of a philosophy professor is permissible, then delivering lectures is permissible, even if the professor's interest in delivering the lectures does not itself ground a requirement of beneficence on others to help him with the lectures.[297] This argument is not necessary for intrinsically life-enhancing goods, which themselves justify a type of life. This indirect justification of goods applies most clearly to "purely episodic goods" which are "genuinely good for the person, but which makes her life overall no better."[298] Examples include everyday events such as having a cup of coffee, having a conversation, an hour of reading, or a weekend outing with your children. In

[296] Ibid., 158.
[297] Ibid., 160.
[298] Ibid., 161.

isolation and by themselves not having these events would probably not worsen one's life, but a life without any of these types of events or goods *would* be worse. They are justified by a type of life, and they in turn help to make the type of life better. Cullity concludes that the pursuit of purely episodic goods contained in an otherwise morally justified kind of life are permissible.[299]

As already mentioned, intrinsically life-enhancing goods (ILEGs) are morally justified whether or not they are contained in a justified kind of life. Cullity lists seven different categories of such goods: relationships of friendship and love, worthwhile personal projects and the achievements they can bring, enjoyment, understanding of oneself and the world, autonomy, involvement in the life of a culture or community, and the freedom to live in accordance with one's fundamental beliefs and commitments.[300]

Let's now summarize the conclusions so far reached about permissibility. Lives and goods are permissible by beneficence if they are better than the alternatives by requirement-grounding amounts, or they are entailed by a permissible kind of life or permissible goods or classes of goods. And corollaries that follow from this reasoning hold that the following do not violate the requirements of beneficence:

- Pursuing commitment goods, even when alternatives would be no worse.
- Living a non-altruistically-directed life, even if an altruistically-directed life would be no worse.
- Leading a life that contains purely episodic goods.

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[299] Ibid., 162.
[300] Ibid., 162-3.

These conclusions frame the kinds of life and goods that are permitted by beneficence. They can be applied to particular activities or, more globally, to one's life as a whole. Applications will be discussed later. This completes the argument for permission, and now we consider the *requirements* of beneficence.

Requirement

The question now is which sacrifices in personal spending are morally required, or which forms of personal spending are not morally defensible, considering the obligations of beneficence. Conclusions reached by Cullity so far include: beneficence requires making some effort to save another person's life directly; the life-saving analogy is defensible and thus we have obligations to help people indirectly as well by making contributions of time and money to aid agencies; but we are justified in rejecting the iteration of the life-saving analogy that would lead to the Extreme Demand (which entails an altruistically-focused life) and we are justified in rejecting the altruistically-directed life or anything more demanding, and the aggregate approach is justified. Under the aggregate approach we are justified in establishing a degree of overall sacrifice and refusing to sacrifice more, even if there is more worthwhile beneficence work to be done. Cullity calls this level of sacrifice "large enough" which is simply what one can "sensibly appeal to in order to justify an unwillingness to go further."[301] He expresses this level of sacrifice in a form parallel to, but obviously different from, the Extreme Demand;

[301] Ibid., 173.

> I am morally required to keep contributing my time and money to aid agencies (or to some other comparably important cause) until either:
>
> (a) there are no longer any lives to be saved (or comparably important goals achieved) by those agencies, or
>
> (b) extending further my overall contribution to our collectively saving lives (or achieving something comparably important) would be a large enough sacrifice to excuse my refusing to contribute.[302]

The key phrases are "overall contribution" (which is justified by the aggregate approach) and "large enough sacrifice" (which is defined by the previous discussion regarding permission). By specifying what we have permission to spend for our own personal interests we also specify what level of spending for others beneficence requires, and vice versa. Permission and requirement are specified by the same conditions, and putting the arguments together yields the following joint conclusion, which is Cullity's formulation of "*the moral demands of affluence*," the title of his book;

> I am required to keep contributing my time and money to aid agencies (or to some other comparably important cause) until I reach an overall level of personal spending for which either:
>
> (i) Its permissibility is entailed by the permissibility of living a particular kind of life or the permissibility of pursuing a particular good or class of goods, or

[302] Ibid., 174.

(ii) Restricting it further would be a requirement-grounding loss.[303]

The *implications* of this conclusion can be summed up as follows: I can justify refusing to reduce my personal spending any further when, but only when, one of the following is true:

- It would deprive me of a non-altruistically-directed *life*.
- It would worsen my *life* by a requirement-grounding amount (i.e., it would cause a requirement-grounding loss in my life)
- It would deprive me of a *good* that is better than the alternatives by a requirement-grounding amount (i.e., the loss of the good would be a requirement-grounding loss).
- It would deprive me of a *commitment good*.[304]

Cullity not does specifically label his view, although he refers to it as "an account of the moral demands of affluence"[305]and also calls it a "moderately demanding" view.[306] For easy reference, I will call it Cullity's "moderately demanding view" or Cullity's MD View. The following schematic demonstrates the various levels of beneficence Cullity has considered, with Cullity's view represented as MDV (Cullity's moderately demanding view).

[303] Ibid., 174-5.
[304] Ibid., 175.
[305] Ibid., 174
[306] Ibid., 186.

Schematic

E--------PC----------**P&R**--------ADL-----Non-AFL----ED (AFL) -------CI--------SA
MDV

E- Egoism (p. 104, 202)
PC - Permissive Conclusion (p.202)
P – Permission (Non-ADL, Non-AFL and Not CI)
R – Requirement (same conditions as Permission – p. 174)
MDV - Cullity's moderately demanding view – Reasonable policy (p. 191), some constraints required (p. 202)
ADL – altruistically-directed-life (p. 158)
Non-AFL - Minimally non-altruistically-focused-life (p. 158)
ED – Extreme Demand (requires AFL – an altruistically-focused-life)
CI – Complete Impartiality
SA – Self-Abnegating (p. 119 – 120)[307]

This formulation does not draw a sharp boundary line, which Cullity acknowledges. And he seems to agonize that it could be interpreted in the now-forbidden iterative way, which he says is a false interpretation. He likens the difficulty to the sorites puzzles where, for instance, it is indeterminable when the addition of a grain of wheat makes a "heap" of wheat, or when the removal of a grain of wheat destroys a "heap." But he quickly dismisses this concern because, "this form of reasoning is fallacious."[308] Instead of agonizing about increments of sacrifice, he says one is justified in asking what line it is "reasonable for me to draw between the overall sacrifices that are and are not requirement-grounding,"[309] with "reasonable" and "overall" being the key concepts.

He further responds to this concern in a footnote with, what I find to be, a very helpful analogy to sleep.[310] We each have to make personal judgments

[307] Page numbers refer to place of discussion in Cullity 2004.
[308] Ibid., 177.
[309] Ibid.
[310] Ibid., FN 5, 257.

about how much sleep is necessary for us to function each day. If we are asked to give up five minutes of sleep for a good reason, it would generally be reasonable and acceptable for us to do so. But if we received multiple such requests each day a difficulty would arise because soon we would not be getting enough sleep to be able to function properly, and if we responded to all such requests we would destroy our health and perhaps our life. On the other end of the scale, once we receive a certain amount of sleep any additional sleep produces diminishing returns, becomes superfluous, and doesn't benefit our work, our health, or our life generally. This additional time could be used in a better way such as responding to requests for help from others. Thus we are justified in having a "policy" regarding sleep that carves out enough sleep to make our life go well, but also allows for better use of our time when we have had enough. Ultimately only the individual under consideration can determine the right amount of sleep that is appropriate, and analogously only the individual can determine the right level of beneficence that is appropriate. The analogy is not perfect since, for instance, sleep cannot be stored for future use the way financial resources can, but as a way of conceiving of appropriate lines to draw or "areas to shade", I think it is helpful.[311]

Cullity provides four further clarifications to applying his view.[312] First, he says the overall sacrifice required should not be specified directly in terms of time and money, but instead as the extent of compromise of one's commitment to

[311] Cullity mentions in footnote 6, "shading an area" as an alternative metaphor to "drawing the line," which he attributes to Susan Wolf. This is more descriptive because of the lack of sharpness of the line being described.
[312] Ibid., 178.

intrinsically life-enhancing goods. The sleep analogy would seem useful in measuring this compromise.

Second, we should measure sacrifices by what is retained, not what is given up. Thus the rich are required to give a greater proportion of their wealth than the less rich in order to arrive at the same degree of restriction in their ability to pursue life-enhancing goods. Also, as previously discussed, there will be a variation in the amount of time and money people can defensibly spend on themselves. This would seem to leave open the opportunity for some to claim a lavish lifestyle because it is necessary for their well-being, but in partial reply he makes clear that an objective measurement standard applies.[313] The sleep analogy would also seem useful in measuring how much is enough.

The third clarification is that the aggregate view calls for a diachronic instead of a synchronic view of required sacrifices. We are to measure the impact of sacrifices on our life as a whole, and we best do this by establishing a reasonable overall policy which serves to restrict our personal spending and also justify refusal to restrict further.

His fourth clarification is a bit more complicated. The issue is whether the maximum required sacrifice varies by the number of people needing help. He gives what he calls an "agnostic" answer by recalling his broad "common-sense" view of what is required to save someone else's life directly - that is, merely inconvenient sacrifices of time and money are required, but not "risking death,

[313] Ibid., 154, "the important point here is whether you *could* pursue a cheaper alternative that would not be substantially worse for you. This is not a matter of whether you *think* it would be substantially worse."

permanent injury, or the impairment of your life prospects."[314] But ultimately he concludes that his account of the maximum that is required of us toward the poor generally (his moderately demanding view) would apply regardless of the number needing help. Thus if only one person was in need, the help that beneficence requires could be very substantial as to that person. Consistent with the second clarification, we are to measure what is retained, not what is given up.

In a footnote related to the fourth clarification, Cullity references Peter Unger's example of "Bob's Bugatti" which is a discussion of whether one's life savings (in this example, the life savings are invested in a Bugatti automobile) should be sacrificed to save the life of another. Unger argues that the owner, Bob, is morally required to sacrifice the automobile. Cullity analyses this example consistent with his view of the moral standard of beneficence by asking if the sacrifice in question is requirement-grounding, and he seems to agree with Unger if the loss to Bob is not permanent. But if the sacrifice is permanent because Bob has no prospects of replacing his savings afterwards, then the loss to Bob would "worsen his life overall genuinely and substantially" and he is justified in not making the sacrifice, according to Cullity. He says this is not wrong "in the same way it is not wrong to suffer a permanent, life-impairing injury to save a life."[315] This nuanced view of Bob's dilemma is still demanding and perhaps severe, but it seems more acceptable than Unger's rigid and even more demanding view. The likelihood of a "Bob's Bugatti" situation in one's life is remote, perhaps as remote as coming across a pond full of thousands of

[314] Ibid., 179.
[315] Ibid., 257, FN 7.

drowning children. Yet it is comforting to have a thoughtful and morally defensible response to such situations, and I think Cullity has provided that. Singer and Unger seem to suggest there is only one moral answer, but now we have moral alternatives to consider.

Cullity next considers the practical implications of his views. He does not try to set forth any general descriptions of permissible and impermissible personal spending, applicable to everyone, because what is life-enhancing for a person varies according to circumstances and the constituents of one's life. If less expensive personal spending would not be substantially worse for a person then pursuing more expensive non-commitment goods cannot be defended, but for others the cheaper alternative could be substantially worse and thus not required. As earlier discussed, commitment goods such as friendships and worthwhile personal projects occupy a sort of "safe-haven" and thus time and money spent on commitment goods is not as rigorously scrutinized as other goods.

Despite these general observations about the subject-relative nature of the judgments required, he does make some universal claims. For instance, he says none of us should be agonizing about routine individual supermarket purchases, by asking if the cheaper alternative will make one's life substantially worse. He says this sort of scrutiny seems "forbiddingly unattractive" and a life lived this way would involve the kind of "moral fanaticism" or "moral totalitarianism" that is sometimes alleged against utilitarianism.[316]

[316] Ibid., 181.

He advocates that we assess our overall level of personal spending at periodic intervals, perhaps taking the form of personal annual reviews, when we would make moral decisions about an overall budget, but not about each individual purchase. But for major purchases, such as an automobile, he says we should apply the moral guidelines directly, which is not overly burdensome since we usually deliberate a lot about such large purchase anyway. I expand this concept in my own recommendations of a Periodic Personal Plan (or PPP). The PPP would be used to establish guidelines for expenditures of time and money for the forthcoming period of time, to be followed by a review of actual expenditures and adoption of a new plan for the next period, etc

Cullity argues that generally we cannot morally defend expensive purchase made purely for the sake of enjoyment, because less expensive alternatives can usually provide enjoyment that would not result in a life-diminishing loss. Enjoyment is an allowed criterion for routine spending within our pre-set budgets (e.g., the more expensive supermarket purchases) but not for major purchases. And the following would usually be morally wrong: expensive clothes or furniture, a new car, and books for a private library. Items that are usually morally defensible include private education and private tuition and equipment to develop sporting or musical talents. These sorts of goods are justified because of their life-enhancing value. But in trying to be helpful, I think Cullity faces a problem in even suggesting fine-tuned moral boundaries. Designating some expenditures as morally acceptable (e.g., a private education) and others as not morally justified (e.g., a private library) seems arbitrary and it

demonstrates the peril in being this specific. A private library could be as life-enhancing as a private education.

These examples of detailed judgments of specific purchases seem to be primarily for illustration purposes to demonstrate how to apply Cullity's views, and not to set hard and fast rules. Without an overall plan, such personal spending must be analyzed on a case-by-case basis. The right policy, according to Cullity, is to set a budget applying his moderately demanding view and then try to live by it. He gives a positive spin to the budget process by suggesting that we deliberate about how to seek fulfillment and enjoyment in our lives, within the guidelines he has proposed. I agree with this positive approach, and would similarly suggest that one's PPP include aspects of personal fulfillment and enjoyment as well as obligations and duties. He describes his view as "revisionary" in a demanding direction[317], which seems to suggest that we revise our views of what is morally important in our personal lives and in what we can do to help others. This approach inspires my own views, to be discussed in Chapter Five.

Overview

Cullity's suggested moral policy allows one to remain engaged in personal projects, relationship, and other life-enhancing goods while recognizing and responding to the claims of the interests of others required by beneficence. He says one is justified in making "reasonable judgments" and forming "reasonable policies" regarding personal attitudes and actions toward those in need, but one

[317] Ibid., 186.

is not justified in doing nothing.[318] He has argued against the Extreme Demand which would result from the iterative approach to the life-saving analogy, but he does not specifically address the mistake in the iterative approach until almost the end of the book. The iterative approach assumes that any prior beneficent actions on behalf of others are not countervailing considerations as to the next person needing help. The moral saint, with a lifetime full of good deeds, and the total egoist, who had never concerned himself with anything but his own selfish interests, have the *same* moral obligations when confronted with the child drowning in the shallow pond or confronted with the opportunity to contribute to an aid agency. The mistake, Cullity says, is that the iterative approach assumes there is no *other* countervailing interest. He argues that it is reasonable for a beneficent person to refuse to worsen her life to a requirement-grounding degree for other people, and *this* is an appropriately countervailing consideration in relation to beneficence. One can refuse to contribute towards helping others not by reference to all the good things done in the past, but by reference to one's engagement with defensible life-enhancing goods. But if a beneficent person balanced his personal life and his duties of beneficent duties to others as described by Cullity, it is reasonable to assume that the person *would* have done good thing for others in the past and *will* do good things in the future. But the specific defense against the iterative approach and the Extreme Demand rests with the reasonableness of each person to live a life of integrity and dignity, and with fulfilling life-enhancing goods and relationships.

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[318] Ibid., 191.

Cullity next responds to the concern that his bootstrapping form of argument is circular, that it "begs the question," by requiring one to help another only if it is already obvious what interests the other person is entitled to have. If this was the case, the requirement-grounding argument would serve no purpose. For example, if one is required to help another pursue a musical career, it may seem obvious that it has already been presupposed that the musical career is morally permissible, and thus the requirement-grounding question is superfluous. Cullity explains that the concern expressed this way confuses entailment with priority. We have a duty to warn another that his suit on a hanger is about to drop to the ground and get dirty, because the person has a legitimate interest in having a clean suit. But that person has no priority interest in having a clean suit if he encounters a child drowning in a pond while wearing the suit. Similarly, a person may have a legitimate interest in having a well-functioning gun, but that interest has no priority if the gun is being used to rob a bank. Cullity's view is that "facts about what people are morally entitled to get or retain and facts about the help we are required to give each other are interdependent**."**[319] Beneficence provides reasons for us to help other people, but those reasons can be superseded. For instance, I have a legitimate interest in having clean clothes, which grounds reasons of beneficence for others to help me pursue that interest, but that legitimate interest loses priority if we come across a drowning child. My interest in clean clothes and your reasons of beneficence for helping me keep them clean are superseded by greater reasons of beneficence.

[319] Ibid., 193.

Cullity's concludes that beneficence does not require giving up life-enhancing goods in order to respond to the interest of stranger, and thus his is a moderately and not extremely demanding view. But this does not rule out other moral reasons imposing extreme demands. For example, obligation towards one's own children may be extreme, based on the obligations of one who brings another in the world and the special duties attached to the role of being a parent. These potentially extremely demanding obligations can't be refuted by reference to the more moderate requirements of beneficence. Cullity also mentions the extreme demands that could arise from the obligation to participate in the collective self-defense of one's country, and the wrongness of free-riding by enjoying the benefits of a society but not enduring the requisite costs. And moral integrity may impose on me a moral duty to volunteer to go to jail (and possibly worse) to prevent another from being unjustly punished for a crime I committed.

And arguments of justice, not argued by Cullity, may impose extreme demands. Rectificatory, distributive, and regulative justice can all be argued to impose duties on the wealthy to benefit the poor. Thomas Pogge, for instance, bases his argument for obligations to the poor on rectificatory and regulative justice.

Cullity has consistently defended the life-saving analogy, which some interpret as imposing obligations to help the distant poor equal to our obligations to save a drowning child in our presence. Because his moderately demanding view of beneficence allows one to refuse help to others if the sacrifice compromises the well-being of one's own life, a beneficent person will not be

required to attempt to save every desperately poor person possible. But does this imply that we may no longer be required to save a drowning child in our presence if we have reached an aggregate overall level of beneficence consistent with a reasonable policy? Cullity now argues that there really is a difference in direct and indirect rescue. He earlier reached the conclusion that individual contributions do not, by themselves, save lives by making contribution to aid agencies.[320] And now he argues that failing to save lives directly is more *blameworthy* than failing to contribute to aid agencies because the former is "more vividly inescapable." And he allows that failure of direct rescue may also be more *wrong* than failing to contribute to aid agencies. His view does not preclude the idea that "relationships of directness create *further* reasons to help." Therefore, failure to directly rescue may be wrong and blameworthy even when contributions to aid agencies would not be, and if given the choice between the two, Cullity says we should save the life directly.[321] This is just another way to say that the life-saving analogy is not perfect, as our ordinary moral thinking and intuitions tell us pre-reflectively.

Cullity earlier set forth requirements for an acceptable reply to the Extreme Demand, and now he checks his Moderately Demanding View against those requirements.[322]

1. He has justified the aggregative rather than an iterative approach, which was the central thrust of Cullity's objection to the Extreme Demand.

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[320] Ibid., 66.
[321] Ibid., 201.
[322] The requirements were first set forth at pp. 106-7, and his proposal is checked against these criteria at pp. 201-3.

2. He defends a more-than-minimal level of personal spending. He arrives at a moderately demanding view rather than an ascetic or extremely demanding view.

3. He explained the mistake in *reasoning* made by the iterative argument. The quality of life of the beneficent person is a countervailing consideration to the demands of beneficence.

4. Extremes of self-sacrifice may be morally required in some cases such as in regard to family obligations or as a requirement of justice. The argument for beneficence does not argue for but also does not block these possibilities.
5. Cases of supererogation are not required by Cullity's views, but neither are they prohibited. We are not required to be moral saints, but nothing in beneficence requires us *not* to be saintly.
6. The presuppositions of beneficence that serve as Cullity's starting point assume that egoism is false. His moderately demanding views calls for a wide range of moral constraints on personal spending.
7. Beneficence provides the foundation for the moral claims in both the Extreme Demand and Cullity's Moderately Demanding View, so he does not appeal to claims that are more controversial than the claims supporting the Extreme Demand. His argument may be controversial, but not because of a contentious starting point.[323]

[323] Ibid., 201-3.

Cullity's Conclusions

Three main components constitute Cullity's view: (1) he accepts the life-saving analogy, (2) he defends the aggregate approach which assesses the overall sacrifice required, and (3) he argues that personal spending should be restricted until more restriction would worsen one's life by a requirement-grounding amount, but that one is justified in living a non-altruistically-directed life and is justified in pursuing commitment goods such as friendships and worthwhile personal projects.

He does not draw a sharp boundary line between the morally defensible and indefensible personal spending, "as long as it is a reasonable line to draw."[324] He claims that most of us should change our lives and spending practices in a demanding direction, and that living according to his view of beneficence would not necessarily be comfortable or easy. He concludes with the words:

> Living up to the conclusion of this book would be uncomfortable, for most of us – but not in the life-constricting or -diminishing way that makes an extremely demanding moral outlook seem so unattractive. It exhorts us to combine a proper recognition of the desperate needs of other people with a full engagement with the goods that provide us with our own interests. This is not easy: I doubt whether we can ever be confident that we are living just as we ought to be. But the ambition of living up to

[324] Ibid., 204.

> both of these aims is not an unrealistic one. We are left with a serious practical challenge, but not, I think, one that is beyond us.[325]

Conclusions and Criticisms

Cullity gives a thorough review of the analogy between direct rescue and contributions to aid agencies, or what he calls the life-saving analogy. He ultimately defends and supports the analogy, but allows that failure to contribute to aid agencies is less blameworthy and may also be less wrong than failure to save a life directly.[326] One of the strengths of his argument is its theoretical modesty – it is based on the simple concept of beneficence. Objections to foreign aid are discussed and reviewed, with the general conclusion that the policy failures of aid agencies do not remove the moral obligations to do what we can to help people who desperately need help - what he refers to as the "humanitarian imperative." As a further response, effective aid can be designed, and some aid agencies are effective, so the concept of foreign aid is not without merit, and we should support the most effective of the aid organizations. Cullity's conclusion is that the collective efforts of aid agencies can save lives, and we have a duty of beneficence and fairness (to other contributors) to participate in those efforts. If one objects to the goal of poverty relief because, for instance, it perpetuates the underlying problem of overpopulation, then one should support a program to address another comparably important policy that will relieve suffering, such as sustainable population programs. And I would add that if one

[325] Ibid.
[326] Cullity 2004, 200.

investigates and finds no justifiable way to help the poor, then one may be justified in not acting, but not before thoroughly and honestly investigating the possible ways to help.

A practical problem of the life-saving analogy, as typically interpreted, is that it leads to extremely demanding requirements. It would be easy to merely dismiss demanding principles such as Singer's because they are too demanding. Cullity takes a more analytical approach by going to the heart of the problem, the iterative function, and providing an extensively reasoned explanation for why an aggregative approach can be morally justified to replace the iterative approach. The essence of his argument is as follows:

> Morality must leave us room to lead a fulfilling life, rather than a life emptied of fulfillment in the service of others. And if leading a fulfilling life is justifiable, then we are justified in rejecting the iterative accumulation of small demands into large ones, since it is incompatible with having such a life.[327]

Simplified and briefly stated, he defends his rejection of the iterative approach and the "extreme demand" it produces with two observations; (1) that morality based on the extreme demand requires an altruistically-focused life and (2) that duties of beneficence do not extend to helping people obtain what it would be wrong for them to have. If people are not living altruistically-focused lives then it would be wrong (according to his interpretation of the Extreme Demand) to help them continue in this non-moral life style. Thus we would have duties to save only altruists, or moral saints, and this is an absurd conclusion.

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[327] Ibid., 91.

People, both the poor and the affluent, are justified in living non-altruistically focused lives, and a certain amount of personal partiality is acceptable, and it is *impartially* acceptable.[328] With his thorough and careful analysis, Cullity may seem to have broken the spell that Singer imposes with the CMI principle, making room in morality for a self-fulfilling life using the same underlying assumptions as Singer.

But in reaching his conclusion that the Extreme Demand is unsound, Cullity has run some questionable arguments. He bootstraps the obvious obsertation that we have no duty to help a bank robber unjam his gun into the non-intuitive argument that we have no duty to help people who are living less than altruistically-focused lives. But he fails to observe that the gangster's intended actions are intrinsically wrong while living a less than totally altruistic life is not intrinsically wrong. This faulty analogy prevents Cullity's argument against the Extreme Demand from going through as smoothly as he claims – and perhaps it fails to go through at all. Ordinary moral thinking informs us that Singer's exptrapolation of the pond case into a duty to give to the poor in every situation whwe we can't claim a conflicting duty of comparable moral importance just can't be right, even if we can't quite place our finger on the critical error. But countering Singer with another questionable analogy, as Cullity has done, is not a satisfying answer. David Lewis's observation, as to a similar argument of Peter Unger, that "even if we cannot diagnose the flaw, it is more credible that the

[328] Ibid., 114.

argument has a flaw than that its most extreme conclusion is true"[329] may be as close as we can get to directly refuting Singer. Acceptable alternatives to directly challenging Singer include allowing for carefully reasoned exceptions to his demanding duties (as Singer does for himself) or to acknowledge that the Extreme Demand conflicts with other moral duties such as care and concern for ourselves and those directly dependent on us (e.g., our children).

The "knock-out" punch that Cullity aim for fails to deliver, but his analysis leaves Singer's extreme demand more wobbly than when Cullity entered the ring. The proper response to Singer, I contend, is not to attempt a complete refutation, but to be morally inspired by the truths embedded in his arguments, recognizing that without becoming moral saints we can't simultaneously live a life where we help all the poor who need our help and also live self-filling lives that entail demanding obligations to those closest to us. A moral life requires making choices, and in this case requires threading a needle between the duties of beneficence to the poor and the duties and entitlements of a satisfying and flourishing life. A balance is required, not a definitive choice between the opposite poles of self-abnegation and egoism. We should commit to the struggle that morality requires and not anticipate knock-out arguments giving clear decisions between the competing interests of morality.

Although Singer's life-saving analogy is not perfect and it can be attacked in many ways, none of the arguments *completely* undermine his analogy. There is an element of truth to the observation that it is wrong to carry on life as usual

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[329] Ibid., 88, citing in FN 32, Lewis, David, "Illusory Innocence?", *Eureka Street,* 5 (1996), 36, reprinted in David Lewis, *Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 155.

as an affluent person while fellow humans suffer and die of preventable causes every day in large numbers. At a minimum, we have a moral duty to investigate whether we can help, and in what way.

Although Cullity's methodology in undermining the Extreme Demand is unsound in some respects, I agree with him that an extremely demanding altruistically-focused life is not required by a beneficence based morality. The reason I agree is that we can't meet such an extreme demand and also fulfill other, more salient, moral obligations closer to home. But his Moderately Demanding View (MDV) – the "Moral Demands of Affluence" (MDA) principle - is still very demanding. Under the MDA principle, we are required to give to aid agencies (or to some other comparably important cause) until, along with other technical criteria, one or more of the following would apply if we gave more:[330]

- We would be deprived of a fulfilling life,
- Our life would be worsened, or we would be deprived of goods, to an extent inconsistent with beneficence toward ourselves, or
- We would be deprived of a commitment good, which is a morally permissible life-enhancing good.[331] Cullity considers the following a plausible, but not definitive, list of morally permissible life-enhancing goods:
    - relationships of friendship and love,
    - worthwhile personal projects and the achievements they can bring,
    - enjoyment,

[330] Ibid., 174-5.
[331] Ibid., 156

- understanding of oneself and the world,
- autonomy,
- involvement in the life of a culture or community, and
- the freedom to live in accordance with one's fundamental beliefs and commitments.[332]

In short, we can reasonably and morally refuse; to give up a fulfilling life, to deprive ourselves of what beneficence requires toward others, or to worsen our lives by giving up a commitment good. Otherwise, we should be doing all we can to help the desperately poor of the world.

In summary, Cullity documents in great detail the reasons it is morally acceptable to live a fulfilling life if it is balanced with the beneficence of concern for others. In addition, his device of an annual budget and an annual review of spending practices (which is similar to my Periodic Personal Plan) represent a reasonable and responsible approach to allocation of time and money. And most importantly, we are justified in avoiding the iterations of beneficence that lead to the extreme demands, and instead can address our moral obligations with an aggregative approach. His moderately demanding view is one that can reasonably be advocated as both a public and a private morality, although it may still be too demanding for some because of its austerity.

I have two concerns with Cullity's conclusions[333] - (1) his extensive use of new terminology and his complicated reasoning, and (2) my concern that his "safe-haven" of commitment or life-enhancing goods can be abused.

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[332] Ibid., 162-3.

Cullity's use of new terminology may be necessary for precision and accuracy but, as presented in his book, the reasoning and principles are too complicated and technical to widely advocate. If simplified, as I have done above, I believe Cullity's reasoning and conclusions provide a good guide as to how to balance our own morally legitimate life interests with the duties of beneficence morally required in regard to the desperately poor. With these moral guidelines we can reasonably plan our moral obligations in advance, aggregating our various concerns for a chosen period of time.

My concern about the safe-haven for commitment goods is that these categories of permissible good open potential loopholes for exploitation by those wanting to justify self-regarding behavior to the exclusion of the other-regarding obligations of beneficence. For instance, relationships of friendship and love, clearly justified in my view, *could* be used to justify excessive spending under the moral cover of tending to these important relationships. But spending millions to keep our friends and family happy (and presumably beholden to us) is not justified when millions of unrelated others starve. I address excess in my concluding Chapter Five.

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[333] In addition to my concern with his methodology in refuting the Extreme Demand, as already discussed.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions

> *"In the actual world, we are confronted with different people who might be targets of our sympathy. And the business of ethics is deciding who to help and why and when."*[334]

Facing life and death decisions like the pond case rarely happen to the average person, and ordinary moral thinking tells us what we should do if it does happen (we should save the child!). But we shouldn't allow an imperfect analogy between direct rescue and foreign aid to dominate our moral thinking. There are analogous features, but also important disanalogies – primarily the rarity of pond cases and the ubiquity of world poverty. Appeals from aid agencies serve the purpose of keeping us aware of the crying need for poverty relief, and we should respond to those appeals in a responsible way. Responsibility means being responsible to all our obligations and duties, to those who depend on us in our inner circle, as well as to those who have desperate needs but are represented in the outer circles of our HMO, and to any others to whom we owe or feel duties of beneficence. Ordinarily, no single concern should dominate our individual life plan or our Periodic Personal Plans. We should arrive at our moral priorities in a calm, deliberate way with focused thinking, which my PPP facilitates. Dramatic analogies and psychologically sophisticated advertising should not control our moral lives.

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[334] Philosopher Philip Kitcher, quoted in "Scientist Finds the Beginnings of Morality in Primate Behavior," *The New York Times*, Science Times, F3, March 20, 2007.

Hierarchy of Moral Obligations (HMO) – "Bird's Eye" View

My proposed conception of moral obligations can first be represented by a set of concentric circles. From this viewpoint, the circles represent various categories of *people* relative to the individual making personal moral obligation determinations. The following is a description of a hypothetical HMO. The composition of the actual HMO of each person will depend on the personal priorities of the person constructing an HMO model for themselves. This is a subjective determination, but intended to be motivated by objective considerations – including the facts of world poverty.

The inner circle typically represents ourselves and our children and any others for whom we have special obligations because of relationship or circumstances. This circle is "thicker" than all the others to represent moral obligations that carry more weight in importance, and a greater number of types of obligation, than for all other circles. The outer circle may represent the poor with whom we have no personal relationship and no specific obligation to, but who nevertheless represent significant moral concerns based on beneficence. This outer circle represents a necessary element of a complete moral life, considering the large and desperate needs of the distant (and nearby) poor. This circle is "thinner" than the inner circle, to represent fewer obligations relative to the obligations we owe to those closest to us. As to those in the outer circle, we may deem ourselves to have no obligations greater than the basic needs of

survival, perhaps because we have no relationship to them other than as fellow humans.

The intermediate circles represent obligations less weighty than those of the inner circle, but greater than those in the outer circle. The next circle out from the center may represent concern for (and in some cases obligations to) friends, extended family, and other close relations such as business associates. These relationships may be based, for instance, on family relations, implied or express contracts, or mere affection such as for friends. Another circle may represent community and organizational relationships such as those with fellow members of civic or religious organizations, or special community interests such as libraries, museums, the opera or other causes one deems important to oneself and his community, or one's alma mater.

I take no stand on whether compatriots, by virtue of that relationship, should occupy a closer circle than non-compatriots. Richard Miller makes a case for priority to compatriots over foreigners based on shared coercive government, but he has more recently questioned whether that priority is appropriate. The needs of the poor in certain foreign countries (e.g., some African countries) may be so extreme relative to the needs of the poor in ones home country (e.g., the United States) that failure to include the foreign poor in ones HMO would seem to lack appropriate scope. Morality or beneficence that fails to show concern for large numbers of people who suffer and die daily due to preventable causes appears to be inadequate because of its nearsightedness. Dismissal of those concerns *without adequate reason* and *without investigation* is wrong and

immoral, if one has the resources to help and the ability to investigate. But as discussed in the introduction, wealthy residents of certain countries with very substantial numbers of desperately poor people (e.g., Mexico) may be more justified in limiting their scope of aid to their own country than the wealthy of countries with little extreme poverty (such as the United States). If one's resources can be used domestically to prevent fellow compatriots from perishing then one would seem to be justified in not including foreign poor in his or her HMO. Providing aid to the distant poor when the nearby poor are in desperate need would most likely be inefficient and thus not the most prudent use of ones aid assistance.

The composition of the HMO circles is an individual decision to be guided by ones own values and moral reflection on the relevant facts. If concern for the distant desperate poor is deemed to be as important as concerns for causes closer to home (e.g., the less-poor compatriot) then concerns for the distant poor would occupy circles of the same thickness. If the distant poor (because of their desperate needs) were considered of greater concern than the local poor, then concern for the distant poor would move to a thicker circle closer to the center, to indicate more concern and a greater allocation of resources and perhaps time. Physical distance and relational remoteness does not necessarily relegate a concern to the outermost circle or tier.

The specifics of how any individual completes his or her personal HMO are ultimately determined by their view of the various moral obligations they may have, and this it is a subjective determination. But this subjective view should be

informed and motivated by the objective facts of the world. It is an objective fact that thousands of fellow humans die each day of preventable causes, and that fact should be considered and weighed against one's other moral obligations.

In satisfying priorities for moral obligations we would generally begin at the center circle and work outwards, making sure to leave a reasonable percentage of our resources for the outer circles if we possess sufficient overall resources. I will describe the process of making these allocations (i.e., the Periodic Personal Plan) below. But first we should look at our model from the side view.

Hierarchy of Moral Obligations (HMO) – Side View

My proposed conception of moral obligations can be pictured from the side as a graduated stack of moral *obligations*, resembling perhaps a multi-tiered wedding cake. The bottom or foundational level is the first priority, and encompasses broader obligations than required of any upper level. This foundational level is larger in diameter that the others to indicate the broader obligations owed to all fellow humans based on general duties of beneficence. It represents our concern for others as to the basic needs of life, such as protection from starvation and prevention of death from preventable diseases and other easily preventable causes. If people are starving, we should make efforts to get food to them. If they are dying of preventable diseases, we should make efforts to get vaccinations, medicines and other appropriate medical treatments to them.

If one believes, based on convincing evidence, that starvation and preventable diseases can best be addressed in some better way than direct aid, such as non-invasive population control, then aid to support such efforts should

be provided. While people are suffering and dying of preventable causes it is morally wrong to do nothing, unless one has investigated and honestly concluded that aid will do more harm than good. But such a conclusion seems suspect, considering the sophistication, expertise, and dedication to doing good of the better aid agencies.

The higher levels in the HMO represent important but increasingly less urgent needs from the standpoint of mere survival. The top tier represents obligations of love, affection, emotional support, and financial obligations such as higher education. This top tier, as indicated above in the description from the "birds-eye" level, represents special obligations to our children, ourselves and others for whom we have similar direct and distinct obligations. We should view the top tier as the top of a cylinder which reaches all the way down to the bottom of the diagram, to indicate that our obligations to people in the middle of the circle (e.g., our children) include not only the top level obligations such as a college education, but also the basic needs such as food and the means of subsistence that the duty of beneficence requires to all – our children as well as the distant poor. Tiers below (and outside) the top tier may represent obligations of community, fellowship, friendship, etc. that we consider important aspects our lives. And because all tiers reach to the bottom, they also include the basic needs which the duty of beneficence requires to all, as well as other "higher level" duties unique to that tier, and thicker tiers. Again, the concentric circles have various levels of thickness, ranging from the thickest in the middle to the thinnest outer circle.

In summary of this description of my model, the horizontal slices of my HMO design represent categories of moral *obligations* and concerns, and the vertical slices represent categories of *people*. For instance, the thickest center core represents our most extensive and our most demanding obligations (viewed from the side) and also represents the people, such as our children, to whom we owe those obligations (viewed from the top). Each concentric circle represents another set of obligations (viewed from the side) and another category of people (viewed from the top). Again, the completed picture of personal moral obligations (the HMO) may be pictured as a multi-tiered wedding cake, decreasing in diameter from the bottom to the top.

The HMO is a model motivated by the recognition that we must make ethical judgments in life as to how we spend our time and money. For reasons I discuss, our concerns are not all of the same "thickness" and I argue that our "thickest" concerns belong to those in our "philophilic family." I argue that the center circle should be populated by that family, and that the extreme poor belong in the overall HMO scheme, but otherwise I don't argue for specific allocations. The underlying rationale for this approach is that if one is motivated by morality, and beneficence in particular, one will more likely and more prudently consider the needs of others balanced against unique moral obligations if one undertakes completion of a personal HMO.

This concept of personal morality is obviously not impartial. An impartial model of morality could be pictured as a set of concentric circles all of the same thickness - a wedding cake without the tiers. I don't advocate impartiality in this

sense because I don't believe it is practical or workable in a well-lived life, and thus not morally required, as discussed below.

Partiality and Impartiality

Impartiality is often mentioned as a characteristic of morality, perhaps as a counter to notions such as prejudice, bias, or unfairness which are often associated with immorality. But upon reflection, I believe that morality does not require complete impartiality. As a pervasive and universal moral requirement, the idea of complete impartiality seems to contradict our ordinary moral intuitions. A more common-sense view is that it is morally permissible for one to be partial toward oneself and one's own projects, concerns, and loved ones, unless one is under an obligation to be impartial because of one's role or relationship in regard to another, such as a judge on the bench presiding over the fate of one's child or a hiring executive considering the application one's child along with the application of others. Such situations usually call for a recusal or, at a minimum, disclosure of the relationship in compliance with legal or business codes of ethics. I am presuming in this discussion that no such role/relationship situations apply that would call for impartiality outside of ordinary moral obligations.

As a practical matter, impartiality would be too demanding because it would require doing for all what you do for one and it would diminish the special feelings of affection that characterize relations among loved ones and thus would tend to make one either dispassionate (draining life of emotion) or passionate toward all (which would be unsustainable for most people). In a world where

most people demonstrate at least some partiality for their own, the child of an impartial parent would be unfairly deprived of the special concern that other children receive from their parents. Failure to show special concern and special love to one's child is a failure of a parent's moral obligations. And partiality in other aspects of one's life also gives importance and motivation that would be missing with impartiality. All in all, impartiality is impractical in the world as it is, and because it can lead to failure of moral obligation, it is not a requirement of morality. Thus partiality is permissible, justifiable, and can even be admirable if one also fulfills moral obligations to others and not just to those one is partial toward.

Consistent with my view, John Cottingham defends the view that it is not only psychologically understandable but also morally correct to favor one's own, unless one is under a duty to be impartial such as when one is grading papers or hiring for a civil service job.[335] Partialism can be defended as an element of a moral life-plan because failure to give special priority to one's own particular plans, projects, and interests will cause one to disintegrate as an individual, to lose one's character or, as phrased by Bernard Williams, to become a cog in a "satisfaction system."[336] The partialism that seems the most defendable is *philophilic* partialism, which Cottingham describes as the love of one's friends, one's children, siblings, spouse – "all who are beloved or 'dear' to the agent."[337] Failure to demonstrate *philophilic* partialism would seem to lead to a failure as a

[335] Cottingham, John, "Partiality, Favourtism and Morality," *Philosophical Quarterly,* 36 (1986), 357-8.
[336] Ibid., 364-5, citing Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge, 1981), 4.
[337] Ibid., 368.

parent, a friend, a spouse, or as anyone who deems another "dear" to one – those belonging in the center circle of one's HMO model. The moral obligations we owe to our children and certain others can be completely fulfilled only with *special* concern, and thus is inconsistent with impartiality. In the case of philophilic partialism with its special concerns and obligations, partialism is moral.

Moral partiality is not the same as infinite partiality, however. Moral obligations to one's children can be fulfilled without bestowing excessive resources on them. Special concern requires a certain amount of partiality, but not extravagance. The moral duties of beneficence, which extend to others outside the inner circle of special obligations, require that resources be allocated in a way to accommodate these additional duties. The obligations of *philophilic* partialism should be satisfied first, but not to the exclusion of other moral duties, if one has sufficient resources to satisfy these other moral duties. We are specially (sometimes uniquely) situated to act on concerns for those in our "philophilic family." If we go against this natural inclination, we deprive those closest to us as well as ourselves of the benefits of special and unique relationships of love. A morality that deprives one of such relationship would be defective, applying ordinary thinking. Ordinary moral as well as prudential thinking ground us in our own concerns and beneficence motivates a broader concern for others.

The non-philophilic life is not feasible for most people, nor is it moral unless one has no obligations of the philophilic category. A monastic life may be the exception and thus a monk could conceivably be impartial as well as moral.

But monks depend on others (i.e., non-monastic philophilic partialists) for support, so the monastic lifestyle would not survive if it was adopted by the mass of mankind.[338] Nevertheless, partialism can be criticized if it is excessive, and it can be abused if it takes on forms such as racism, sexism, and extreme nationalism and patriotism. Thus the partialists must bear the burden of justifying lack of impartiality, but that burden seems to be met in the case of philophilic partialism, unless the partialism becomes excessive. I discuss the issue of excess in regard to philophilic relationships later in this chapter.

And let me be clear that I am not arguing against acts of supererogation or of voluntary beneficence beyond what ordinary moral thinking requires, which are characteristics of a "moral saint." Although even moral saints would most likely be partial as to those directly dependent on them, their acts of general beneficence to all others on a non-discriminatory basis are laudable. Even Susan Wolf who is skeptical of moral sainthood has the following to say:

> The gain in happiness that would accrue to oneself and one's neighbors by a more well-rounded, richer life than that of the moral saint would be pathetically small in comparison to the amount by which one could increase the general happiness if one devoted oneself explicitly to the care of the sick, the downtrodden, the starving, and the homeless.[339]

Moral concerns toward all should be encouraged and, because of the good that can result, moral sainthood should not be discouraged even though it is not

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[338] Ibid., 370.
[339] Wolf, Susan, "Moral Saints," *Journal of Philosophy,* 79 (1982), 428.

morally required. Morality, even for moral saints, requires at least a certain amount of partiality toward those in the center of one's HMO. Mother Theresa had a greater obligation to those poor in her presence than to the abstract poor of the world and a greater obligation to those sisters who worked directly under her authority than to the thousands of other Catholic sisters of the world.

Priorities

For those who are inclined to justify keeping for themselves all that they have, with little inclination to allocate much to others regardless of their greater needs, an analogy to sleep may influence them to change their mind.[340] We all need sleep, and couldn't function without it. But we don't need, nor could we effectively use, sleep full-time. It is necessary for a normal life to allow oneself a certain amount of sleep, and it is also necessary in a normal life to allow oneself a certain amount of resources and time for personal interests. An allocation between sleep and awake time requires a balance that everyone learns to make, even though no hard and fast rules govern the correct or optimum amount of sleep. To sleep substantially longer than health requires is not beneficial to yourself or to anyone else. Excessive sleep is mere sloth.

Analogously, many affluent people have more time and resources than they can effectively use for themselves. Many people have free time and surplus resources that could be used to help others without significantly detracting from the quality of their own lives and personal interests. Like sleep, there is no objective and definitive rule that one can consult for how to make this allocation,

[340] This idea was inspired by Cullity 2004, 257, footnote 5.

but if one is motivated by beneficence[341] to strike a balance and give up some time and resources for others, a balance can be found without causing harm or real detriment to oneself. I am not proposing the sleep analogy as a perfect analogy to moral obligations prioritization, but only as a motivating device to suggest that excesses - either of monetary self-indulgence or of sleep – are beneficial to no one and thus we lose nothing (and others can gain) if we give up this excess.

Now let's consider how to prioritize these obligations. We should first satisfy obligations at the basic need level for people with whom we have specific and direct obligations such as our children and ourselves. At the base level of our moral concerns for others should be protection from death caused by starvation, preventable diseases, or from other preventable causes. We owe this obligation first and foremost to our children and ourselves and any others we are similarly responsible for. Thus in our HMO model we begin at the center and at the bottom, as might be our first step if we were constructing the model with building blocks.

After the center of this basic needs level is satisfied, the question is whether to more outward on the same level to satisfy the basic needs of a larger category of people or to move up a level to satisfy higher needs for those closest to us. Singer would seem to argue for the former considering his impartialist views, but I argue for the latter. I propose that we should satisfy most of the reasonable needs of those uniquely dependent on us before we reach out to those in outer circles. This approach provides a central stable core for a full

[341] I assume beneficent motivations on behalf of my readers , as discussed in my Introduction.

moral life. For instance, I argue that it is moral to provide (or budget for) education for my children before trying to address the poverty, near or far, of those not in my center circle of concern. The priority I advocate is to first satisfy obligations unique to myself (i.e., those that only I have a primary responsibility for) before moving out to broader circles of concern. We are naturally motivated to give a priority to ourselves and those in our "philophilic family," and society seems to function best if we act on this natural motivation, but without being excessive (excess is discussed below). To the extent one is able, after accounting for the thicker needs of those represented in the center circle, one should then address concerns for the basic needs for all people.

A further issue to consider is which of the following should be satisfied first; the thicker needs of those in a circle outside our center circle, or the more urgent and basic needs of people in all our circles of concern. For instance, if one's resources are to be prioritized, should one give to the local or regional library to encourage literacy and appreciation for literature and community within one's relatively well-off society, or instead respond to the more desperate needs of survival of the distant poor? The ideal answer is to do both, but if a choice is required I contend that duties of beneficence weigh more heavily in favor of matters of survival, regardless of relationship or distance. In this regard I believe Singer was correct to give a high priority to the absolute poor. Ordinary moral thinking tells us that loss of human life and the suffering of severe deprivation are more important than most all other concerns. When prioritizing urgent matters, those matters of "life and death" naturally, and I think correctly, come first. The

HMO model allows for the rights of each individual to make these choices for themselves, but ordinary moral thinking leads to a serious consideration for the absolute poor of the world, and an HMO would not be complete without considering the needs of the poorest.

It would be presumptuous to suggest the absolutely optimum moral use of one's time and money. Even as to world poverty, reasonable people can disagree about the priority of feeding those dying now of starvation versus the need to address underlying economic and sociological issues such as self-sufficiency, population control, etc. And some may argue that human poverty itself is not the ultimate moral concern. Environmental and biodiversity issues may play a large role in the future of our world, and some make the case that these issues need to take a top priority. The agora of moral concerns and priorities is bustling with passionate people and ideas as to how best to satisfy our moral obligations. Rather than dictate exactly which issues one should support, I propose that those worthy issues with which one feels the most identity, resonance, and self-expression should be supported. The PPP device and HMO model are intended to bring to the surface the various moral concerns one may consider, and to help facilitate establishing moral priorities.

I have emphasized global poverty because it is an issue frequently and consistently discussed in the literature, it is a more neutral and impartial issue than some because it is less self-serving and less self-regarding than some other issues (e.g., support for one's alma mater, support for the local library, concern for the environment because one enjoys travel to affected areas, etc.), and

because there is a general consensus among moral thinkers that poverty is a moral issue in need of attention (although they may differ in their views as to *how* it should be addressed). And personally I believe it represents the issue that our generation could most severely be faulted for not addressing, given our knowledge of the issue and our apparent capabilities to solve or substantially address it. Just as we now ask how moral people could have allowed slavery to exist in the nineteenth century; future generations may reasonably ask how we allowed fellow humans to die of preventable causes in such large numbers in our time.

Periodic Personal Plans (PPP)

Instead of attempting to define duties of beneficence as a matter of moral principle, I propose instead that these issues be considered by each person while constructing a Periodic Personal Plan ("PPP") of one's priorities of obligations to others. During this planning process one should consider both the needs of the distant as well as the nearby poor, and the less urgent, but still very important, needs of one's society. One should seriously consider the urgent needs of the desperately poor alongside the less urgent (but perhaps closer to the heart) needs of one's more immediate society. In this process, one's ordinary moral intuitions can be fairly considered – not in the passion of either a local fundraising event or while watching a television appeal to aid the desperate people in Darfur – but rather in the calm reflection on one's priorities generally, being aware of the various needs of the world and one's personal obligations.

This PPP process is inspired by the budget and review process typical of businesses, which typically covers the period of a year but often extend our several years. In businesses, a financial budget is prepared in advance, periodically reviewed during the period covered by the budget, and then reconciled at the end of that period to the actual financial results. Similarly, an individual can prepare in advance a personal budget of resources, both time and money, that are available to meet the various moral obligations in one's life for the period of time under consideration. In one place and at one time can be considered the obligations represented by the center of the HMO, the duties of beneficence to the poor of the world, and all other duties, obligations and personal loyalties (e.g., to an alma mater) for which one feels an obligation. This procedure is designed to draw out from oneself the range of one's obligations with the opportunity to compare self-regarding (e.g., self and family[342]) and other-regarding interests side by side without being unduly influenced by either. The competing interests and one's personal resource limitations will tend to cause one to give more serious consideration to each of one's various moral obligations.

My mention of the business budget model is not to argue for a direct analogy to moral obligations, but instead to add some rigor and accountability that is often lacking in people's perceived satisfaction of moral obligations. The business budget is intended only as an inspiration. The PPP is a process intended to focus our ordinary moral thinking, all relevant facts considered. The underlying expectation is that participants are motivated by ordinary morality,

[342] I am assuming my readers are naturally motivated to care for their own family to a similar degree as they care for themselves. Lack of such motivation is not an issue I address.

including beneficence, and they desire to act prudently, efficiently, and consistently with beneficence.

Although the PPP can be reviewed over the course of the designated time period, and should be reviewed and assessed at the end of the time period, once the moral obligations have been considered and the plan is set one will be justified in not reviewing questions of moral priorities whenever spending decisions are required. If appropriate moral consideration is given to the plan process, then one can have some comfort in knowing that spending within the plan budget is morally justified. However, emergencies can justify exceptions to the plan. Both a medical emergency for a family member and an emergency of direct rescue of an unrelated other could justify plan exceptions. Generally, however, one would be morally justified in resisting appeals from aid agencies, local organizations, and even family members if the expense does not fit within the PPP.

This PPP process may sound dreary and burdensome, but the overall goal is to establish these priorities in a responsible way and then be more free to enjoy life knowing that moral obligations have been handled to the best of your ability. Furthermore, the PPP can also allow for planning ways to bring more fulfillment and enjoyment in one's life, consistent with moral objectives. If approached in this positive manner, it can help one feel justified that he or she is living morally and thus cause a higher sense of self regard and happiness. As discussed above, one may choose to satisfy their moral obligations in any number of ways (after seriously considering their various personal obligations

and the needs of the greater world). In this process one may also allow for personal self-expression as an important element in one's well-being and happiness.

Guidelines

What metric or other guidelines should one use? Do we attempt to give to the most urgent need, do we attempt to give where we think we can do the most good, or do we aim at some other goal? The utilitarian metric of trying to produce the greatest good for the greatest number should be a leading candidate. All other things being equal, if one can save a life with little effort, one should certainly do so rather than spend more effort to merely save one from a lesser harm. Peter Unger, in *Living High and Letting Die*, suggests that saving a person's life (with a UNICEF donation) is at least as morally important as saving someone's leg at a far greater cost to oneself. [343] And if all other factors are neutral he seems to be correct – but they are not neutral even in his example. The person in risk of losing a leg is right before us and we may be the only person who could help that person. The salience of the situation pulls us to act in the immediate situation even when we fail to act on greater needs that are not as immediate or as salient. One non-central (to his argument) but nevertheless important lesson we can take from Unger is that we should not be too rigid in our periodic plans. It is unlikely that saving people in shallow ponds or on the side of the road will be anticipated in our PPP, but our plans should be flexible enough for us to act in the unlikely event those situations should confront us. The benefit

[343] Unger, Peter, *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 27.

of the periodic plan is that we would already have considered the UNICEF contribution, and have acted on it (or not) in a calm, thoughtful, and deliberate manner. Having considered and made provision for foreign aid in our PPP, we can follow our ordinary moral intuitions in reacting to the rare emergency where we can help and also know that our overall moral plan is consistent, rational, and beneficent. The careful and deliberate planning of our PPP is not inconsistent with the impulsive morality required to respond to the urgent needs of someone needing to be rescued. Ordinary moral intuitions should be followed in this regard, as suggested by Richard Miller's "Principle of Nearby Rescue," discussed in Chapter Three.

And John Arthur, as discussed in Chapter Two, qualifies the utilitarian formula by inserting a concern and a priority for entitlements, i.e., rights and deserts. We should not pledge to UNICEF if our own children are hungry or otherwise in need of assistance that we can provide. It is our right and, more importantly, our duty to care for those in our center circle of concern before caring for those in farther out circles.

My system of moral priorities is a deontological system, but it allows for consideration of consequences, as well as concern for rights and deserts. Consequences are a natural consideration in ordinary moral thinking. Concepts of individual rights and deriving just deserts from one's efforts are ordinary concepts of justice ingrained in the human psyche – especially the American psyche going back (at least) to John Locke and Thomas Jefferson. The mere fact that one is making the decisions as to how to spend one's money is tacit

recognition (by that individual) that one is entitled to make those decisions. By comparison, following a formula such as Singer's would leave one with little discretion. As already indicated, in following the Periodic Personal Plan process one should consider the consequences of one's actions, and saving a distant life would have priority over benefiting the local library, and perhaps priority over the less desperate needs of the nearby poor. Consequences are to be considered, but should not create rigid boundaries. Even if it is clear that more good consequences would result from an Oxfam or a UNICEF contribution, one is still entitled to favor the library contribution or the local needy after giving fair consideration to more desperate needs. Consequences should influence, but not control, the decisions during the periodic plan process.

A reasonable and rational goal for life is to live a life worth living – to live the best life we are capable of. Entailed in such a life are reasons to be concerned for others, and reasons to be concerned for ourselves and those personal relationships, projects, and interests that we naturally care about. A good life as well as ethical living requires striking a balance by giving weight to both self-regarding and other-regarding interests. Ethics is about making choices and striking balances, and the balance of self-regarding interests versus other-regarding interests is fundamental. Giving one's life over totally to others is an unwarranted (and perhaps irresponsible) abandonment of self-regarding interests because it does not give proper weight and importance to one's own life. And failure to be concerned with the suffering and basic needs of others is an unethical (and perhaps imprudent) abandonment of our interests in society and

of important aspects of a life well lived. Self-abnegation is psychologically non-intuitive and total egoism conflicts with the beneficence we have assumed.

Our individual goals should be to live as best as we know how, and not fret about what we can't control. *Ought* implies *can* and if we can't solve poverty then we have no ultimate ought regarding its solution. But we can help with a collective effort that will benefit other individuals and may eventually lead to solving poverty, and this is what we should do, similar perhaps to what we should do in regard to cancer, as discussed below. Determining the best life to live is an individual decision, perhaps without objective answers. But morality entails striving to arrive at the best one is capable of and the PPP process and HMO model will facilitate the moral striving in regard to various moral obligations, including obligations in regard to world poverty. Failing to investigate our obligations is a moral failing if we ignore the needs of others because of our own self-centeredness. The HMO/PPP motivation is to stimulate a greater and more methodical concentration on our various obligations.

Thinking specifically about world poverty as a social problem and what we should do about it, perhaps another comparison would be useful. Cancer can cause terrible suffering for those unlucky enough to contract it, as well as their loved ones. It seems appropriate that we should do what they can to support efforts to find a cure for cancer. For most people, this would mean making individual contributions and supporting institutional and government efforts to find a cure. Some will be inspired to do more, and they should be encouraged to do so. Diligence should be applied by medical researchers and fundraisers and we

all should continue to support promising efforts until there are breakthroughs in the medical research. But if a motivated individual gave all that one had to cancer research, this extreme sacrifice would not necessarily speed the discovery of a cure. And giving away everything one has to cancer research would deprive one of leading a self-fulfilling life. Similarly, no single individual can solve world poverty even if one gives all one has or gives to the extent called for by Singer's CMI principle, and thus likely deprives oneself of a fulfilling life. But contributing to a collective effort may very well have positive results, and thus would be justified on consequentialist grounds, and is consistent with beneficence.

We individuals did not cause poverty or cancer, thus we should not feel responsible for their existing, but we should act out of a duty of beneficence to do all we can to help consistent with a fulfilling life for ourselves. If we can help eliminate poverty and cancer we should – because of the good it will produce for others and for society generally, and because it contributes to a well-rounded and a well-lived ethical life.

Poverty is an individual and social ill, with many causes - some particular to the individual (such as one's inability to be self-sufficient), some brought about by ignorance or carelessness (e.g., failure to control births resulting in children but inadequate resources to care for them), much poverty is caused by society (e.g., corrupt governmental regimes, failed government policies, etc.), and some is caused by nature (such as weather related crop failures). As with cancer, the appropriate response from the average person is to support efforts to address these issues, but not to sacrifice or ruin our own lives with guilt over something

that can't be immediately solved. This observation and suggestion is consistent with the arguments for collective action methodically argued for by Garrett Cullity (Chapter Four), and is otherwise based on ordinary moral thinking.

Philophilic Excess

An obvious question to consider is how far up in the HMO center circle can one morally go before considering the needs of those in outer circles. Here again I will argue we should first address the fundamental concerns of those directly dependent on us (self and children in particular) before considering any others. Those fundamental concerns include food, shelter, security, and education, career for oneself, and other morally permissible life-enhancing goods or commitment goods (to use Garrett Cullity's terminology).[344] I will not attempt to define a precise line at which one should stop, but a college education at the best school available for oneself and one's children would seem to be acceptable, while excessive spending for a wardrobe beyond what is needed for one's way of life may not be acceptable. But rather than try to draw specific distinctions such as this, the approach I advocate is to engage in a holistic view of one's life and priorities on a periodic basis (the PPP), establishing at that time how much of one's resources will go to self, children, and other close relations, and how much to those in outer circles, some of whom have much greater needs. Considered in this context, resources devoted to luxuries and extravagances are more difficult to justify. And once a periodic plan is established, the temptation to deviate – for

[344] Cullity 2004, 156, 162-3.

either personal luxuries or to respond to appeals for poverty relief – are more reasonably and morally resisted.

As to the non-essential, and possibly extravagant, desires of one's children, I contend that the moral duties of a parent have reasonable limitations. For instance, a parent may reasonably provide a driving age child with an automobile if it is needed for the child's normal activities such as work or school activities at times when the parent is not available. And for safety reasons, a parent may reasonably justify a new car because of the advanced safety features. But a new car every year merely because the child wants one is not a reasonable moral duty of the parent. The much weightier needs of others, including the distant poor, would override the child's (unreasonable) wishes.

Wealthy parents are often faced with the issue of how to properly allow for the needs of their children without being excessive. Even the billionaire Warren Buffett recognizes the need for some restraint. He takes the view that children of wealthy parents should have enough so they can do "anything" but not so much that they can do "nothing." And he recently backed up this philosophy by leaving the bulk of his wealth to a charitable foundation established by Bill Gates. Buffett and Gates are in a league of the wealthy that most of us find hard to imagine, but many people have enough wealth to properly care for their children and still have wealth left to benefit others. Most children of wealthy parents have privileges that will benefit them adequately for the opportunity to succeed as an adult, and don't need the luxuries that parents often feel compelled to provide. The important privileges are a good education, adequate medical care, social

integration, and the privilege of beginning their work life with manageable or no debt. Extravagances such as lavish parties (birthday parties, religious celebrations, marriage parties, etc.), expensive luxury cars, extensive travel for mere pleasure, and the like may be more about the need of the parent to demonstrate their wealth and less about the child's need. Peer pressure plays a role, for both parent and child. Parents and children in wealthy communities may feel deprived (or negligent in the case of the parent) if most people around them are spending on themselves at a high level. It may be difficult to not provide an automobile for a child if all the friends of the child have an automobile, even if it is not strictly necessary. Although one could consider numerous examples to try to separate the excessive and unnecessary from the appropriate and necessary, the judgments from such an exercise would be arbitrary to some degree regardless of the analysis and effort given to the task.

Instead of defending specific judgments on moral or immoral uses of wealthy, I advocate instead the PPP process and the HMO model as a commonsense methodology to reach moral decisions. If the starving poor and a lavish party to celebrate an important occasion are both unemotionally considered in the same thought process by morality-seeking people, a fair balance is likely to result. In most cases neither self-abnegation (all to the poor and no party) nor complete egoism (none to the poor and a party without limits) are likely to result. A more likely, and I contend a more moral, conclusion would be an allocation of some to the poor and some to a more modest party. And my experience suggests that most children have a sense of fairness that would allow

them to see the rationality and morality of making such a comprise if they were privy to and participated in the thought process. The PPP and HMO may be adaptable to a family discussion for those issues that directly affect more than one family member.

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