

# Ethics in a shrinking world exploring the ethical implications of the proliferation of technology on world hunger

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Kevin M. Dupree  
*University of Central Florida*

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ETHICS IN A SHRINKING WORLD: EXPLORING THE ETHICAL  
IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROLIFERATION OF TECHNOLOGY ON WORLD  
HUNGER

by

KEVIN M. DUPREE

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Humanities  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
and in the Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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Thesis Chair: Nancy A. Stanlick

## **ABSTRACT**

Even if they do not realize it, readers are perpetually in a condition that is strikingly similar to that of the Good Samaritan. Right now they have access to a vast network of communication that both enhances their senses and increases their sphere of influence. They can, for example, sit down at a computer and click on a certain combination of “sites” and the result will be that, in two weeks (or sooner), a DVD will arrive on their doorstep. Or, they can choose another combination, and the result will be that, in about two weeks (or less), a child will be saved from starvation and dehydration in some distant and destitute nation. Like the Good Samaritan, a reader of this thesis can see the desperate need of others and they have the ability to affect their condition. This perpetual Good Samaritan condition is directly a result of the recent changes the world has undergone as a result of technological advancement.

This thesis is an exploration of the ethical implications of the potential perpetual good Samaritan. I will argue that (1) affluent individuals are able to affect positively the global poor and that they have a moral obligation to do so, (2) that this moral obligation is limited insofar as fulfilling the obligation requires a moral agent to sacrifice something of substantial significance (i.e., something that would cause a long term decrease in happiness), and (3) fulfilling this obligation requires specific actions on political, social, and individual levels.

**Dedication:** To “the least of these.”

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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# **INTRODUCTION: OUR SHRINKING WORLD**

## **A Prefatory Remark for the Skeptical Reader**

This thesis is perhaps nothing more than the ramblings of someone who is suffering from what some might see as liberal guilt, a condition characterized by feelings of guilt about being affluent in a world where many live in abject poverty. On the other hand, perhaps this thesis is more than that. Perhaps it is the result of a more desirable condition: a condition that compels me to explore and follow the dictates of reason. It will be left to the reader to determine which of these two statements accurately describes what follows, for what follows is an inveighance against the inimical iniquity of death dealing indigence amongst affluence.

## **Our Shrinking World**

Even if they do not realize it, readers are perpetually in a condition that is strikingly similar to that of the Good Samaritan. Right now, they have access to a vast network of communication that both enhances their senses and increases their sphere of influence.<sup>1</sup> They can, for example, sit down at a computer and click on a certain combination of “sites” and the result will be that, in two weeks (or sooner), a DVD will arrive on their doorstep. Or, they can choose another combination, and the result will be that, in about two weeks (or less), a child will be saved from starvation and dehydration in some distant and destitute nation. Like the Good Samaritan, the reader can see the desperate need of others and they have the ability to affect their

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Critical ed. (Corte Madera CA: Gingko Press, 2003), 337.



situation. This perpetual Good Samaritan situation puts moral agents in a seemingly absurd position: they have to choose between satisfying their movie craving and saving the life of a child. This interesting dilemma is directly a result of recent technological advancement and the subsequent “shrinking of the world.”

Indeed, the ubiquity of the recognition that the world is a qualitatively different place as a result of technological proliferation is staggering. President John F. Kennedy began his inaugural address in 1961 by recognizing that “...the world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life.”<sup>2</sup> A little over thirty years ago, communications scholar John Edgar ruminated on the ramifications of technological proliferation, “[technology] is a force for change throughout the world that simply will not be stopped, no matter how it is resisted...are we ready for the consequences of this change? Are we prepared to consider the profound social, legal, economic, and political effects of technology around the world?”<sup>3</sup> Philosopher John Caputo describes our situation this way,

Today, when we hitch a ride on the electronic circuits that form the invisible ribs of a vast virtual world we soar like pure spirits, sailing effortlessly and with breathtaking speed across staggering distances. We make a mockery of ‘matter’...when you hit a bit of hypertext in a text, you are invited to spread your cybernetic wings...to lift yourself beyond the limits of the room in which you are seated, to sail across the seas, to enter an old library or to explore some distant ‘site’ which is but a point and click away.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Speeches that Changed the World: The Stories and Transcripts of the Moments that Made History* (London: Quercus Pub., 2007), 142.

<sup>3</sup> John M. Eger, “A Time for Decision,” *Journal of Communication* 29 (Winter 1979): 204-207.

<sup>4</sup> John Caputo, *On religion* (London: New York: Routledge, 2001), 73-74.

Anthropologist Thomas De Zengotita recognizes that, "...there has been a convergence of the digital and the biogenetic that will lead eventually to a full-blown merger between the real and the representational in every department of our lives...reality is becoming indistinguishable from representation in a qualitatively new way."<sup>5</sup> Friedman, a columnist for *The New York Times*, gives the appellation "Globalization 3.0" to describe our current world. He defines the word this way, "Globalization 3.0 is shrinking the world from a size small to a size tiny...[it] is the newfound power for *individuals* to collaborate and compete globally...individuals from every corner of the flat world are being empowered."<sup>6</sup>

Prior to the proliferation of technology, both knowledge of morally problematic circumstances and the ability to affect said circumstances were directly related to geography: only those who were close to the problem had to consider their ethical obligations towards rectifying the problem. Perhaps the two main responses to the growing irrelevance of geographical distance in our social, economic, and political endeavors can be broadly categorized in the following way: there are those who have sought to decrease the "moral distance" between the affluent and the starving thereby generating moral obligation of the former towards the latter and there have been those who, through various claims ranging from "self-defeating aid" to "meta-ethical particularism," have sought to increase the "moral distance" between the wealthy and the destitute, which absolves the wealthy of any obligation.

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas De Zengotita, *Mediated: How the Media Shapes Your World and the Way You Live in it* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006), 18.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2005), 10-11. (emphasis original)

This thesis is essentially an answer to a very natural question to ask when one recognizes the shift the world has undergone and the subsequent philosophical discussion regarding our ethical obligations: What new moral obligations arise out of this technological advancement and how can we fulfill these obligations? My answer is this: 1) technological advancement affects our sphere of influence and our concepts of community in a way that results in new ethical obligations towards those who require life-saving care regardless of their geographical location, 2) our duties to behave benevolently to the world's desperately poor are limited insofar as exercising those duties requires a sacrifice of something substantively significant (i.e., something that will result in a long term decrease in happiness), but our duty to begin valuing benevolence over other "substantively significant" endeavors is unlimited, and 3) fulfilling these obligations requires consistent and coordinated effort to deliver effective aid, eliminate unfair economic arrangements, and motivate individuals on a psychological level to aspire to behave more benevolently.

The purpose of this introduction is twofold. The first part of the introduction will map out the flow of the thesis. The second part of the introduction will address some of the limits, assumptions, and methods of which I make use for this thesis. With that being said, I turn now to the first point of discussion in this introduction.

Although there have been at least two attempts at providing a probative and ecumenical account (i.e., an account that does not rely on any particular moral framework or addresses the problem from various ethical perspectives) of our obligations to the distant destitute, these attempts have been plagued with conceptual difficulties that ultimately seem to undermine their cogency. For Peter Singer in "Famine, Affluence, and Morality", use of the term "morally

relevant” in the formulation of his premises (an attempt at being ecumenical) highlighted the vagueness of his argumentation, which made it an apt target for criticism.<sup>7</sup> The shortcoming in Thomas Pogge’s argumentation (in “Real World Justice”) is that he assumes that libertarian ideology is coherent and can coherently be applied at the global level, which is a claim that has been perpetually challenged.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the first chapter of the thesis will be dedicated to providing an ecumenical account of the affluent’s obligation to the global poor that avoids the aforementioned difficulties.

Philosophers across the board seem to recognize that the proliferation of technology has had the result of making distant relations morally equivalent to proximate relations (Hardin, Singer, Unger, O’Neill, Rachels, Fletcher, Pogge, etc.). Thus, the difficulty in establishing obligation to the impecunious is not that philosophers contest that distant situations are morally equivalent to proximate ones. Instead, as Jan Narveson points out, even if, morally speaking, there are starving people “right next to us,” it is not immediately clear to all that we have any obligations to them.<sup>9</sup>

Narveson identifies the moral paradigm underlying the “intuitive” denial that we have any obligations to others as the “conservative-libertarian” paradigm. Judith Jarvis Thomson’s

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<sup>7</sup> John Arthur, “Rights and the Duty to Bring Aid,” in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 39.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Blake, “International Justice (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy),” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/international-justice/>.

<sup>9</sup> Jan Narveson, “Morality and Starvation,” in *World Hunger and Moral Obligation*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 1st ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 49-65.

quote in “A Defense of Abortion” is representative of this view, “Surely we do not have any such ‘special responsibility’ for a person unless we have assumed it, explicitly or implicitly.”<sup>10</sup> To establish ethical obligation within the libertarian-conservative paradigm, I will present three arguments drawing heavily on insights from Thomas Pogge, William Aiken, James Sterba, and Onora O’Neil. Specifically, the first argument seeks to establish that the world’s rich are harming the global poor. The second argument casts the world hunger issue as one of conflicting liberties, and argues that the poor ought not to be expected to have their liberty limited in a way that condemns them for trying to save their lives (by procuring resources from the rich). The final argument claims that within an ethical paradigm that takes liberty as one its central values, life, a necessary precondition for liberty, should also be taken seriously, i.e., *positive* efforts should be made to preserve life.<sup>11</sup>

Nel Noddings’ infamous question, “Starving children in Africa, who cares?” typifies another response to the problem of world hunger: the partialist one.<sup>12</sup> This response is characterized by the claim that because the world’s poor are outside of our community, we do not have obligations to them. Justifications for partialism typically rest on concepts like

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<sup>10</sup> Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion,” in *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, ed. Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 747.

<sup>11</sup> This will undoubtedly be the most difficult pill for libertarians to swallow since it rests on the derivation of positive duties. Some may object to the idea that this is truly ecumenical, noting that the notion of non volunteerist positive duty is entirely foreign to the libertarian ethical paradigm. However, this account is still ecumenical in that it takes liberty as the central value of libertarian ethical thought and proceeds from that starting point.

<sup>12</sup> Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 86.

“constitutive community.”<sup>13</sup> The typical partialist claim (whether cultural perfectionism or meta-ethical particularism) is that members of the same constitutive community have obligations to one another since they, among other things, play a role in constructing that moral agent’s identity. The cultural homogenization that has occurred in our shrinking world provides reason to suspect that in many cases the rich and the poor share the same “constitutive community.” Thus, I will argue that it is not inconsistent with partialistic conceptions of morality to suppose that we have some obligation to the distant destitute.

Although it seems that there has been extensive discussion on whether or not the affluent have an obligation to the distant destitute, the discussion regarding the demandingness of our obligation to the indigent has been far from adequate. The debate over how far reaching our obligations are to the poor seems to strike at the heart of moral questions: how demanding can morality be? The previous discussion of this topic has resulted in a seemingly intractable debate. Indeed, Henry Shue, while attempting to settle this issue, threw up his proverbial arms in exasperation and wrote, “either a person’s general duties are limited or they are not...at this level the logic is inescapable. We need a fresh perspective.”<sup>14</sup>

The second chapter will take up that neglected project, and attempt to provide a fresh perspective. I will begin by representing some of Robert Noggle’s comments on the difficulties that have befuddled philosophers in their attempt to formulate a principle of benevolence with

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<sup>13</sup> This term is borrowed from Michael Sandel. *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, (New York: Cambridge University Press), 172.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Shue, “Solidarity Among Strangers and the Right to Food,” in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 124.

regard to the world hunger question. Secondly, I will represent and criticize some seemingly viable attempts at providing a response to how demanding our duties are to provide for those who are suffering. Specifically, I examine Peter Singer's, John Arthur's, William Frankena's, and Robert Noggle's attempts to understand the limit of the affluent's duty to the world's poor. Next, I will present and defend a principle of benevolence that will, perhaps, circumvent the problems that Noggle notes and the problems of the previously critiqued theories. This principle might be classified as a "moderate" one, and is summarized briefly as follows: our duties to behave benevolently are limited insofar as exercising those duties requires a sacrifice of something substantively significant (i.e., something that will result in our long term unhappiness), but our duty to begin valuing benevolence over other "substantively significant" endeavors is unlimited. Thus, we have a duty for our duty of benevolence to grow in magnitude.

The third part of the second chapter contains a further exposition of this principle and adds caveats. Such elaborations are an attempt to capture the complexities of the lives of moral agents, and to pay due respect to these complexities, since previous principles of benevolence, in addition to the fact that they seem inaccurate, also are extremely vague.

The principle of benevolence that I put forth in this chapter involves an aspect that makes moral agents look much like what Susan Wolf calls a "loving moral saint."<sup>15</sup> Thus, this "ideal" moral agent is subject to all of the criticisms that Wolf levies against what she thinks are overly demanding and intrusively all-encompassing ethical obligations. Briefly, she claims that demanding moral obligations hinder the development of non-moral virtues, and that this results

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<sup>15</sup> Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," in *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, ed. Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 709.

in a less than ideal individual. She also makes the related claim that morality itself should not serve as the primary motivation for all actions.

The final part of the chapter is dedicated to responding to these objections. I will draw on several comments made in the article, “What Moral Saints Look Like” to respond to Wolf’s first claim. I will address the second claim by exposing the normative nature of Wolf’s comments (and thus the ethical nature) and by arguing that Wolf cannot cogently criticize all-encompassing moral demands and, at the same time, prescriptively suggest a “non-moral” all-encompassing ideal (what she calls the “point of view of individual perfection”).

The third chapter addresses what seems to be a crucial question that philosophers neglected concerning our obligations to the needy: How do we fulfill those obligations? Indeed, a common remark at the end of several articles on the topic all express similar sentiments: our obligations to the impecunious are more far-reaching than many of us are currently prepared to act on.<sup>16</sup> Even Peter Singer has recognized this and mitigated the strength of his moral demands on his website “The Life You Can Save” (a site dedicated to raising funds for the poor) in order to prevent people from becoming discouraged at the demandingness of morality.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, typical prescriptions that philosophers recommend have been, at best, parochial and, at worst, inimical. Indeed, Amartya Sen wrote at one point, “The focus on food per head and Malthusian optimism [as a means of helping the poor has] literally killed

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<sup>16</sup> See Peter Singer’s “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”, Richard Watson’s “Reason and Morality in a World of Limited Food”, Garrett Cullity’s “The Life-Saving Analogy”, Hugh LaFollette and Larry May’s “Suffer the Little Children”, Henry Shue’s “Solidarity among Strangers and the Right to Food”, etc. for this trend.

<sup>17</sup> *Peter Singer and Michael Slote* (Philosophy TV, 2010), <http://www.philostv.com/peter-singer-and-michael-slote/>.



millions.”<sup>18</sup> This preoccupation with conceptual issues and a lack of concern for pragmatic implementation is perhaps a vice to which philosophers are particularly susceptible. David Crocker, a founding member of the International Development Ethics Association, confirms this when he notes, “unfortunately, preoccupied as they were with the task of justifying aid to distant people, most philosophers evinced scant interest in institutional and practical issues.”<sup>19</sup> The third chapter, then, is an attempt to escape the aforementioned philosopher’s vice. I will present practical solutions to the problem of poverty both on an individual level and on a social/political level.

Often times, as LaFollette notes, the “...strongest barrier to helping those in chronic need is more psychological than philosophical.”<sup>20</sup> Michael Slote’s comments in *Moral Sentimentalism* suggest that empathy is a key factor in motivating moral behavior. He notes that there are many studies that have attempted to show this empirically.<sup>21</sup> For the individual prescriptions, I draw on some insights that Michael Slote and Martin Hoffman have discovered on the connection between empathy and motivation for moral behavior.

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<sup>18</sup> Amartya Sen, “Goods and People,” in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 199.

<sup>19</sup> David Crocker, “Hunger, Capability, and Development,” in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh LaFollette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 213.

<sup>20</sup> Hugh LaFollette and Larry May, “Suffer the Little Children,” in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 80.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Slote, *Moral Sentimentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16.

For the social/political prescriptions, I explore the controversial topic of development economics. The controversy could be broadly categorized as a debate between those who embrace a neo-liberal globalization paradigm for economic growth and those who think that structural and institutional reforms are the key to ending poverty. Fortunately, it appears as though there has been some recent consensus about the economic means necessary to tackle the problem of poverty.<sup>22</sup> I attempt to isolate some prescriptions on which the various sides on the debate agree, and present these prescriptions as the safest bet for making strides towards ending poverty. I also look specifically at some of the prescriptions that Thomas Pogge, Andrew Kuper, and Dale Jamieson recommend. I also discuss some of the positive results of social entrepreneurship.

Finally, I address some objections to the notion that the affluent have an obligation to the indigent that are based on more practical concerns. More specifically, the notion of “self-defeating aid” will be explored. Garrett Hardin is perhaps the best known philosopher who attempted to show that we ought not to give aid to countries that have exceeded their “carrying capacity.” The result of not heeding Hardin’s remarks will, according to him, be something like this: “their population [will] continue to grow unchecked and so will their ‘need’ for aid. In the short run, a world food bank actually may diminish the need, but in the long run it actually increases the need *without limit*.”<sup>23</sup> I critique both the empirical and conceptual basis for

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<sup>22</sup> World Bank (Washington, DC), *World Development Report 2000 2001 Attacking Poverty* (Oxford [etc.]: [Oxford University Press [etc.], 2000), 192.

<sup>23</sup> Garrett Hardin, “Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor,” in *World Hunger and Moral Obligation*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 1st ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 17.

Hardin's (and others') arguments against helping the poor. Next, I will argue that proper aid for the world's global poor does not involve an abandoning of our economic growth. In fact, it seems that properly appropriated dollars will have a "boomerang effect," i.e., as more and more nations are lifted out of poverty, there will likely be some long term benefits for developed nations' economies.<sup>24</sup> These findings will be used to address what seems to be, paradoxically, a consequentialist (which is typically characterized by impartiality) and a partialist objection to aiding the poor, an objection that argues that we ought not to help the poor because doing so is harmful to our economy.

I also respond to this objection by noting that generally speaking, moral actions cannot be condemned because of the negative consequences that would result within a certain system. This says more about the system than it does about the moral act itself, and while it maybe debatable whether or not one should perform some action in a system that will result in negative consequences, there is no question that the system itself if immoral or should be replaced. If this response to the objection is correct, then the question becomes, "how can the system be reworked?", i.e., how can our economy be reconstructed in a way that efforts to help the cadaverous children will not result in dire consequences.

### **Acting on Aristotle's Ancient Aphorism: Limits and Assumptions**

Towards the end of the first book of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, he justifies his "lack of precision" of explaining the exact nature of "the good" by these words,

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<sup>24</sup> Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*, 428.

... do not look for the same degree of exactness in all areas, but the degree that fits the subject-matter in each area...For the carpenter's and the geometer's inquiries about the right angle are different also; the carpenter's is confined to the right angle's usefulness for his work, whereas the geometer's concerns what, or what sort of thing, the right angle is, since he studies the truth. We must do the same, then, in other areas too...so that digressions do not overwhelm our main task.<sup>25</sup>

Since there are two main fundamental questions that threaten to “overwhelm” the main task of the thesis, I find myself in a similar situation to Aristotle: I must make some initial limiting assumptions. These assumptions involve two meta-ethical topics: the validity of moral realism and the role intuition ought to play in ethical argumentation.

To deal adequately with the issues and objections to moral realism could certainly be a thesis topic of its own and would be outside the scope of this thesis. However, Unger has noted that moral realism does not need to be assumed in order for these sorts of ethical prescriptions to be taken seriously. So, rather than assuming realism at the outset of this thesis, I will, following Peter Unger's method in his work *Living High or Letting Die*, assume the much weaker notion that the status of moral truths (objective or subjective) is irrelevant in determining the nature of what is an ethical way to behave (even though I am inclined to side with moral realism).

Peter Unger imagines an interlocutor who would object to this notion. The interlocutor might object by asking, “What would happen if we believed there weren't any substantial moral truths? Rather than feeling constrained by our deepest moral commitments, mightn't even we

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<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *Introductory readings in ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy*, ed. C Reeve and Patrick Miller (Indianapolis IN: Hackett Pub. Co., 2006), 309.

decent folk be free to do just what we please....”<sup>26</sup> This objection is met by echoing Unger’s response. He notes that even if someone believes that there are no objective moral truths it would not “free them up” to behave in ways contrary to his or her values. He borrows an example from James Rachels to illustrate this point: Suppose that someone has a rival heir to a large sum of money. Suppose further that this person will receive much more money if his rival dies first. Finally, suppose he stumbles upon this rival who is in danger of drowning. If this person does not believe there are objective moral truths will they simply allow their rival heir to drown? “Not a chance”, Unger notes, “when clear [sic] that there’s a great conflict between some conduct and our Values, we avoid it like the plague.”<sup>27</sup> Those who read this thesis who reject objective moral truths may consider the arguments put forth to be an attempt to clarify values that are already possessed by the reader (objectively or subjectively). For those who reject the notion that we have such values (again, subjectively or objectively), I am content to take David Hume’s advice,

Those who have denied the reality of moral distinctions, may be ranked among the disingenuous disputants; nor is it conceivable, that any human creature could ever seriously believe, that all characters and actions were alike entitled to the affection and regard of everyone... The only way, therefore, of converting an antagonist of this kind, is to leave him to himself. For, finding that nobody keeps up the controversy with him, it is probable he will, at last, of himself, from mere weariness, come over to the side of common sense and reason.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Peter Unger, *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996),

22.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>28</sup> David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Principles of Morals*. Section 1 “General Principles of Morals.” (Project Gutenberg, 2003), <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4320>.

The next and final meta-ethical topic that cannot be discussed in full here concerns the role of “moral intuition” in forming moral judgments. This has been attacked recently by several ethicists.<sup>29</sup> If I am to take Aristotle’s advice seriously, however, I absolutely cannot defend the use of “moral intuition” in making judgments here. This need not necessarily worry the reader. I have tried to make an appeal to intuition only when doing so will not be controversial. (e.g., I think that it is intuitive that we ought to wade into a shallow pond to save a drowning child, but this is an intuition to which I will not appeal since it has been contested.)

Despite the fact that a reliance on intuition may be dubitable to some, I will make use of it because 1) doing so allows me to be free from committing myself to any particular ethical theory (e.g., consequentialism, deontology, etc.) and 2) backing up every moral judgment considered in this thesis using some moral theory may result in a prolixic and prattle-like discussion since the judgments that are being justified (as noted above) are not controversial. With these limits and assumptions in mind, I turn now to the first task of my thesis: establishing that the affluent do have a duty to the distant destitute.

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<sup>29</sup> See Jan Narveson, “Welfare and Wealth, Poverty and Justice in Today's World,” *The Journal of Ethics* 8, no. 4 (2004): 305-348 and Peter Singer, “Ethics and Intuitions,” *The Journal of Ethics* 9 (2005): 331-352.

## CHAPTER 1: MORAL MIGRATION FROM “DISTANT” NATIONS

This chapter begins with a discussion of what seem to be the most seminal articles and books in the past discussions about world hunger since Singer’s “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” (1971). Next, it seeks to highlight and justify some of the implicit premises of the arguments of these authors, as these premises and arguments are important in establishing duties to the distant. The third part of the chapter will attempt to provide an ecumenical exposition of our ethical obligation to the indigent. Specifically, I engage libertarian and partialist perspectives on world hunger and conclude that duties to the distant can be coherently derived within these paradigms. I target these particular perspectives since these positions have been the least conducive to establishing duties towards the distant destitute.

### **The Moral Migration of Starving Children**

As mentioned in the introduction, the growing irrelevance of distance in our economic and social interactions has been accompanied by an attempt to shrink the moral distance between the affluent and the poor.<sup>30</sup> Two notable philosophers who have sought to shrink the “moral distance” between the haves and have-nots are Peter Singer and Peter Unger. They have, through their conceptual work, acted rather like Mosaic figures. They have essentially led an exodus (morally speaking) of starving persons from the destitute third world to the promised land of the

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<sup>30</sup> Articles that attempt this “shrinking of moral distance” are plentiful, (“Famine, Affluence, and Morality,” “The Right to Be Saved From Starvation,” “Global Justice” are a few examples) and have filled at least three anthologies: *World Hunger and Moral Obligation*, *Morality and World Hunger*, and *The Ethics of Assistance*.

pocketbooks of the affluent. This exodus is evidence of the first effect of our shrinking world: *distant* relations can now be assessed morally as though they are *proximate* relations. Essentially, Singer and Unger have claimed that, morally speaking, *there are starving children in our living room* and we ought to do something about it. This discussion will be focused on representing the Singer and Unger's arguments on the first claim, and making explicit their implicit premises that allow them to draw this conclusion.

Peter Singer likens our condition as affluent individuals to a person coming across a drowning child in a pond, and (using principles that will be discussed later) he concludes that, "...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."<sup>31</sup> Moreover, he claims that,

...instant communication and swift transportation have changed the situation. From the moral point of view, the development of the world into a 'global village' has made an important...difference to our moral situation. Expert observers and supervisors, sent out by famine relief organizations or permanently stationed in famine-prone areas, can direct our aid to a refugee in Bengal almost as effectively as we could get it to someone in our own block. There would seem, therefore, to be no possible justification for discriminating on geographical grounds.<sup>32</sup>

Peter Unger does more extensive work in showing that, morally speaking, we are in a position similar to a person stumbling upon a drowning child. He does this by presenting two analogies: "The Sedan" and "The Envelope".

Here is his Sedan analogy reproduced largely in its entirety,

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<sup>31</sup> Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 24.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 25.



...your one luxury in life is a vintage Mercedes sedan that...you've restored to mint condition. In particular, you're pleased by the auto's fine leather seating. One day, you stop at the intersection of two small country roads both lightly traveled. Hearing a voice screaming for help, you get out and see a man who's wounded...Assuring you that his wound's confined to one of his legs, the man also informs you that he was a medical student for two full years and...he's knowledgeably tied his shirt near the wound so as to stop the flow. So, there's no urgent danger of losing his life, you're informed, but there's great danger of losing his limb. This can be prevented, however, if you drive him to a rural hospital fifty miles away...Now, if you'd aid this trespasser, you must lay him across your fine back seat. But, then, your fine upholstery will be soaked through with blood, and restoring the car will cost over five thousand dollars. So, you drive away. Picked up the next day by another driver, he survives but loses the wounded leg.<sup>33</sup>

Peter Unger claims that, intuitively, it seems like a “severe moral failing” if an individual was unwilling to ruin his upholstery in his car in order to save this strange bird watcher’s leg. He then presents another analogy,

In your mailbox, there's something from (the U.S. Committee for) **UNICEF**- After reading it through, you correctly believe that, unless you soon send in a check for \$100, then, instead of each living many more years, over thirty more children will die soon. But, you throw the material in your trash basket, including the convenient return envelope provided, you send nothing, and, instead of living many years, over thirty more children soon die than would have had you sent in the requested \$100.<sup>34</sup>

Unger then notes that, intuitively, this action does not seem to be in the same category as the above analogy, i.e., a “serious moral failing.” His project then becomes one of showing both why these disparate intuitive assessments exist and why they need to be revised. His answer is

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<sup>33</sup> Unger, *Living High and Letting Die : Our Illusion of Innocence*, 24-25.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

that the difference in our intuitive assessments is a result of “psychological distortions” due to the distance of the individual, and is not actually reflective of our real moral principles.<sup>35</sup>

Unger is not the first to recognize that psychological distortions related to distance can affect our moral assessments. Unger’s claim is an echo of the sentiments of David Hume in his most sentiment-focused treatise, *An Inquiry Concerning Principles of Morals*. Hume notes that,

...small benefit done to ourselves, or our near friends, excites more lively sentiments of love and approbation than a great benefit done to a distant commonwealth: But still we know here...to correct these inequalities by reflection, and retain a general standard of vice and virtue, founded chiefly on a general usefulness.<sup>36</sup>

Psychological distortions do indeed seem to be at work because of the distance between the world’s rich and poor. This is actually something that will be explored in greater detail in the third chapter. For now, it is enough to note that psychological states are not considered particularly relevant to making moral judgments within the two paradigms that I examine in this chapter.

In both of the Singer and Unger’s work we find implicit criteria for determining whether a situation can be evaluated morally. The first is relevant knowledge of the problem. The second is the ability to rectify it. Perhaps both of these criteria can be encapsulated by the maxim that “ought implies can,” since both knowledge of the situation and the ability to rectify it are a part of the “can.”

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<sup>35</sup> Al-Noor Nathoo, “Rationalized Self-Interest or Reasoned Skepticism? Objections to Singer and Unger on the Obligations of the Affluent” (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary, 2001), 22, [http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/Obligations\\_of\\_the\\_Affluent.pdf](http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/Obligations_of_the_Affluent.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Project Gutenberg, 2003), <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4320>.

Distance is only relevant to determining whether an action can be evaluated morally insofar as it affects the aforementioned criteria. By slightly altering the drowning child analogy, I will attempt to justify this claim. Suppose that instead of an able bodied person stumbling upon the drowning child that a paraplegic person does. Clearly, this person is immune to any moral obligation to wade into the pool to save the drowning child. Note also that he is equally immune to moral obligation regardless of his location in relation to the drowning child. Suppose also, that instead of noticing the child as the person walks by the pond, the person is too busy on a cell phone to recognize that the child is in danger. Again, here this distracted individual is certainly free from any moral censure since both persons cannot do anything to save the drowning child. At one point in time distance was the obstacle both for knowledge of morally problematic situations and efficaciousness of affecting those situations, but in a shrinking world, this simply does not seem to be the case.

### **The Road Less Traveled: An Ecumenical Exposition of Ethical Obligation**

It would seem that at least the first part of Singer and Unger's claim is true. There are indeed starving children in the living rooms of the affluent, but their second claim, that we ought to do something about it, is far from obvious for some. Interestingly, as Jan Narveson notes, it is "self-evident" to some that we ought to help a starving child in our living room, yet it is "self-evident" to others that we have no moral obligation to help that child at all.<sup>37</sup> One man's axiom is another man's specious speculation.

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<sup>37</sup> Jan Narveson, "Morality and Starvation," in *World Hunger and Moral Obligation*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 1st ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 52.

Narveson provides some insight into what appears to be an axiomatic standoff. He uncovers the two moral paradigms that generate these “axioms” which reveals that they are not basic propositions at all, but they are, instead, based on other principles. Narveson gives a name to each position: libertarian-conservatives are those who believe that they have no obligation to the starving children in their living room and “liberals” who believe that they clearly do. I will add to these two categories one other: partialists who believe that our legitimate favoritism towards “our own” results in eliminating any duties to the distant.

It may be helpful in clarifying these positions to represent some of the claims of proponents of these positions. The words of Michael Ignatieff, Judith Thomson, and Nel Noddings are representative of the liberal, conservative-libertarian, and partialist views respectively. Ignatieff, in *The Needs of Strangers* claims that “the ground zero of human obligation is that this common humanity is reason enough for a claim on another’s superfluity.”<sup>38</sup> Thomson states in her famous article, “A Defense of Abortion,” “surely we do not have any such ‘special responsibility’ for a person unless we have assumed it, explicitly or implicitly.”<sup>39</sup> Finally, Nel Noddings’ infamous rhetorical question, “Starving children in Africa, who cares?” typifies a partialist response to world hunger.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1984).

<sup>39</sup> Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion,” in *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, ed. Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 737-749.

<sup>40</sup> Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 86.

At this conceptual crossroad, I will take the road less traveled: the ecumenical one. Following the ecumenical approaches used by Singer, Thomas Pogge, and William Frankena, the rest of this chapter will seek to establish our duties to the distant from a variety of ethical perspectives (even perspectives that traditionally are thought to mitigate or obliterate our obligation to the distant).<sup>41</sup>

To be clear, my ecumenical approach will not likely result in conclusions that proponents of these particular perspectives might accept, but my approach is ecumenical in the sense that it takes the central values of these ethical perspectives as such. Another preliminary clarifier: I am not presuming that aid to the Third World take one particular form. I merely use food aid or health aid as examples throughout this discussion. However, it is entirely possible that these are not the most effective means of fulfilling our duty to the distant. This is an issue I will take up in Chapter 3. For now, I will examine Narveson's unpacking of the conservative-libertarian paradigm.

**On Liberty and Poverty.** Looking at the world hunger problem through the libertarian paradigm is perhaps the most extensively explored perspective. Thus, I will be drawing heavily on several authors' previous work for three separate arguments for duties to the distant within a libertarian paradigm: the "harm argument," the "conflict argument," and the "axiological argument." Although the first two arguments that I present are not

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<sup>41</sup> Here I am referring to Singer's use of the term "morally relevant" in his argument "Famine, Affluence, and Morality", Pogge's explicitly ecumenical defense of the notion that the affluent are causing harm to the poor in "Real World Justice", and Frankena's interchangeable use of deontic and aretaic language in "Moral Philosophy and World Hunger" to describe our moral relationship to the poor.

particularly novel, they are important since the libertarian paradigm has been a serious conceptual obstacle in recognizing the affluent's duty to the distant destitute. Even though the third argument relies on an observation made by Aiken, it seems to be a unique contribution to the discussion on how libertarians should view the problem of world hunger. Before delving into these arguments, it is important to get a grasp on exactly what is meant by the "libertarian position."

The "libertarian position" is, according to Narveson, an entirely negative conception of morality. Persons who endorse this conception of morality aver that one only must refrain from causing harm to others, but otherwise they are entirely free to do what they like. Moreover, according to this position, we have positive duties only if we acquire them by some agreement since liberty is the central value of this system and imposing positive duties limits the freedom of the moral agent.<sup>42</sup> A final tenet of this position is that if any person acquires property legitimately (e.g., if some sort of trade occurred or it was given as a gift), then "nobody may take x from me without my voluntary consent."<sup>43</sup> With this definition of the

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<sup>42</sup> This, by the way, seems odd, since in the introduction to one of the most seminal texts in the development of libertarian thought, Mill's *On Liberty*, he claims that, "there are also many positive acts for the benefit of others, which he may rightfully be compelled to perform; such as...to perform certain acts of individual beneficence, such as saving a fellow-creature's life...A person may cause evil to others not only by his actions but by his inaction, and in either case he is justly accountable to them for the injury." John Mill, "On liberty - Google Books", n.d., 24, <http://books.google.com/books?id=3xARAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA24&lpg=PA24&dq#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

<sup>43</sup> Narveson, "Morality and Starvation," 54.

libertarian position in mind, consider what I refer to as the harm argument for obligations to the distant needy.

Thomas Pogge is perhaps best known for his recent work which attempts to show that the affluent are affecting the poor negatively. His central claim combines empirical information from economic theories, "...by shaping and enforcing the social conditions that foreseeably and avoidably cause the monumental suffering of global poverty, we are harming the global poor."<sup>44</sup> However, it is not immediately clear that the type of harm that Pogge is referring to is not so causally disconnected from our actions, that we cannot be held morally responsible for them. In other words, it seems unlikely that we would suppose, for example, that Bob could be held morally responsible if Bob's calling of Jill on her cell phone results in Jill crashing her car and creating a 20 car pile up. So how is the situation that Pogge paints about the affluent harming the poor different? To answer this question, I will draw from observations made by Onora O'Neill, and from there, present Pogge's argument. Together, these two sets of observations form the "harm argument" for generating obligation towards the poor within the libertarian paradigm.

O'Neill claims that person A's right to not be killed can be violated by person B even if the following conditions are present:

- a. B does not act alone
- b. A's death is not immediate
- c. It is not certain whether A or another will die in consequence of B's action

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Pogge, "Real World Justice," *Journal of Ethics* 9, no. 1 (2005): 29-53.

d. B does not intend A's death<sup>45</sup>

She then proceeds to support these claims up with the following examples (where aa corresponds to condition a):

aa. A is beaten by a gang consisting of B, C, D, etc. No one assailant single-handedly killed him, yet his right not to be killed was violated by all who took part

bb. A is poisoned slowly by daily doses. The final dose, like earlier ones was not, by itself, lethal. But the poisoner [sic] still violated A's right not to be killed

cc. B plays Russian roulette with A,C,D...If A is shot and dies, then B has violated his right not to be killed

dd. Henry II asks who will rid him of the turbulent priest, and his supporters kill Becket. It is reasonably clear that Henry did not intend Becket's death, even though he in part brought it about, as he later admitted.<sup>46</sup>

These examples are largely unproblematic. However, the fourth one may need some qualification, so before proceeding, a caveat is in order.

It does seem morally relevant whether or not someone's right was violated intentionally. No one would, for example, equally reproach someone who deliberately committed murder and someone who committed manslaughter. However, O'Neill's example is less controversial when we consult our intuitions about how cases where actors are aware that their actions cause harm even though that is not the ultimate end they seek would be evaluated. Even though someone might not intend it, they may know that a direct result of their attempt to throw rocks at a tree will be that people will be hit on the head (when they

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<sup>45</sup> Onora O'Neill, "Lifeboat Earth," in *World Hunger and Moral Obligation*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 1st ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 154.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 154-155.



often miss the tree). It is immoral for this person to continue to behave this way, even if he is not ultimately trying to hit people on the head. Thus, a revision of O'Neill's condition would be this:

d2. B does not intend A's death, but B knows that A's death (or another's) will likely be a side-effect of their actions.

Even this revision, however, does not adequately qualify O'Neill's claim. We can easily imagine a situation in which an individual may be morally justified in engaging in an action that will likely result in the death of another. Suppose that a doctor must perform a surgery to save the life of a mother who is in labor. Suppose further that the surgery will likely result in the death of the unborn child. Assuming that the unborn child has rights, the doctor's actions are still justified since he is attempting to accomplish some moral good. This is, of course, the doctrine of double effect.<sup>47</sup> A final revision of O'Neill's principle that takes this into account, then, is this:

d3. B does not intend A's death, but B knows that A's death (or another's) will likely be a side-effect of their actions and B is not attempting to accomplish an action of morally comparable significance.

O'Neill then suggests that a conjunction of these conditions also constitutes a violation of A's right not to be killed.<sup>48</sup> Presumably, these are the conditions that Pogge refers to implicitly when he discusses the harm of the poor. O'Neill's observations also serve to bolster

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<sup>47</sup> Allison MacIntyre, "Doctrine of Double Effect (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)," n.d.,

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/double-effect/>.

<sup>48</sup> O'Neill, "Lifeboat Earth," 155.

Pogge's arguments against some of the criticisms that have been levied against it. With these conditions justified, we can now turn to Pogge's argument.

For Pogge, the current economic order is "unjust [and causing harm] when it leaves social and economic human rights unfulfilled on a massive scale even while there is a feasible alternative order under which these human rights would be much better realized."<sup>49</sup> Pogge points at a specific example of this in the WTO negotiations:

In the WTO negotiations, the affluent countries insisted on continued and asymmetrical protections of their markets through tariffs, quotas, anti-dumping duties, export credits, and subsidies to domestic producers, greatly impairing the export opportunities of even the very poorest countries. These protections cost developing countries hundreds of billions of dollars in lost export revenues.<sup>50</sup>

More examples of these structural inequalities will be discussed in Chapter 3 (where discussion of feasible improvements for the benefit of the impecunious are discussed). For now, it is enough to note that there is a feasible alternative to this order where human rights would be better realized, viz., the right not to be killed would not be violated. Notice that O'Neill's conditions are present in this situation: affluent nations are not acting alone in perpetuating this economic order, the economic order does not result in immediate death (but death by starvation from the lack of resources that results from the economic order), affluent nations are not sure exactly who will be affected, and affluent nations do not intend to harm the poor (although they know that a result of their actions is harm).

Pogge's argument has been criticized for failing to recognize the impact that the country's own government has in perpetuating poverty within its border and for failing to show

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<sup>49</sup> Pogge, "Real World Justice," 43.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 50.

that the international economic order is the main cause of poverty.<sup>51</sup> However, O'Neill's analogy strengthens Pogge's argument in a way that he has yet to recognize: "A is beaten by a gang consisting of B, C, D, etc. No one assailant single-handedly killed him, yet his right not to be killed was violated by all who took part."<sup>52</sup> Even if the international economic order established by affluent nations is not the main cause of death of the impoverished members of Third World countries, affluent nations are still implicated in violating A's right not to be killed since even if no "assailant single-handedly killed him" A's right is still violated. Pogge has also responded to these criticisms by noting that affluent nations play a part in enabling the poor leaders of poor countries to continue to ruin their economy,

How harmful corrupt leaders in poor countries are, for example, is strongly influenced by whether the global order recognizes such leaders, on the basis of effective power alone, as entitled to sell us their country's resources, to borrow in its name, and to use the proceeds to buy the means of internal repression.<sup>53</sup>

Even if this is not the case, now that Pogge's argument has been bolstered by O'Neill's, his claims seem tenable enough to assert reasonably that there may be some obligation to the world's needy. This obligation, of course, would be limited to changing economic circumstances so that the poor would not be "harmed." It is still an entirely negative duty on the part of the affluent. The next two arguments, however, seek to establish that the world's rich have positive duties to alleviate the suffering of the world's poor.

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<sup>51</sup> I am referring to Narveson's comments in "Welfare and Wealth in a Just Society" and Pablo Gilibert's comments in "The Duty to Eradicate Poverty – Positive or Negative" respectively.

<sup>52</sup> O'Neill, "Lifeboat Earth," 154.

<sup>53</sup> Pogge, "Real World Justice," 47.

The “conflict argument” is the second argument that results in generating obligation within the libertarian paradigm. This argument is offered by James Sterba in his article “Global Justice.” Although Sterba’s argument seems to be a very important contribution to the discussion on world hunger, it seems to have received little attention.<sup>54</sup> Thus, presenting his argument here has less to do with shoring up aspects of his argument that have been criticized (unlike Pogge’s argument) and more to do with pointing out Sterba’s significant remarks on world hunger.

Sterba begins his article by defining liberty in a way that seems consistent with Narveson’s definition: “liberty is the absence of interference by other people from doing what one wants or is able to do.”<sup>55</sup> He then begins to frame the world hunger problem as a conflict between the liberties of the rich and the poor: “Either we can say that the rich should have the liberty not to be interfered with in using their surplus resources for luxury purposes, or we can say that the poor should have the liberty not to be interfered with in taking from the rich what they require to meet their basic needs.”<sup>56</sup>

Next, he invokes two ethical principles. The first is a slightly modified version of a fundamental ethical principle: the “ought implies can” principle. He articulates that principle this way: “People are not morally required to do what they lack the power to do or what would

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<sup>54</sup> A search on Google Scholar reveals that it has only been cited by two other works. A search on the Philosopher’s Index turns up no results on this particular article by Sterba (probably because it was only published in the book *World Hunger and Morality*). A search on Philpapers.org returns similar results.

<sup>55</sup> James Sterba, “Global Justice,” in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 134.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-135.

involve so great a sacrifice that it would be unreasonable to ask them to perform such an action....”<sup>57</sup> In other words, its unlikely that I could legitimately be held morally responsible, for example, for not attending a promised lunch with a friend when doing so would result in missing the opportunity to see my first child being born. The second is what he calls the “conflict resolution principle”: “What people are morally required to do is what is reasonable to ask [and in severe cases require] everyone affected to accept....”<sup>58</sup> This principle, Sterba claims, is in accord with “the generally accepted view of morality as a system of reasons for resolving interpersonal conflicts of interest.”<sup>59</sup>

Applying these principles to the conflict between the rich and the poor, he examines three possible prescriptive outcomes: a moral resolution that would require the rich to give to the poor (thereby sacrificing some of their liberty), a moral resolution that requires the hungry poor to not take from the rich (thereby sacrificing their liberty to do so and, as a result, their life), and a moral resolution that would “require the rich and the poor to accept the results of a power struggle in which both the rich and the poor are at liberty to appropriate and use the surplus resources of the rich.”<sup>60</sup>

Sterba then argues that accepting either the resolution that forbids the poor from taking from the rich or allows both the rich and the poor to live in a power struggle over surplus resources is effectively the same prescription. This prescription asks the poor to abide by a moral

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 138.

rule that is unreasonable for them to accept. Therefore, according to Sterba, these moral resolutions cannot be legitimate ones. Instead, Sterba seems to argue rightly that we must accept that the world's affluent have some obligation to give their surplus resources when doing so will result in the saving of lives.<sup>61</sup>

This last (axiological) argument is going to be particularly uncomfortable for libertarians, for it concludes that non-volunteerist positive duties are consistent with the libertarian paradigm and that the positive duty to preserve life is a legitimate duty. Again, note that this approach is ecumenical in that this argument proceeds from taking liberty as a central ethical value.

Liberty was certainly a central ethical value for the “founding fathers.” Consider this quotation from *The Declaration of Independence*, “when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their *duty*, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.”<sup>62</sup> In this quotation, there is a rather natural connection between the notion of the value of liberty and the logical response to valuing liberty. How much sense would it make, for example, to say that someone valued most his children's well being, yet he allowed that child to be bullied in school or allowed that child to develop unhealthy habits (e.g., poor study habits and work ethic)? It seems, then, that Thomas Jefferson was right to make the very natural connection between valuing something and the practical actions necessary to preserve that same thing.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Jefferson, “Declaration of Independence - Transcript,” n.d., [http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html). (emphasis mine)

On this account, if libertarians really do value liberty, then libertarianism cannot be an entirely negative ethic. There must be at least one positive duty, viz., the duty to preserve one's liberty. It may be questionable whether this duty is demanding enough to require that a person make huge sacrifices. In other words, it seems unlikely that we are morally required to join Patrick Henry in his rabble rousing rhetorical remark, "Give me liberty or give me death." However, suppose that preserving liberty was an easy duty to fulfill. Suppose that it was a matter of, say, clicking a few buttons on a machine in your home every other day. Then, surely, if one truly values liberty, then one ought to preserve it by clicking those buttons.

Another rather obvious observation about the libertarian paradigm is that since liberty is the central ethical value, it attempts to provide liberty for everyone. It is not merely concerned with one's own liberty. Think, for example, about Sterba's remarks earlier in this chapter,

liberty is the absence of interference by other people from doing what one wants or is able to do. Interpreting their ideal in this way, libertarians claim to derive a number of more specific requirements, in particular, a right [not to be killed], a right to freedom of speech, press, and assembly, and a right to property.<sup>63</sup>

Again, here it is clear that the liberty of others is actually valued in society, and that this valuing results in engaging in many positive acts. For Henry Shue, "it is abundantly clear...that positive duties will have to be performed. Police will have to be on the streets, judges will have to be in the criminal courts."<sup>64</sup> I recognize that it is less clear, however, whose responsibility it is to organize and implement these particular positive duties, but it will

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<sup>63</sup> Sterba, "Global Justice," 134.

<sup>64</sup> Henry Shue, "Solidarity Among Strangers and the Right to Food," in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh LaFollette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 127.

be shown shortly that the positive duty to preserve the liberty of others can involve a much less problematic requirement. To return to the aforementioned simple (and odd) example, imagine if preserving the liberty of all the citizens in America was simply a matter of pressing a few keys on a machine in your house.

From here, all that is necessary to show that a logical realization of the value of liberty involves a positive duty to preserve life is to recognize a remark made by William Aiken in his article “The Right to Be Saved from Starvation”: “life...is required for the exercise of liberty.”<sup>65</sup> Indeed, Aiken even states that the right to life should take precedence over the right to liberty when the two conflict. This is an overstatement on Aiken’s part. Taking Aiken’s remarks seriously would require us to do things that other philosophers have shown to be contrary to our moral intuitions.<sup>66</sup> However, Aiken’s remarks do contain some insight, and they provide the final piece to my axiological argument. A formal statement of my argument is as follows:

- 1) Recognizing liberty as a value requires that at least minimally demanding duties to preserve liberty should be recognized.
- 2) Life is a necessary precondition for the exercise of liberty.
- 3) Therefore, recognizing liberty as a value requires that minimally demanding positive duties to preserve life should be recognized.

Because of the proliferation of technology, preserving another person’s liberty half way

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<sup>65</sup> William Aiken, “The Right to be Saved from Starvation,” in *World Hunger and Moral Obligation*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh LaFollette, 1st ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 89.

<sup>66</sup> Specifically, I am referring here to Judith Jarvis Thomson’s argument in “A Defense of Abortion.” If the right to life trumps the right to liberty, then the kidnapped individual would be morally obligated to stay connected to the violinist, which seems absurd.



across the world is literally a matter of pressing a certain combination of keys on a computer. Of course, there is the matter of transferring funds to the individual in need, so they can get the resources that will help them live. This raises a simultaneously absurd and interesting question: How much is another person's liberty worth in dollars? This question is not unrelated to how much we ought to sacrifice in order to preserve the lives (thereby preserving the liberty) of others, so it will be more properly addressed by the second chapter of this thesis. However, my argument is that if liberty is something that is (or ought to be valued), then individuals must also take seriously the value of human life, especially when doing so comes at so little a cost.

If the above remarks are correct, then it is entirely compatible with libertarian thought for there to be duties to distant individuals. However, there has been some concern that libertarianism cannot be coherently be extended outside the national boundaries of one's nation.<sup>67</sup> This concern would undermine essentially all of the arguments that have been put forth so far. Of course, these concerns have been put forth by those who reject liberalism's impartiality. Thus, I will turn to a discussion on partiality and its place in the discourse on world hunger.

**On Community and Poverty.** There seems to be little explicit discussion about how a cogent partialist moral view would affect our duties to the distant. Many who have written on the topic seem to be concerned with the project of justifying our intuitive judgments about the moral permissibility of partialism. Thus, readers are often left with an impression that there may be some justification of our intuitively partialistic prescriptions, but they have little idea how to

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<sup>67</sup> Michael Blake, "International Justice (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/international-justice/>.

apply them in the shrinking world. Although Virginia Held is arguing for the usage of moral principles to provide guidance for moral agents, she unintentionally captures the aforementioned ambiguity in her book *Feminist Morality: Transforming, Culture, Society and Politics*,

...we have limited resources for caring...though the hunger of our own children comes before the hunger of children we do not know, the hunger of children in Africa ought to come before some of the expensive amusements we may feel like providing our own children. These are real moral problems calling to some extent for principled answers. But we have to figure out what we ought to do in the actual context of buying groceries, cooking meals, refusing the requests of our children for the latest toy...and sending money to Oxfam.<sup>68</sup>

Despite this overall ambiguity, within a partialistic paradigm, there are several views that are explicit and attempt to show that we have surprisingly little or no duty to the distant destitute. These views ultimately rest on some conception of what a community is. Unfortunately, as Daniel Bell notes in his *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on communitarianism, “when community is employed by political communitarians, it seems to mean anything they want it to mean.”<sup>69</sup> This section will focus specifically on one type of community and two attempts to justify partialistic negligence of the poor based on the importance of that community. As mentioned at the outset of the chapter, I will attempt to argue that, because of the shrinking world, this partialism is not grounds enough for dismissing our duty to the distant because communities are becoming less distinct, and as a result, the claim that partiality can be justified

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<sup>68</sup> Virginia Held, *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press., 1993), 74.

<sup>69</sup> “Communitarianism (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy),” n.d., <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/communitarianism/>.

based on important roles these distinctive communities play in forming the identity of the agent is becoming increasingly untenable.

This sort of partialism takes at least two forms: cultural perfectionism and meta-ethical particularism. In the following discussion, I will be utilizing Thomas Hurka's definitions of "cultural perfectionism" and "meta-ethical particularism." He defines cultural perfectionism as the view that "the good for human beings consists in developing their 'nature' or 'identity' [which is tied that human being's culture]." <sup>70</sup> He provides a rather lengthy definition of meta-ethical particularism as the view that

codes and principles...always arise within particular cultures; they are addressed to the members of a culture as having the particular cultural identities they have and as occupying particular roles within that culture. Morality is always *our* morality, in these circumstances here. This means that the standpoint presupposed by impartial morality--outside all cultures and making judgments about them all--is not available. Morality must be partial because the impartialist alternative is conceptually incoherent. <sup>71</sup>

Both forms of partialism rely on the ability to make clear distinctions between communities and/or cultural groups. These forms of partialism rest on variants of what Michael Sandel calls "constitutive community," i.e., a community that forms the identity of the agent as a member of that community. <sup>72</sup> Sandel argues that conceiving ourselves as entirely independent from our community comes at "great cost to those loyalties and convictions whose moral force

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<sup>70</sup> Thomas Hurka, "The Justification of National Partiality," in *The Morality of Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 141, <http://www.netlibrary.com/urlapi.asp?action=summary&v=1&bookid=23515>.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 143. This is, of course, identical to the thesis that MacIntyre put forth in his lecture, "Is Patriotism a virtue?" Alasdair MacIntyre, "Is Patriotism A Virtue?," in *The Lindley Lecture* (University of Kansas, 1984), 10.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 151.

consists partly in the fact that living by them is inseparable from understanding ourselves as the particular persons we are – as members of this family or community or nation or people....”<sup>73</sup>

For cultural perfectionists the community constitutes the “good” for that individual in that cultural community. In other words, “the good life” for that individual consists in realizing and developing their identity as a member of a community. For meta-ethical particularists the community constitutes the morality of the individual within that community. Of course, there is some overlap between the two concepts since culture helps to determine the morality of an agent within that particular cultural setting. Let us begin by examining what effect the shrinking world has had on the distinctiveness of cultures.

In a shrinking world, it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between “this...community or nation or people.” The cultural homogenization that has occurred as a result of globalization is blurring the lines between, what used to be, distinct cultural groups. If this is the case and the lines of the communities are becoming blurred, then the practical prescriptions of caring for one’s community will look increasingly like liberalism’s impartialistic prescriptions since “globalization” is essentially the process of forming a global community.

Historians, political scientists, and sociologists have been pointing towards the formation of a global community for some time now. More specifically, Paul Berman makes a comment about the blurring of cultural lines in his book *Terror and Liberalism*, “In the modern world, we are all hyphenated personalities. ‘Nobody is anything anymore,’ said C.L.R. James. And the distinction between Western and Non-Western civilization looks blurrier and blurrier the more

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 179.

you try and get it into focus.”<sup>74</sup> There are several other interesting examples of descriptions of cultural homogenization that I’d like to point out.

Friedman writes about the accent neutralization centers in India. Not only are these individuals learning English, but they are also learning how to neutralize any trace of their Indian accent from their English.<sup>75</sup> (Apparently, Western customers are often frustrated by an Indian accent, which is what motivates these companies to provide accent neutralization classes.) The homogenization extends further than accent neutralization. In “Towards a Global Culture?”

Anthony Smith writes,

Though individual national cultures remain distinctive and vibrant, there are also broader European cultural patters which transcend national cultural boundaries to create an overlapping ‘family’ of common components. Democratic deals and parliamentary institutions; civil rights and legal codes; Judeo-Christian traditions of ethics; the values of scientific enquiry; artistic traditions of realism and romanticism; humanism and individualism: these are some of the cultural patters which straddle many of Europe’s national cultures, to create a syndrome of repeated elements and form a culture area of overlapping components.<sup>76</sup>

“The West” (as a group that was to some extent already culturally homogenous) eventually became a very influential cultural force in the world. Theodore Von Laue’s comments in “The World Revolution of Westernization” notes that, “Women in China, Japan, or Africa, for instance, admired the respect and freedom enjoyed by women in the West; by comparison, their societies offered even less equality with men. Consumers everywhere liked Western goods

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<sup>74</sup> Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004), 26.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2005), 27.

<sup>76</sup> Anthony Smith, “Towards a Global Culture?,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 7, no. 2 (1990): 187.

suitable for local consumption.”<sup>77</sup> Ironically, one of the philosophers that anticipates the homogenization of cultures and identities is Michael Sandel himself. In an interview with Thomas Friedman he noted that Marx had predicted the effect globalization would have on individuals,

Marx was capitalism’s fiercest critic, and yet he stood in awe of its power to break down barriers and create a worldwide system of production and consumption. In the *Communist Manifesto*, he described capitalism as a force that would dissolve all feudal, national, and religious *identities*, giving rise to a *universal civilization* governed by market imperatives....<sup>78</sup>

It would be naïve to claim that Americanization/Globalization spreads to all corners of the globe. As Friedman notes in his book, “I realize that the [entire] world is not flat.”<sup>79</sup> However, it seems clear that even if this is not the case, there are significant portions of the world where the culture may be considered to be sufficiently similar to one another to include the poor within the same communities as the affluent. This cultural homogenization forces partialists to face an issue that, to my knowledge, they have not addressed: how different must a culture or community be in order to consider them to be a separate community? How does increasing similarity between constitutive communities affect their ethical obligations towards one another? To be consistent, it seems like cultural perfectionists are committed to responding to the above question by saying that ethical obligations towards different cultural communities increase insofar as those cultures become indistinguishable. This brings me to the effect cultural homogenization would have on moral agents within particular cultures.

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<sup>77</sup> Theodore H. Von Laue “The World Revolution of Westernization,” *The History Teacher* 20, no. 2 (1987): 267.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

Recall, that for meta-ethical particularists the community is constitutive in that it makes up the identity of the individual qua moral agent. Thus, it only makes a difference that cultural homogenization has occurred in a shrinking world insofar as that homogenization results in identical moral identities, i.e., identical moral ideals that are not necessarily tied to any one physically situated community. There is little doubt that there has been a radical convergence, at least officially, in moral ideals in the world.

At this point, a communitarian might object, and say something similar to MacIntyre remarks when he recognized that there may be some similarities between one community and another,

...moral rules elaborated in one particular historical community will often resemble and sometimes be identical with the rules to which allegiance is given in other particular communities...But there will characteristically be *some* distinctive features of the set of rules considered as a whole, and those distinctive features will often arise from the way in which members of that particular community responded to some earlier situation...in which particular features of difficult cases led to one or more rules being put in question and reformulated...in some new way.<sup>80</sup>

On one reading of this text, MacIntyre seems to imply here that one distinctive feature in one's set of moral rules is enough to justify partiality. This implication, however, destroys MacIntyre's basis for justified national patriotism. It is entirely likely that families or communities smaller than a nation will have distinctive moral rules that are the result of some specific sequence of events within that community or family. MacIntyre's view, on this reading, seems to commit him to the idea that each of these smaller communities and/or families would be justified in making decisions that would be in their best interest and not

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<sup>80</sup> MacIntyre, "Is Patriotism A Virtue?," 8-9.

necessarily in the best interest of the nation. This, of course, is an unacceptable consequence in light of MacIntyre's project.

Even with a more charitable interpretation of MacIntyre's statements in the above text, the duties to foreigners can still be established within his meta-ethical particularist paradigm. This interpretation might look something like this: there is some line where communities are sufficiently alike to produce identical moral agents. It is largely irrelevant for MacIntyre if the moral agents have similar cultural practices. These agents must be influenced and shaped by similar norms that are shared by various communities. With the shrinking of the world, this has become possible. Indeed, there is a sharing of ethical norms across geographical and cultural boundaries. In other words, it is possible for individuals in India to be a part of the same constitutive community (in the sense that their community constitutes their identity as moral agents) as individuals in America because both groups individuals are shaped by the same moral ideals.

According to Francis Fukuyama, this is precisely what has happened in recent history. Liberal democracy as a normative political ideology has largely won out over competing normative political concepts. In Fukuyama's words, "for a very large part of the world, there is now no ideology with pretensions to universality that is in the position to challenge liberal democracy."<sup>81</sup> Of course, the prevailing political ideology of a community shapes the moral compass of the individuals within that community. This is precisely the sort of morally relevant dependence that moral agents have on their community that MacIntyre was attempting to utilize

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<sup>81</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Lastman* (New York NY: Perennial, 2002), 45.



to justify partiality. If it is the case, as Fukuyama points out, that individuals from varying cultures are being shaped by the same ethical ideals, then MacIntyre's meta-ethical particularist argument loses its "particularist" flavor.

A final example of the collapsing of the distinctiveness of constitutive communities is, at the risk of sounding inadequately academic, anecdotal. This particular example is especially useful since it shows both the cultural similarities and the ethical similarities of a "foreigner." During my time in Haiti, something happened that, in retrospect, was quite amazing: I found myself driving with my Haitian translator who was speaking *English*, talking about political prescriptions within the *liberalistic paradigm*, while listening to the *same sort of music* I would find on my American radio stations, and occasionally throwing in some *religious prescriptions* based on Christianity, an ethico-religious paradigm that is shared across political boundaries. The shrinking of the world demands that Sandel continue his list in the above quote, "living by [particular loyalties] is inseparable from understanding ourselves as the particular persons we are – as members of this family or community or nation or people or *world*."

In sum, whether the issue of the affluent's ethical obligation is approached from a libertarian or communitarian paradigm, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that there is some ethical obligation on the part of the affluent to those who require life-saving care. From the libertarian perspective, obligation arises because the affluent often contribute to conditions that harm the poor, a cogent moral resolution cannot require that the liberty of the poor to secure resources from the rich be restricted since doing so would result in their death and this is a violation of the "ought implies can" maxim, and finally, because taking seriously the value of liberty (which libertarianism by definition does) requires that positive duties towards

preserving life (the necessary prerequisite for liberty) be taken seriously. From the partialist perspective, obligation arises because the shrinking world has ensured that constitutive communities overlap enough to establish obligations to members on opposite sides of the globe. These perspectives cannot succeed in increasing the “moral distance” between the affluent and the world’s poor. The moral migration of the world’s poor from distant nations seems undeniable. The more difficult question, however, is how demanding our obligation is to respond to this moral migration. This is the project that I will take up in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 2: SINGER'S WORST NIGHTMARE

If there has indeed been a moral migration (i.e., if the affluent have an obligation to assist the distant poor), then we are right to say that a bystander (the affluent) ought to save a child from the pool (donate to OXFAM). The moral migration that has occurred as a result of the shrinking world is, however, a massive one. There are many who are in need of life saving care. In Garrett Cullity's words, "Suppose, then, that what I come across is not a pond containing one or two children, but the *nightmarish* scene of a lake, or even a sea, teeming with them."<sup>82</sup> The scene is nightmarish not only because of the lives that are at stake, but also because of what it requires a moral agent to do in the situation. On Singer's account, the moral agent is inundated with moral claims to her rescue efforts. However, an entire pond of drowning children makes an important moral difference to the situation. As Andrew Kuper points out, "it is one thing to expect [Singer] to save a drowning child and give up one lecture, but it is quite another-if there are tens of thousands drowning (or starving, or ill) everyday-to expect [Singer] to devote himself to being a lifeguard instead of a teacher."<sup>83</sup>

Although it seems that there has been extensive discussion on whether or not the affluent have an obligation to the distant destitute, the discussion regarding the demandingness of our obligation to the indigent has been far from adequate. This chapter will take up that neglected

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<sup>82</sup> Garrett Cullity, "The Life-Saving Analogy," in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 61. (emphasis mine)

<sup>83</sup> Andrew Kuper, "More Than Charity: Cosmopolitan Alternatives to the 'Singer Solution'," *Ethics and International Affairs* 16, no. 1 (2002): 110.

project. I will begin by representing some of Noggle's comments on the difficulties that have befuddled philosophers in their attempt at formulating a principle of benevolence with regard to the aid question. Secondly, I will represent and criticize some viable attempts at providing a response to how demanding our duties are to provide for those who are suffering. Finally, I will present and defend a principle of benevolence that circumvents the problems that Noggle notes and the problems of the principles that I will critique. This principle might be classified as a "moderate" one, and is summarized briefly as follows: our duties to behave benevolently are limited insofar as exercising those duties requires a sacrifice of something substantively significant (i.e., something that will result in our long term unhappiness), but our "attitude fitting" duty to begin valuing the lives of those who are perishing over other "substantively significant" endeavors is unlimited. In other words, we have a duty for our duty of benevolence to grow in magnitude. The third part of this chapter contains a further exposition of this principle and adds caveats to the principle. Such elaborations are an attempt to capture the complexities of the lives of moral agents, and to pay due respect to these complexities, since previous principles of benevolence, in addition to the fact that they seem inaccurate, also are extremely vague. Finally, I will defend the principle from what seems to be a plausible objection that is related to Susan Wolf's comments in her article, "Moral Saints." I turn now to pointing out some of the conceptual hurdles that must be overcome if an adequate principle of benevolence is to be formulated.

### **“We Need A Fresh Perspective”**

Essentially, the question of this chapter is, “When does our ‘duty to the distant’ become supererogatory?” However, it seems that a more precise statement of the question is this: When is our prima facie duty of impartial beneficence legitimately eclipsed by our partialistic concerns? There have been many attempts to answer this question. Singer was the first to attempt to answer the question.

In Peter Singer’s “Famine, Affluence, and Morality,” he suggests that our duties to the distant ought to be carried to the point of marginal utility or to the point of other “mitigating circumstances.” Others, like John Arthur, claim that our duties to the distant are limited insofar as performing those duties would involve a substantive sacrifice on our part (i.e., a sacrifice that will result in long-term unhappiness). The conflict between these two views has led to a seemingly intractable debate about the demandingness of morality, which Henry Shue comments on in his article, “Solidarity Among Strangers and the Right to Food:” “And that would just be to go around the circle one more time: either a person’s general duties are limited or they are not...At this level the logic is inescapable. We need a fresh perspective.”<sup>84</sup> Thomas Noggle summarizes the difficulty of forming a principle of benevolence (as originally expressed by James Fishkin),

Any principle of beneficence strong enough to require a person to save a life at a minor cost becomes overwhelming when applied successively to each of the millions of people who could be saved at a minor cost. Yet a principle of beneficence weak enough to avoid overwhelming the agent would require so little sacrifice—permitting her to let someone

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<sup>84</sup> Shue, “Solidarity Among Strangers and the Right to Food,” 124.

die rather than incurring a small cost to herself—that it would seldom require any beneficence at all.<sup>85</sup>

We are left, then, with a dilemma about how to formulate a principle of benevolence.

The first horn of this dilemma has been embraced by some ethicists who have been willing to bite the philosophical bullet and express a position similar to this: “In response to the claim that affluent people should *entirely* devote their lives to the relief of the suffering and crippling poverty...one’s initial response is not so much that this claim is unjustified as that affluent people cannot be blamed for failing to live up to this austere ideal of self-sacrifice.”<sup>86</sup> Indeed, it seems that Singer himself takes this view.<sup>87</sup> The problems with this view will be discussed later in the chapter.

The latter horn of this dilemma may not appear too unappealingly sharp to some readers. They may ask, “Why suppose that ethics need to be demanding at all? Why, for example, should we not suppose that our duty merely extends to one or two children, and that we could legitimately call it quits afterward? This approach to ethics has been justly criticized as a sort of “yuppie ethics,” which sees benevolence as a matter of “attending a few charity fund-raisers or dropping some coins into the Salvation Army bucket at the holidays.”<sup>88</sup> It seems that a rather uncontroversial definition of the purpose of morality put forward by LaFollette and May would

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<sup>85</sup> Robert Noggle, “Give Till It Hurts? Beneficence, Imperfect Duties, and a Moderate Response to the Aid Question,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 40, no. 1 (2009): 1.

<sup>86</sup> Richard Arneson, “Moral Limits on the Demands of Beneficence,” in *The Ethics of Assistance: Morality and the Distant Needy*, ed. Deen Chatterjee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 53.

<sup>87</sup> Peter Singer and Michael Slote (Philosophy TV, 2010), <http://www.philostv.com/peter-singer-and-michael-slote/>.

<sup>88</sup> Noggle, “Give Till It Hurts? Beneficence, Imperfect Duties, and a Moderate Response to the Aid Question,” 1.

demand more: “our view is that the purpose of morality is...to set expectations that are likely to improve us, and...improve the lot of those we might assist.”<sup>89</sup> Moreover, it seems that it would also be uncontroversial to agree with LaFollette and May when they state that morality should be “...like any goal which enables us to grow and mature: they must be within reach, yet not easily reachable.”<sup>90</sup> With this understanding of morality in mind, consider Singer’s suggestion about the degree of demandingness to the distant. The principle of benevolence that I would like to put forth in this chapter, seeks to avoid both horns of the aforementioned dilemma, but before formulating this principle, I will attempt to show why other principles of benevolence are inadequate.

**Why Singer’s Principle is Conceptually Nightmarish.** Singer suggests that we are obligated to assist those who are in need of life saving care until we sacrifice something of moral significance or, in his stronger moral principle, something of comparable moral significance. Since Singer is a utilitarian, “something of comparable moral significance” can only mean that affluent members have a duty to help the deprived until they have reached the point of “marginal utility.” Specifically, Singer defines marginal utility this way, “the point at which by giving more one would cause oneself and one’s dependents as much suffering as one would prevent in Bengal.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Hugh LaFollette and Larry May, “Suffer the Little Children,” in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 73.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality,” 30.

This conceptual path leads to a rather stark contradiction with our intuitive expectations of our obligations to others. Consider, for example, what this principle would demand of a father with children. If David Hume was right in noting that, “It must also be confessed, that, wherever we depart from this equality, we rob the poor of more satisfaction than we add to the rich, and that the slight gratification of a frivolous vanity, in one individual, frequently costs more than bread to many families, and even provinces,”<sup>92</sup> then Singer’s suggestion of carrying our duties to the distant to the point of marginal utility would demand that a father never purchase toys or presents for his child, since the suffering the child will endure as a result of not receiving the gift is unlikely to be as great as the suffering that a distant child will encounter as a result of not having food. To be sure, this bumps up against moral intuition concerning our filial obligations. It is very likely, for example, that a child’s well-being is enhanced by providing them with some activities that they enjoy.

There is another case that shows that Singer’s strong principle will conflict with moral intuition: Judith Thomson’s violinist. In Thomson’s classic example, a moral agent wakes up to find he is biologically connected to a famous violinist, who needs that person’s kidneys in order to continue to survive.<sup>93</sup> If we apply Singer’s utilitarian ethic to Thomson’s violinist situation, then it would be correct to say that we are morally obligated to stay connected to the violinist for nine months (or nine years). These two cases show that Singer’s principle cannot help us resolve

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<sup>92</sup> Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, sec. Of Justice.

<sup>93</sup> Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion,” 738.



the issue of how we should proceed when our duties to the distant conflict with our duties to the not-so-distant.

John Arthur offers some additional relevant criticisms of Singer's strong principle in his article, "Rights and the Duty to Bring Aid." His main contention is that Singer's strong principle leaves little room for our personal life projects and desires. He isolates the importance of our personal projects with a rather ingenious example. He asks us to suppose that a woman has a choice between leaving her husband or staying with him. She knows that either action will cause the same amount of happiness. Suppose further, however, that she desperately wants to leave her husband because doing so will allow her to pursue some important life goals. Arthur (rightly) claims that according to Singer's principle, she ought to flip a coin in order to determine how she should act in the aforementioned example.<sup>94</sup> He thereby reduces to absurdity the notion that our goals and projects are not relevant. Arthur has shown that our goals are at least minimally relevant in making moral judgments.

What about Singer's weaker principle (the principle that states that we ought to give to OXFAM until we sacrifice *something* of moral significance)? John Arthur criticizes Singer's weak principle as "too weak." He seems to argue correctly that the lighter principle can be avoided very easily. Singer provides two examples of morally irrelevant things: dirtying your clothing and looking well dressed. Specifically, he counters Singer's claim by noting that it is not irrational to believe that looking well dressed may be morally significant if "you think aesthetic values are intrinsic you might well dispute the claim that being 'well dressed' is without moral

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<sup>94</sup> John Arthur, "Rights and the Duty to Bring Aid," in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 44.

significance.”<sup>95</sup> Similarly if a person is made happy by purchasing new clothing, then even Singer would have to admit that that is morally relevant. As I’ve mentioned before, Singer’s attempt at being ecumenical gets him into trouble in his account of obligation, which purposely leaves the notion of “morally significant” unanalyzed. Arthur offers an alternative principle after criticizing Singer’s, but I will leave this principle unexamined until the next section.

**Why Frankena’s Principle Fails.** William Frankena in, “Moral Philosophy and World Hunger” suggests that we limit the obligations of the affluent toward the poor by adopting a method that rule-utilitarians have used to mitigate the force of the obligations that act-utilitarian theory generates. This method involves using moral principles for the “designing, assessment, and modification of social institutions, practices, roles, and rules, as opposed to taking moral principles as rules on how we ourselves should act.”<sup>96</sup> In the case of world hunger, Frankena argues that we should work towards setting up institutions and systems that will result in everyone having the basic necessities. For him these institutions are “an adequate economic system” and “the institution of family.” Thus, “every agent...is to act according to the rules of the system or systems there are and, especially and *urgently*, to do what he, she, or it can do to bring into existence a system that will get everyone fed...”<sup>97</sup>

The problem with this approach, however, is in the word “*urgently*.” Frankena has offered what appears to be a helpful way to think about obligation towards the poor, but he has

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>96</sup> William Frankena, “Moral Philosophy and World Hunger,” in *World Hunger and Moral Obligation*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 1st ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 80.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 81.

not answered the question of how demanding our obligation is. He argues that moral principles should not be directly applied to individuals, for this application would result in overwhelming obligation. Frankena, however, has left us absolutely in the dark about how hard we should work towards creating and altering institutions that will assist the world's poor. Should I, for example, drop out of college and begin to write letters every day to my representatives expressing my discontent with the current set of international economic institutions? Or perhaps I should devote my life to trying to become a high ranking member of the WTO so that I can alter policies and create helpful institutions? Or perhaps it will be enough for me simply to vote for candidates that I believe will further the cause of the poor? Essentially, Frankena's answer to the question how hard we should be working to help the poor is, "pretty hard," which is not very helpful at all.<sup>98</sup>

**The Imperfection of Noggle's Imperfect Duty.** Thomas Noggle's suggestion about the limits of the affluent's obligation to the indigent is perhaps the most complicated and most impressive out of the responses I have encountered. He suggests that the duty to aid the world's poor be understood as an imperfect duty. He contrasts this imperfect duty with Kant's perfect duty in the following passage,

Kant claims that whereas a perfect duty requires a... specific action or omission, an imperfect duty requires the adoption of an end... When a person adopts an end, she thereby commits herself to a policy of choosing actions that would promote the end and avoiding actions that would thwart it. Having a policy to promote an end does not entail maximally promoting the end; rather, it involves adopting a *propensity* to promote it. Having a propensity to *A* does not imply that one *As* at every favorable opportunity... I suggest, then, that moderates should regard beneficence as requiring an agent to treat the welfare of

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<sup>98</sup> To be fair, Frankena also argues that this is a more desirable application of moral principles since international institutions are much more capable of positively affecting the poor. Frankena may be right about this pragmatic concern, but his remarks are still unhelpful in answering the question of how demanding our obligations are.

others not just as an intrinsic end, but as one of her fundamental concerns or ‘ground projects.’ A ground project is an intrinsic end whose pursuit is fundamental to the meaningfulness of the life of the person whose end it is.<sup>99</sup>

Noggle then goes on to explain what adopting an ultimate, intrinsic, end would mean in terms of “resource allocation” and priority with other adopted ends. Specifically, he explains that moral agents would not sacrifice their ground project for some other non-fundamental end, and if they do, we can call into question their commitment to their ground project. He provides a rather useful example of the interplay between ends and ground projects,

For example, suppose that Jamie has set watching the final game of the World Cup as an intrinsic but non-ultimate end, while the welfare of her spouse, Carl, is one of her ultimate ends. If Carl suffers a heart attack during the game, we would expect Jamie to sacrifice the end of watching the game in order to help Carl. But we would not expect Jamie even to consider sacrificing Carl’s welfare to avoid sacrificing her end of watching the game. Nor would we expect her to consider sacrificing Carl’s welfare simply to better promote her end of watching the game.<sup>100</sup>

Noggle then proceeds to point out that the sacrifice one makes for promoting an ultimate end must be “significant” in order to be considered a morally relevant sacrifice. Drawing on the same example, he explains this by saying that “If Carl hates soccer and finds it irritating that Jamie likes to watch it, then Jamie’s choice to watch the game might annoy Carl, causing a slight decrease in his happiness. But it would be hyperbole to accuse Jamie of sacrificing Carl’s welfare to watch the game.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Noggle, “Give Till It Hurts? Beneficence, Imperfect Duties, and a Moderate Response to the Aid Question,” 7.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

Noggle seems to have laid the foundation for a rather helpful way of looking at our duty to the distant. Upon closer examination, however, we can see that his theory of imperfect duties are better fit to describe instances such as a parent's relationship with a child or a husband's relationship with his spouse (as in the above example). Applying Noggle's notion of imperfect duty to the world hunger situation seems deeply problematic because every action we take that is not in the interests of those who are in need of live-saving care is a *significant* sacrifice of their well-being. In fact, it will often result in their death, which certainly seems significant. To return to Noggle's analogy, affluent moral agents are in an analogous position to the example described above: they are in a position where they have to choose between Carl's well-being (because of his heart attack) and watching a soccer game.

From this observation, all that is necessary is to point back to Noggle's definitions in order to see that his theory falls apart. If we adopt the caring of distant others as a "ground project" and an "ultimate end," then we should not sacrifice this ultimate end for some other non-ultimate end.<sup>102</sup> To continue using Noggle's soccer game example, if Jamie chooses to purchase the soccer game on Pay Per View, she does so at the cost of several children's health in the Third World. According to Noggle's definition, Jamie cannot make this sacrifice and still be considered to have the well-being of distant others as an ultimate end.

After a look at these attempts to "limit" the affluent's duty to the world's poor, it is not surprising that Henry Shue argued that "we need a fresh perspective" on this issue. The next section is an attempt to provide that fresh perspective.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 8.

## Building a Benevolence Principle

I have attempted to show that the benevolence principles offered by three thinkers are inadequate. Singer's principle is inadequate because it is counter-intuitively demanding and it conflicts with filial obligations. Frankena's principle fails because it offers no advice on how demanding the obligation to "bring into existence a system that will get everyone fed" is. Finally, Noggle's imperfect duty cannot capture the nature of the affluent's obligation towards the indigent because every action that the affluent takes that is not on behalf of the poor is a substantial sacrifice of their well-being. If the above statements are correct, then a new principle of benevolence is needed to describe (and limit) the affluent's duty to the distant. In this section, I will attempt to formulate a principle of benevolence that will avoid the aforementioned difficulties.

John Arthur provides a principle of benevolence after criticizing Singer's principle in his article, "Rights and the Duty to Bring Aid." His principle forms the foundation of my attempt to build a principle of benevolence, so I will start by presenting his principle. Next, I will argue for certain qualifications and additions to this base principle until an adequate principle of benevolence is formulated. This particular principle of benevolence seeks not only to avoid the aforementioned difficulties of other principle but also seeks *clarity*. Previous principles have been, as mentioned earlier, extremely vague.

Arthur's alternative principle of benevolence (henceforth PB) is this:

PB1: If providing lifesaving care will not result in a substantive sacrifice, i.e., something that would cause a *long term* decrease in happiness, then one ought to provide lifesaving care.<sup>103</sup>

What Arthur means by “happiness” is something that needs to be clarified. For Arthur, happiness consists of both objective and subjective components. Objectively, individuals need, for example, “food, clothing, health care, housing, and sufficient training to provide for oneself.”<sup>104</sup> Subjectively, Arthur thinks that certain psychological facts “need to be weighed” in order to determine if something is substantively significant. It may be the case, for example, that a moral agent A may have a particular attachment to their collection of baseball cards, then selling them might have a long-term effect on their happiness. On the other hand, a moral agent B may not care at all about the collection of cards. For moral agent B, selling the cards in order to bring aid is morally obligatory, according to Arthur.<sup>105</sup>

The definition of happiness that Arthur puts forth, however, does seem to be a bit shallow, so I will begin constructing my principle of benevolence by making a slight alteration to Arthur’s definition. Arthur’s long-term happiness seems to invoke a sort of hedonic conception of happiness (i.e., the kind that might be associated with a utilitarian view). When I employ the term “long-term happiness,” however, I mean something closer to an Aristotelian conception of happiness. In other words, I mean happiness in the eudemoniac sense of the word, the kind of happiness that relates to human flourishing.

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<sup>103</sup> Arthur, “Rights and the Duty to Bring Aid,” 47.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

At this point, I have given little reason for the reader to suppose that a long-term decrease in happiness should count as *more morally relevant* than the lives of the indigent. As mentioned earlier, a consequentialist conception of the duty to the distant will not allow for individuals to choose themselves over others. To provide an account of our duty to the distant that is in line with our intuitive judgments about morality means that we must assume that there is some sort of moral multiplication that occurs when the value of the wants of the individual is considered versus the value of others is considered so that when the moral calculus is complete, it is morally permissible for an individual to choose to further some of the partialistic ends. It is precisely this moral multiplication for which I seek to give an account. This moral multiplication is, of course, a sort of partialism, but the justification of this partialism rests on notions that are separate from constitutive community (since the comments in the previous chapter would render a partiality based on constitutive community conceptually useless).

Judith Lichtenberg claims that overturning Singer's principle with partialist argumentation is actually an easy conceptual matter, "The opponent may argue that what we would have to sacrifice (our 'projects,' the ability to lead lives, within certain limits, pretty much as we choose) is 'of comparable moral importance'" when compared to aiding the poor.<sup>1</sup> It turns out, however, that, for reasons partially discussed in the previous chapter, justifying partialism in the case where other individuals are in need of life saving care is extremely difficult. In fact, it seems providing an account for this moral multiplication is impossible with value-based concepts. In the first chapter, I attempted to show that liberty as a value could not be a reason to shield the affluent from any obligation to the poor because life was a necessary pre-condition for liberty, and if liberty is valued, then the life of the poor must also be valued. The same could be



said about Lichtenberg's "life projects." If a person's "life-projects" is the value that justifies partiality, what about the life projects of those who are perishing while an affluent individual pursues his life projects? Essentially, whatever value we are "counting in" when we are making a moral judgment will run into the same problem: If I value life projects/liberty, then I ought to pay attention the extinguishing of life projects/liberty that dies along with those to whom the projects/liberty belonged. It would seem, then, that a moral concept that avoids this value problem must be located in order to justify partiality.

Nagel offers autonomy as a justifiable reason to depart from the concerns of "agent-neutral" morality or what seems to be an entirely consequentialist and impartial morality.<sup>106</sup> According to Nagel, autonomy is inextricably linked to "attachments to our own desires, commitments, personal ties and the like."<sup>107</sup> This link between autonomy and attachments to our own desires seems to justify the pursuit of a certain moral agent's happiness. It avoids the aforementioned value problem because as autonomous agents we stand in unique relation to our own "desires, commitments, personal ties," etc. In other words, it is not as though moral judgments are rendered from an impartial perspective by weighing certain values, which would run back into the value problem. Instead, moral judgments are determined from an agent-centered perspective. This agent-centered perspective does indeed seem to have some "moral magic" as MacIntyre suggested.

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<sup>106</sup> Nathoo, "Rationalized Self-Interest or Reasoned Skepticism? Objections to Singer and Unger on the Obligations of the Affluent," 44.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

Autonomy has enjoyed a long history of respect by ethicists as something that is morally relevant. Typically, respecting autonomy is considered to be the prevailing moral imperative even if respecting autonomy means that the overall good will be decreased. It is easy to see why this is the case by imagining an example where the overall good could be increased, but only at the cost of violating another's autonomy. Suppose, for example, that an individual enjoyed smoking. Intuitively, we would find it morally reprehensible if a benevolent (but misguided) genius brainwashed this moral agent so that he/she no longer desired to smoke. We would find this morally reprehensible even if the former smoker lived a longer life as a result of the actions of some benevolent brain-washing genius. Autonomy, then, is that morally relevant concept that can limit the obligation of the affluent, and now that the partialism that is implicit in PB1 has been justified, I can begin an addition to the principle.

In his article, Arthur recognizes that one can become increasingly able to provide for the impecunious without making substantive sacrifices depending on one's current attachment to certain luxury goods, yet, oddly, he leaves this observation unanalyzed.<sup>108</sup> Adding to PB1 requires that we pay more careful attention to this observation than Arthur himself did.

Arthur's lack of attention to this observation has led to a defective principle. This problematic aspect of his principle can, perhaps, best be illustrated by an example. Suppose that Phil is a moral agent who has been convinced by Arthur's principle (PB1), and Phil happens to be a football fanatic. Phil is so fanatical about his fantasy football league, in fact, that to peel his eyes from his TV for one minute to attend to a benevolent act (aside from his duties as a citizen,

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<sup>108</sup> Arthur, "Rights and the Duty to Bring Aid," 49.

father, etc.) would constitute a substantive sacrifice on his part. While Arthur's principle would maintain that this fantasy football fanatic is fulfilling his obligation, it is difficult not to suspect that there is something missing if his behavior continues this way until he dies. It seems likely that the reason we expect more of this individual has something to do with LaFollette's definition of morality as a goal that should stretch us as individuals. Thus, Arthur's principle of benevolence seems too weak in that it fails to prescribe moral growth.

The following is a modified principle that is meant to take this into account:

PB2: We are required to give until we sacrifice things of substantive significance *and* that we ought to be striving to grow in our joy of beneficent acts so that the "sacrifices" we make for the sake of the world's poor look less like "sacrifices."

This may appear to be an absurd and strong position to take. However, it does not seem too far removed from a virtue ethics approach to the issue. In aretaic terms, the aforementioned proposition might read: we ought to be the sort of person that increasingly finds happiness in benevolence. Indeed, this is precisely the notion that we find in the most seminal text on virtue ethics. In *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle's argues, "...someone who does not enjoy fine actions is not good; for no one would call him just; e.g., if he did not enjoy doing just actions, or generous if he did not enjoy generous actions, and similarly for the other virtues."<sup>109</sup>

Phil the football fanatic can provide an excellent illustration for what I mean by the above addition to the PB1. Suppose that Phil has a near death experience. After he narrowly escapes death, he comes to the realization that he has not been valuing his life and the lives of others in the way that he should, so he begins to volunteer as a tutor for inner city children. After Phil's

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<sup>109</sup> Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 310.

*shift in values*, he can tutor disadvantaged children without feeling like he is making some sort of huge sacrifice. Before, on the other hand, he valued his time participating in fantasy football so much that tutoring children without becoming unhappy was impossible. PB2 calls for this sort of transformation to occur in the lives of affluent moral agents. They ought to begin to value the lives of the desperately needy so that sacrifices on the part of the affluent seem less like sacrifices. I will refer to the value shift throughout the rest of the discussion as an “increase in a moral agent’s capacity for benevolence.”

The next addition to PB2 requires that I both clarify and qualify how moral agents should go about preserving their happiness. First, PB2 does not take into account the fact that frequently there is no single action that can cause our long-term unhappiness. A failure to take this into account seems far from capturing the truth about happiness and life. Consider an alteration of the example that Al-Noor Nathoo borrows from Thomas Nagel to illustrate this point: expensive New York dinners for two could be sacrificed and the result would be that many lives would be saved.<sup>110</sup> Now, it is likely that such a dinner could be sacrificed without a long-term sacrifice in one’s happiness. However, a continual sacrifice of such a dinner might result in a loss of happiness between the married couple that usually enjoyed those dinners. According to Arthur’s principle, it seems like a moral agent should sacrifice dinners (and all superfluous expressions of care) with her husband until she feels that her relationship is about to fall apart since these sacrifices, individually, will not affect long-term happiness as long as the relationship maintains intact. This seems more than a little morally obtuse.

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<sup>110</sup> Nathoo, “Rationalized Self-Interest or Reasoned Skepticism? Objections to Singer and Unger on the Obligations of the Affluent,” 1.

Instead, it seems like moral agents should identify those projects or relationships that they consider to be substantively significant, and be morally permitted to pursue those projects as they see fit even if sacrificing individual efforts towards the project will not result in a long term decrease in happiness. In other words, If Singer identifies “being a professional philosopher” as something that is substantively significant he is not required to skip work and go save drowning children in a pond until he is on the verge of being fired. He is morally permitted to attend work every day even if missing one day of work by itself will not result in a substantive sacrifice on his part. Similarly, it is morally permissible for the aforementioned hypothetical wife to spend money on an expensive dinner (as an expression of care) if she identifies her relationship with her husband as something that is substantively significant. These two examples refer to what I will call “the moral permissibility of attending to substantively significant projects.”

To take this aspect of moral life into account, then, would require a reformulation of PB2, which is stated as follows:

PB3: If providing lifesaving care will not result in 1) a substantive sacrifice on the part of the moral agent or 2) an abandonment of attending to substantively significant projects then one ought to provide lifesaving care, and one ought to grow in one’s capacity to behave benevolently.

There is another important moral issue that arises when one considers how PB3 would be put into practice. The principle seems to morally condemn an individual expressing care for a close friend when doing so is not necessary for that agent’s long-term happiness. It condemns, for example, a moral agent for purchasing a Christmas present for his good friend or for a family member. It is possible for an individual to say to all of those close to him, “I will no longer be purchasing anything for any of you, since I will be donating all of my non-necessary funds to

OXFAM.” Moreover, it is possible that all of his friends may accept this and continue to be in relationship with this “saintly” fellow, thus, that individual would not be in danger of making a substantive sacrifice.

In fact, according to PB3, the expressing care for another is only permissible if doing so would allow a moral agent to maintain a relationship for the sake of that moral agent’s happiness. Arthur’s principle (and PB3), then, demands that friendships and family relationships are only morally relevant enough to demand our attention in an instrumental sense, i.e., only insofar as contributing to these relationships contributes to the long-term happiness of the moral agent. This is an unacceptable result. It requires moral agents to treat others merely as a means to an end: that agent’s happiness. To take this into consideration requires that the principle be restated:

PB4: If providing lifesaving care will not result either in 1) a substantive sacrifice on the part of the moral agent, 2) an abandonment of attending to substantively significant projects, or 3) a substantive sacrifice of those close to the moral agent who could benefit from that moral agent’s benevolence, then one ought to provide lifesaving care, and one ought to grow in one’s capacity to behave benevolently.

With this addition, PB4 also takes into account the moral relevance of filial obligations. Singer’s principle was rejected earlier precisely because it failed to take into consideration filial obligations.

Before discussing the objections to this view, there two important clarifications need to be made. The first clarification is an answer to the question, “How demanding is the duty to grow in our capacity to be beneficent?”

Not answering this question would make be guilty of precisely the type of shortcoming that Frankena exhibited when he attempted to put forth a principle to limit the obligation of the affluent. Recall, that he argued that principles of morality should not be applied to persons directly, but rather, that individuals should work towards enacting institutions what will allow for everyone to be provided for. Also recall that the question that was left in answered by Frankena's question: how demanding is the obligation to bring about these institutions?

In the same way that someone would be led to ask about how demanding one's duty is to bring about institutions that ensure justice, the reader might also be led to ask: How demanding is our duty to grow in our benevolence? Should I, for example, change my major to psychology and begin studying self-behavior modification and empathic development, so that I can grow in my benevolent capacities? Or is it enough to live life in a "normal" fashion and take whatever sort opportunities to grow more benevolent as they come? For the same reasons that I argued that our duty to behave benevolently towards the poor should be limited by PB4, the duty to grow in our capacity for benevolence can be checked by, essentially, the same principle. Thus, we are obligated to grow in our "feats" of benevolence insofar as doing so does not require substantive sacrifices on our part, an abandonment of substantively significant projects, and a sacrifice of something substantively significant for those that are close to the moral agent.

To second clarification is a response to this question: How are moral agents to choose when they have to decide between an act that will allow them to develop benevolence and an act that will result in saving the life of a child? How, for example, is Peter Singer supposed to choose between watching a documentary that will elicit empathetic development and between attending a fundraiser whose proceeds will go to OXFAM *when doing both will result in a*

*substantive sacrifice on his part?* There are two reasons to think that, if a person is to choose ethically, she ought to choose the first option.

The first is that moral development is or, according to LaFollette's definition of morality, should be a life project of a moral agent. This "life project" is the same sort of endeavor that mitigates our obligation to the poor in the first place. The project of becoming moral is a project that is related both to the moral agent's happiness and/or related to the moral agent's autonomy. The second reason is that growth in moral development will inevitably lead to more lives being saved in the future. For example, if I have to choose between saving  $x$  lives now, or engaging in actions that will force me to forgo saving  $x$  lives, but will allow me to save  $2x$  lives later at a consistent rate, then I ought to engage in actions that will contribute to my moral development.

Growing in benevolence can be an ambiguous business, i.e., it is not always clear what one needs to do in order to grow in one's ability to become more benevolent (although I will provide some suggestions for this in Chapter 3). Benevolence development should be regarded as a duty that requires specific actions, even if those actions are not always clear. At first glance, this ambiguity might seem intolerable, but it is no different from the ambiguity that we expect moral agents to respond to in every choice they make. In other words, behaving morally is not always a clear-cut enterprise, yet we intuitively expect moral agents to make the best of that ambiguity and to strive to behave morally when they have the opportunity. In the same way, even though growing in benevolence is an ambiguous endeavor (in that it is not always clear how to do this), a person can still be reasonably expected to grow in their capacity for benevolence.



## **In Defense of Moral Saints: A Reply to Wolf's "Moral Saints are Annoying" Objection**

Those who are familiar with Susan Wolf's article, "Moral Saints" have probably recognized by now that the picture I've been painting of the moral agent that can satisfy the extent of her obligation towards to the poor will look strikingly similar to Wolf's "loving saint," and thus be subject to all of her criticism of the "loving saint" being an ideal for us to aspire to. What follows, then, will be a representation of Wolf's criticisms, an explicit explanation as to their connection with the aforementioned principle of benevolence, and a response to the criticisms that Wolf makes against moral sainthood.

For Wolf, the loving saint cannot practically develop both moral and nonmoral virtues.<sup>111</sup> She contrasts the loving saint with the rational saint by noting that the loving saint behaves in an unctuous manner because the loving saint's desires and happiness aligns with the demands of morality.<sup>112</sup> In other words, the loving saint is made happy by her moral acts, which is analogous to the notion that our duty to the destitute never results in our unhappiness and that we have a duty to grow in our ability to help the destitute without it constituting a lack of happiness on our part. By moral virtues, Wolf means those virtues that we typically ascribe the predicate moral too. Virtues such as patience, benevolence, and "niceness" all typify Wolf's (and, according to her, our commonsense conception of moral virtues). By nonmoral virtues, Wolf means developing proficiency at nonmoral activities such as "playing the oboe" or "improving [one's]

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<sup>111</sup> Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," in *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, ed. Steven M. Cahn and Peter Markie (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 710.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 709.

backhand.”<sup>113</sup> A complete lack of these nonmoral virtues, according to Wolf, will result in a life that “cannot be superimposed upon the ideal of the moral saint”, and this life is ideal in some sense.<sup>114</sup> In Wolf’s words,

...one prefers the blunt, tactless, and opinionated Betsy Trotwood to the unfailingly kind and patient Agnes Copperfield; one prefers the mischievousness and the sense of irony in Chesterton’s Father Brown to the innocence and indiscriminating love of St. Francis. It seems that...we look in our paragons of moral excellence for people whose moral achievements occur in conjunction with or colored by some interest or traits that have a low moral tone...<sup>115</sup>

Vanessa Carbonell’s remarks in her article, “What Moral Saints Look like” can be used to respond to some of Wolf’s criticisms. A part of Wolf’s argument rests on the claim that moral saints are, essentially, annoying people. Carbonell responds to this claim by discussing a counter-example: Dr. Paul Farmer.

Dr. Farmer is indeed a moral saint, but he does not suffer from the character defects that Wolf describes. In Carbonell’s words, “[Wolf’s] saint is irritating, obsessive, and bland; Farmer is charismatic and funny. Her saint is holier-than-thou and no fun to be around; Farmer attracts friends and followers like a magnet.”<sup>116</sup> Farmer “takes no salary...sleeps no more than four hours a night...he lives alternatively in a hut and the basement of his own office...he does not buy new clothes...he has little time to himself...”<sup>117</sup> Despite his undeniably saintly life, Farmer displays

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 710.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 711.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Vanessa Carbonell, “What Moral Saints Look Like,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 3 (September 2009): 376.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 377.

the attractive sarcastic quality that Wolf explicitly argues is not possible for saints, which contributes to their unattractive nature.<sup>118</sup> Thus, it would seem that Wolf's claim that moral saints are necessarily unattractive people to be around stands refuted. To be clear, it is not my claim that no moral saints are unattractive to be around, but rather, that it is possible to behave like a moral saint without being annoying.<sup>119</sup>

Wolf makes some more serious claims, however, about the defects of a moral saint that are not addressed by Carbonell's comments.<sup>120</sup> Wolf claims that the moral saint necessarily misses out on important and valuable aspects of life. Specifically, she claims that a loving saint's willingness to happily sacrifice non-moral goods (e.g., his fishing trip) for moral ones (e.g., aiding a sick neighbor) calls into the question how much the moral saint "loves" the non-moral goods in the first place. From this claim, she argues that there is a "kind of joy which the Loving Saint, either by nature or by practice, is incapable of experiencing."<sup>121</sup> To things could be said in response to her claim.

The first response is that someone who is not a Loving Saint has a similar inability to experience a "kind of joy": the kind of joy associated with happily performing moral acts in situations that require sacrifice. So, even if it was the case that Loving Saints are actually

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 380.

<sup>119</sup> Carbonell actually suggests that the difference between an annoying moral saint and an attractive one is that the attractive saint is concerned about the "object of his concern," and not morality itself.

<sup>120</sup> Carbonell actually does think that if her counter-example is really a counter-example, then Wolf's other claims have no ground to stand on. This, however, does not seem to be the case.

<sup>121</sup> Wolf, "Moral Saints," 712.

detached from non-moral goods, one could say the same thing about those who are not Loving Saints, i.e., one could say that those that are not Loving Saints are detached from the joy of moral acts.

Second, there is reason to suspect that there is not a necessary connection between a willingness to happily sacrifice something and a lack of valuing the object that is being sacrificed. All that is required for an individual to happily sacrifice a non-moral good is that they value the moral good more than the non-moral good. Again, there is no necessary devaluing of the non-moral good. It is intuitively possible that a father can value both his career and his family and when he is placed in a position where he has to choose, he can happily choose his family. This choice tells us only that he values his family more than his career. If he makes this choice joyfully and “at the drop of the hat” that may say more about the father’s knowledge of what he values than what he doesn’t value. Thus, he can still be capable of experiencing the joy of valuing his career. Clearly, a moral saint could be placed in this same situation.

Wolf’s second more serious (and questionable) claim is that there is something distinctively disturbing about morality serving as the ultimate goal of an individual. The disturbing nature of moral passion is supposed to stand out over and above a passion for something non-moral (e.g., playing tennis). In her words,

A person who is passionately committed to one of these latter concerns might decide that her attachment to it is strong enough to be worth the sacrifice of her ability to maintain and pursue a significant portion of what else life might offer which a proper devotion to her dominant passion would require. But a desire to be as morally good as possible is not likely to take the form of one desire among others which, because of its peculiar

psychological strength, requires one to forego the pursuit of other weaker and separately less demanding desires.<sup>122</sup>

Wolf's criticism here rests on a definition of "morality" that is questionable. Once this definition is corrected, it seems that Wolf can only condemn a morally passionate life in the name of morality, which reveals that her criticism is self-refuting.

Wolf would like to separate out her normative concerns and label them as arising from the point of view "personal perfection." However, upon closer examination, her prescriptions seem to be moral prescriptions. They involve a normative component, and this component makes them moral claims. Kant's division of normative claims is useful here. Normative claims can be divided into hypothetical imperatives and categorical imperatives. Her claims do not have the form of a hypothetical imperative. She intends her claims to apply across the board and without qualification to every individual. Thus, if Wolf claims that we *should* not allow moral concerns to dominate our lives, she is making a *moral* statement. Wolf can only condemn a life that is saturated in morality by making a moral statement, which means that morality can apply to a moral agent's entire life. If this is the case, then Wolf cannot consistently have a problem with a moral saint who lets morality be the guiding concern of their life. For these reasons, Wolf's criticisms do not pose a problem for PB4.

In this chapter, I have pointed out the conceptual difficulties in formulating a principle that describes how agents ought to morally respond to the world hunger issue, shown "we need a fresh perspective," built a principle of benevolence, and defended this principle against a plausible objection. With the extent of the duty to the distant clarified, perhaps Singer's worst

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 711.

nightmare can end, and principle of benevolence that was “built” in this chapter can shield moral agents from the deluge of moral claims that could demanded from them.

## CHAPTER 3: ESCAPING THE PHILOSOPHER'S VICE: FULFILLING OBLIGATION IN A SHRINKING WORLD

It seems as though philosophers have neglected a crucial question concerning our obligations to the needy: How do we fulfill those obligations? Indeed, a common remark at the end of many articles on the topic all express similar sentiments: our obligations to the impecunious are more far-reaching than many of us are currently prepared to act on.<sup>123</sup> Even Peter Singer has recognized this and mitigated the strength of his moral demands on his website “The Life You Can Save” (a site dedicated to raising funds for the poor) in order to prevent people from becoming discouraged at the demandingness of morality.<sup>124</sup> This preoccupation with conceptual issues and a lack of concern for pragmatic implementation is perhaps a vice that philosophers are particularly susceptible to. David Crocker, a founding member of the International Development Ethics Association, confirms this when he notes, “unfortunately, preoccupied as they were with the task of justifying aid to distant people, most philosophers evinced scant interest in institutional and practical issues.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> See Peter Singer’s “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”, Richard Watson’s “Reason and Morality in a World of Limited Food”, Garrett Cullity’s “The Life-Saving Analogy”, Hugh LaFollette and Larry May’s “Suffer the Little Children”, Henry Shue’s “Solidarity among Strangers and the Right to Food”, etc. for this trend.

<sup>124</sup> *Peter Singer and Michael Slote* (Philosophy TV, 2010), <http://www.philostv.com/peter-singer-and-michael-slote/>.

<sup>125</sup> David Crocker, “Hunger, Capability, and Development,” in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 213.

When philosophers have attempted to provide suggestions on how world hunger ought to be dealt with, these prescriptions have been, at best, parochial and, at worst, inimical. Indeed, Amartya Sen wrote at one point, “The focus on food per head and Malthusian optimism [as a means of helping the poor] has literally killed millions.”<sup>126</sup> There seems to be widespread agreement that the typical philosophical prescriptions to solve the World Hunger problem have been both economically and politically naïve.

Three philosophers in particular have some incisive and important criticism. Thus, the first part of this chapter will be devoted to representing the criticisms of some of the typical suggestions to solving world hunger (e.g., donating to OXFAM). While I agree that these criticisms adequately show that the attempts to end world hunger have hitherto been parochial, they do not show that NGO’s like OXFAM play no role in ending world hunger. Moreover, in this section, I will attempt to provide some prescriptions that, on a collective level, will be effective in ending world hunger.

The second part of the chapter will provide some suggestions on how we (as individuals) ought to attempt to end world hunger/poverty. Often times, as LaFollette notes, the “...strongest barrier to helping those in chronic need is more psychological than philosophical.”<sup>127</sup> Martin Hoffman, a psychologist that specializes in empathic development, suggests that empathy is a key factor in motivating moral behavior. He notes that there are many studies that have

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<sup>126</sup> Amartya Sen, “Goods and People,” in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 199.

<sup>127</sup> Hugh LaFollette and Larry May, “Suffer the Little Children,” in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 80.



attempted to show this empirically.<sup>128</sup> Thus, for the individual prescriptions, I draw on some insights that Michael Slote and Martin Hoffman have discovered on the connection between empathy and motivation for moral behavior. More specifically, I will utilize some of the research discussed in Hoffman's *Empathy and Moral Development*, to represent some suggestions on empathic development, which seem key to providing the psychological motivation for affluent members of society to fulfill their ethical obligations.

In keeping with the practical flavor of this chapter, I, in the last sections, would like to address some more practical objections. Specifically, I will address the notion that aid is self-defeating and the claim that the massive economic breakdown that could result if affluent individuals assist the poor serves as a legitimate reason to free us from our obligation to the poor. In response to the first practical objection, I will represent William Aiken's criticism of the "self-defeating aid argument," which points out that the argument rests on a false conception of a nation's carrying capacity. For the second objection, I will argue that proper aid for the world's global poor does not involve an abandoning of our economic growth. In fact, it seems that properly appropriated dollars will have a "boomerang effect," i.e., as more and more nations are lifted out of poverty, there will likely be some long term benefits for developed nations' economies.<sup>129</sup>

The lack of concern among philosophers for how to motivate a practical solution for fulfilling our obligations misses out on what Anthony Weston refers to as the essence of ethics: "Ethical problem solving is not just a matter of finding a way out of a specific, practical fix. It is

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<sup>128</sup> Michael Slote, *Moral Sentimentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16.

<sup>129</sup> Friedman, *The World is Flat : A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*, 428.

also an occasion to better live out our values and, indeed, to better the world itself. That, is the very essence of ethics!”<sup>130</sup> The third chapter, then, could be seen overall as an attempt to escape the aforementioned philosopher’s vice.

### **Practical Suggestions: Vacationing, Donating, Structurally Adjusting, and Motivating To End World Hunger**

Social/political prescriptions aimed at ending global poverty have generated a vast literature and controversy on the nature of development economics. The controversy could be broadly categorized as a debate between those who embrace a neo-liberal globalization paradigm (i.e., those who think free market solutions are the only effective ones) for economic growth and those who think that structural and institutional reforms are the key to ending poverty (e.g., Pogge). Before delving into this debate, however, two prefatory points should be made.

Notice that in the above paragraph, I stated that the current debate centered on how to end *poverty*, not world hunger. Global poverty was not always the center of the debate. World hunger was seen as the major problem facing the Third World during the 70s when Singer wrote his article. As economists’ and philosophers’ understanding of the issue developed, however, they began to realize that the real issue plaguing persons in the Third World is not necessarily a lack of food, but instead, a lack of purchasing power.<sup>131</sup> Amartya Sen notes that Bengal famine of 1943 serves as a case in point,

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<sup>130</sup> Anthony Weston, *Creative Problem-solving in Ethics* (New York: Oxford, 2007), 6.

<sup>131</sup> Amartya Sen, “Goods and People,” in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 193.

In the great Bengal Famine of 1943, in which about 3 million people died, food availability per unit of population was not particularly low and was, in fact, 9 per cent higher than in 1941 when there was no famine. The famine victims...suffered a drastic decline in their market entitlements due to their wages and money earnings not keeping up with the rise in food prices, resulting from demand-fed inflationary pressure in a war-boom economy...<sup>132</sup>

So, the focus of theorists rightly shifted from solving the problem of world hunger to solving the problem of global poverty. This shift in focus is only a practical one. Even though this shift has occurred, for the purposes of this moral discussion, I intend my conclusions to apply to individuals who are in need of live-saving care, who just happen to be most effectively helped when they have sufficient access to economic resources, for it seems that the moral status of lifting individuals out of poverty is another discussion entirely.

With a task as huge as ending world hunger, it is easy for one to wonder at the outset whether or not it is actually a possibility. “No matter how much I give,” a skeptic might say, “there will never be enough to go around.” However, David Crocker points out in his article, “Hunger, Capability, and Development” that there have been enough resources to provide basic nutrition for all since the 1960s.<sup>133</sup> Pogge, for example, provides an interesting statistic that shows how a small change in resource allocation could be made that tremendously help the poor. He suggests that a global resources dividend (GRD) be set up that contains 1% of the resources of the world’s affluent countries, which is approximately 320 billion annually. This amount is approximately 86 times the current amount of money that is spent on developing countries.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> David Crocker, “Hunger, Capability, and Development,” in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh LaFollette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 217.

<sup>134</sup> Pogge, “Real World Justice,” 50.

**Effective Aid.** Perhaps it is appropriate to begin a discussion of the aforementioned debate with Singer's article, which, in many senses, started the debate among philosophers about how to end world hunger. For Singer, the solution to poverty is quite simple: donate to OXFAM. Singer seems to think that "Expert observers and supervisors, sent out by famine relief organizations or permanently stationed in famine-prone areas, can direct our aid to a refugee in Bengal almost as effectively as we could get it to someone in our block."<sup>135</sup> If it really was that simple, however, there would be little to debate.

In an article entitled, "More than Charity: Alternatives to the Singer Solution," Andrew Kuper argues that Singer's solution is largely off base, and he considers some important aspects of the global poverty debate. For Kuper, charity is not the panacea for poverty. He points to

...the well-documented failure of relief efforts in recent decades [as] a powerful indicator that a structure-sensitive approach to development is indispensable to any wise, humane program or philosophy of right action. Consider, most starkly, the perpetuation and intensification of the Rwandan conflict and the human misery aggravated by aid agencies that sustained refugee camps. In spite of the camps becoming bases for militiamen and incubators for cholera, the prospect of international NGO aid encouraged people not to return to their homes even when it was safer to do so, thus intensifying and prolonging the conflict.<sup>136</sup>

For these reasons, he is an advocate for cautionary charity, but for Kuper, charity is not enough.

In fact, Kuper argues that charity can be harmful in a more direct sense than the above example.

If improperly appropriated, it may, for example, "increase the power and hold of a kleptocratic elite."<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," 29.

<sup>136</sup> Kuper, "More Than Charity: Cosmopolitan Alternatives to the "Singer Solution", 113.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 111.

Kuper suggests rather surprisingly that “we may do better for South Africans by buying furniture and clothes from ethical manufacturers and manufacturers in developing countries than by donation. Adequate employment opportunities, for instance, are the leading determinant of people’s ability to provide for themselves and their families.”<sup>138</sup> With this fact in mind, Kuper implicitly suggests a rather surprising method of fighting poverty: take a vacation. He notes that tourism generated 476 billion dollar worldwide last year, but that sub-Saharan Africa only took 2.5% of the market. He then asks us to imagine “what a tremendous difference it might make to poor people in the region if that number could be brought closer to 10 or 15 percent.”<sup>139</sup>

To be sure, this is an important point. Even if it is the case that money can be more effectively distributed by charities, purchasing products from ethical manufacturers may provide a means for affluent individuals to simultaneously acquire goods which are substantively significant (i.e., goods that have a long-term effect on happiness) and to aid the world’s poor. Kuper’s suggestion is important not only in the sense that it may provide a way for funds to be properly appropriated so that the world’s poor can begin to provide for themselves, but also because the win-win situation that it creates can provide extra motivation for affluent individuals to engage in economic transactions that eventually result in persons being saved from starvation and privation.

For a problem as complex as world hunger, however, aid is not the only viable solution. Both of the solutions that have been discussed so far are not structural solutions. A structural

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Kuper, “More than Charity,” 111.

solution, as its name implies, involves changing the economic order itself in order to ensure more equitable distributions.

**Stopping Starvation-Starting-Systems.** Onora O'Neill begins her article, "Ending World Hunger" by noting that "While the *political* independence of former colonies is now virtually complete, the trade and economic policies of former imperial powers and other powerful developed nations may hinder development."<sup>140</sup> Recall that in Chapter 1, I noted Pogge's argument about the harmfulness of the current economic policies. In the above quotation, O'Neill describes precisely the sort of harmful arrangement that is currently crippling development in the Third World.

According to the 2000 edition of the World Development Report (henceforth WDR), unfair tariffs play a significant role in crippling the economies of developing nations. Development economists estimate that approximately 20 billion dollars (40% of aid in 1998) are lost annually because of the current system of tariffs.<sup>141</sup> The tariffs on agricultural products in particular are especially damaging.<sup>142</sup> Pogge also makes note of an article in the *Economist* that corroborates the information found in the WDR. Recent studies have shown that "rich countries average tariffs on manufacturing imports from poor countries are four times higher than those on

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<sup>140</sup> Onora O'Neill, "Ending World Hunger," in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 91.

<sup>141</sup> World bank (Washington, DC), *World Development Report 2000-2001: Attacking Poverty* (Oxford [etc.]: [Oxford university press [etc.], 2000), 181.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

imports from other rich countries” and that “[poor countries] could export 700 billion more a year by 2005 if rich countries did more to open their markets.”<sup>143</sup>

Peter Singer points out another factor that contributes to starvation starting systems: the use of wheat and corn for products other than direct consumption. He points out two uses in particular: the conversion of corn into biofuel for the vehicles that drive around the Western World and the production of meat to fill the stomachs of the affluent. For example, for every thirteen pounds of grain that is used to feed a cow, one pound of meat is made ready for consumption by an affluent meat-eater. He argues in *The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty* that the decrease in available wheat goods causes an increase in the price of wheat.<sup>144</sup> This increase in price is especially harmful to the poor since, as noted earlier, the problem with world hunger is caused more by a lack of purchasing power than by a lack of available food.

Neo-liberals, however, have typically argued that non-free market solutions (like adjusting tariffs) will do more harm than good. Indeed, for years a debate raged on about which strategy was more effective to reducing global poverty. Fortunately, it appears as though there has been some recent consensus about the economic means necessary to tackle the problem of

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<sup>143</sup> Thomas Pogge, “Assisting' the Global Poor,” in *The Ethics of Assistance: Morality and the Distant Needy*, ed. Deen Chatterjee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 264.

<sup>144</sup> Peter Singer, *The Life You can Save: Acting Now To End World Poverty* (New York: Random House, 2009), 122. I have not included Singer’s argument for stopping world hunger from this book because it is identical to the one put forth in “Famine, Affluence, and Morality.”

poverty.<sup>145</sup> The consensus, in addition to being justified by extensive research, is also supported by an intuitively plausible claim: that something as complicated as attaining material well-being of millions of different people across various cultural and geographical boundaries does not lend itself to solutions that ignore all of those variables. In other words, it is unlikely that either entirely free-market or more structurally focused solutions work all the time in all places.<sup>146</sup> Thus, it appears that Pogge, Singer, and Kuper's solutions are viable options for making strides towards ending poverty in at least some regions.

**Social Entrepreneurship.** What Friedman refers to as, “social entrepreneurship” is another potentially excellent way of fulfilling obligation in our shrinking world. If it is the case that the economic activities of one area can have negative far-reaching impact in other areas (as I hope to have shown in Chapter 1 and earlier in this chapter), then this method seems to be working in the opposite direction via the same mechanism of change: economics. Jeremy Hocksenstein represents a typical attempt at a social entrepreneurial venture. He started a data-entry firm in the capital of Cambodia, Phohm Penh. He hired mostly former Cambodian war refugees, paid them twice the minimum wage, and offered scholarships so that they could complete high school.<sup>147</sup> The business boomed and several other offices were opened in other cities. Hockenstien's business partner, before he started working, was living in a refugee camp. Now, they collaborate and create “better futures for people working at the bottom and the top.” This particular business venture also affords affluent companies in the north the opportunity to

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<sup>145</sup> World bank (Washington, DC), World Development Report 2000-2001: Attacking Poverty, 192.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Friedman *The World is Flat* 364-365



invest in “creating better lives for some of the poor citizens of the world.”<sup>148</sup> Even these macro-level solutions, however, must be started by individuals who are very motivated. Thus, describing methods of motivating individuals to care more about the distant destitute is the topic of the next section.

**Motivating Motivated Duties of Benevolence.** The preceding chapters have done much work in logically motivating the acceptance of duties to the distant. However, it seems that often times, as LaFollette notes, the “...strongest barrier to helping those in chronic need is more psychological than philosophical.”<sup>149</sup> Thus, it seems necessary to motivate the duty-bearer psychologically to perform the duties that have been motivated logically.

The current level of donations of affluent individuals is far from ideal. They are both inconsistent and inadequate. The World Development Report notes that there was a decline in the 90s of support of vocal individuals who encouraged aid to Third World countries.<sup>150</sup> According to the report, these individuals suffered from “aid fatigue” (This is an important psychological phenomenon to understand since it is often a barrier to sustained aid efforts, but this will be addressed later). Indeed, Kuper complains in the article mentioned earlier about the capriciousness of development aid.<sup>151</sup> Moreover, the percentage of the affluent’s income spent on aiding the poor has declined steadily since the 1960s. In the 60s, affluent individuals spent about

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 365

<sup>149</sup> LaFollette and May, “Suffer the Little Children,” 80.

<sup>150</sup> World Bank (Washington, DC), World Development Report 2000-2001: Attacking Poverty, 191.

<sup>151</sup> Kuper, “More Than Charity: Cosmopolitan Alternatives to the “Singer Solution,”” 114.

1 dollar on aid for every 2 dollars spent on recreation. Now, that number is 50 cents, i.e., for every 2 dollars spent on recreation, 50 cents is spent on aid.<sup>152</sup>

How can affluent individuals become more motivated to behave in a benevolent manner? Martin Hoffman, a psychologist who specializes in empathy and moral development, suggests that empathy is a key factor in motivating moral behavior.<sup>153</sup> For Hoffman, “empathy” is defined this way: “an affective response more appropriate to another’s situation than one’s own.”<sup>154</sup> In Hoffman’s *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice*, one paragraph in particular presents a slew of experiments that show how powerfully empathy can motivate moral behavior,

Berndt (1979) found that a group of empathic sixth graders who discussed a sad incident in another person’s life donated more time to making pictures for hospitalized children than did empathic children who discussed a sad event in their own lives. Davis (1983) found that college students who obtained high empathy scores on a paper-and-pencil measure donated more money to the Jerry Lewish Muscular Dystrophy Telethon than did their less empathic classmates. Empathic college students were more likely to volunteer and put in more hours of work at shelters for homeless families (Penner, Fritzsche, Craiger, & Freifeld, 1995)...<sup>155</sup>

Understanding why the current level of giving is both so capricious and so low requires an understanding of the various modes of empathic arousal. With a clearer picture of the

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<sup>152</sup> Judith Lichtenberg, “Absence and the Unfounded Heart,” in *The Ethics of Assistance: Morality and the Distant Needy*, ed. Deen Chatterjee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 78.

<sup>153</sup> Michael Slote, *Moral Sentimentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16.

<sup>154</sup> Martin Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

empathic processes in mind, subsequent prescriptions for increasing motivation to end world hunger will be more forthcoming. Thus, I will briefly represent Hoffman's five modes of empathic arousal. Next, I will relate these modes to the problem of world hunger and the distant destitute specifically with the intent of pointing out which modes of empathic arousal are available to the distant affluent. Again, these prescriptions are meant to be psychologically (and ethically) useful in motivating the affluent members of "the global north" to fulfill their duties to those in abject poverty.

Hoffman divides the five modes of empathic arousal into two types. Three of these modes, are preverbal, automatic, and "essentially involuntary." Hoffman calls these modes "mimicry," "direct association," and "conditioning." The final two modes are "higher-order cognitive modes": "mediated association" and "role-taking."<sup>156</sup>

A close examination of the first three modes of empathic arousal reveals that they are often cognitively "out of reach" for affluent individuals. Hoffman defines mimicry as "innate, involuntary, isomorphic response to another person's expression of emotion."<sup>157</sup> A mother and child, for example, often exhibit mimicry when they interact. Mothers will involuntarily mimic the facial expressions of their child and the child will mimic the facial expression of the mother.<sup>158</sup> Mimicry plays a role in arousing empathy because of something Hoffman calls, "feedback." If a person's facial expressions mimic the expressions of those who are suffering,

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 38.

then the facial expression of that individual causes them to feel emotionally upset.<sup>159</sup> In other words, an individual's facial expression can cause them to feel certain emotions. The second preverbal mode of empathic arousal occurs via direct association when cues from the victim's situation remind the observer of a similar experience they have had.<sup>160</sup> Finally, conditioning, plays a role in empathic arousal when individuals are repeatedly exposed to a stimulus that produces a certain affective response. Hoffman provides a helpful example, "...presenting adults with a fear-producing danger signal (shock electrodes) along with another adult's fearful facial expression, results in fearful faces becoming conditioned stimuli that evoke fear in the subjects even when the shock electrodes are removed from view."<sup>161</sup>

The remaining two modes, on the other hand, are largely voluntary: mediated association and role-or perspective taking. Mediated association is, perhaps, the most common form of empathic arousal that is used in the affluent-indigent interaction. As the name implies, this mode shares some similarity with direct association. Both direct and mediated association involve an observer becoming empathically aroused as a result of a victim's distress reminding the observer of a similar experience they had. Hoffman describes it as a mode of empathic arousal that is, for example, a result of listening to a third party's description of a victim's peril or hearing a victim cry out.<sup>162</sup> Role-taking, as its name implies, occurs when the observer puts themselves "in the

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 7.

shoes” of the victim.<sup>163</sup> With the modes of empathic arousal explained, I now turn to explaining why the distance between affluent and the indigent is so psychologically problematic.

The first three modes *require* that the victim be “present” in order for them to be activated, and this is precisely a limitation of these modes about which Hoffman explicitly makes note.<sup>164</sup> The distance, therefore, makes the affluent-poor interaction psychologically difficult. It prevents spontaneous exposure to the circumstance of the other. Thus, three out of the five modes of empathic arousal are cognitively out of reach. It seems that this has a particularly devastating effect on motivating moral agents because these three modes are the involuntary modes of empathic arousal, and thus, they may be the most effective in motivating pro-social behavior.

The other two modes of empathic arousal are higher order processes, and they are voluntary. The non-automatic nature of these processes means that they can be avoided by moral agents. This phenomenon has actually been captured by experimentation. Agents will deliberately avoid being empathically aroused because they are unwilling to incur the cost of relieving a victim’s distress. College students, in one particular experiment which observed this phenomenon, were more likely to choose a non-emotionally charged appeal for help from a homeless man rather than an emotionally charged appeal.<sup>165</sup> These other modes also seem to be weaker forms of empathy, and this makes the affluent-indigent interaction less likely to result in

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

benevolent behavior. The verbal communication that is involved in mediated association, for example, “dampens” empathic arousal.<sup>166</sup>

Another problem with the distance between the affluent and indigent is this: it prevents the cognitive and emotional reward of seeing that one’s actions had a positive effect on the individual in distress. This, according to Hoffman’s research, is an invaluable step in the empathic process. Empathic arousal leads to empathic distress and an observer can only experience empathic relief once they believe that the individual is no longer experiencing suffering.<sup>167</sup> It is possible that we may be more psychologically motivated to save a drowning child in a pond because of our past experience with empathic relief. On the other hand, donating money to OXFAM does not provide a direct experience of empathic relief. Rather, the person who donates has to imagine the good that his funds will accomplish.

The distance, however, is not the only problem with the world hunger issue. Because the world hunger issue involves the intense suffering of so many individuals, it is likely that agents who are exposed to the issue of world hunger also experience, what Hoffman calls, “empathic over-arousal.” He defines it this way, “an involuntary process that occurs when an observer’s empathic distress becomes so painful and intolerable that it is transformed into an intense feeling of personal distress, which may move the person out of the empathic mode entirely.”<sup>168</sup> Of course, a person who is “moved out of the empathic mode” is less likely to behave in a benevolent manner.

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 198.

If the situation was not psychologically desperate enough, moral agents must also contend with a “here and now” and “familiarity” biases that are, according to Hoffman, inherent properties of empathy. “Here and now bias” is the description Hoffman gives to the phenomena of agents being more willing to help those who are currently present even if doing so violates principles of fairness or justice.<sup>169</sup> Familiarity bias, as its name implies, occurs when agents are more likely to favor those who have similarities to them. One experiment found (surprisingly) that men, for example, are more likely to help men in distress.<sup>170</sup>

For these reasons, the deck is stacked against motivating moral agents to fulfill their obligations to the distant. There are, however, some important things that can be done to improve the likelihood that the affluent will fulfill their obligations. More specifically, the presentation of the problem of world hunger can be changed so that the problems presented by empathic over-arousal, bias, and distance are less problematic. These prescriptions seem especially important since many of the presentations of the problem of world hunger rely on methods that seem counterproductive to motivating individuals to care for the distant poor.

Although statistics are one of the favorite methods of conveying information about world hunger and although they are often informative, based on Hoffman’s observations, I recommend that those who are interested in motivating others to solve the problem of world hunger use them

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 208.

sparingly, if at all.<sup>171</sup> Instead, more visual media should be used to convey the information that is typically communicated via text. Statistic-filled text arouses empathy via mediated association. On the other hand, Hoffman suggests that visual media can play a role in aiding empathic arousal towards distant others since, as noted earlier, visual stimuli are more powerful activators of empathy.<sup>172</sup> In addition, if visual representations featured facial expressions, then the representation would also recruit mimicry as a mode of empathic arousal.

In addition to being ineffective at arousing empathy, statistics are likely to become a source of empathic over-arousal, which clearly is counterproductive to the goal of motivating support. Indeed, Singer cites a study in his article in *Newsweek* that seems to be evidence that anecdotal (rather than statistical) presentations of the problem of world hunger are more effective motivators of action:

In an experiment, one group was given general information about the need for donations, including statements like “Food shortages in Malawi are affecting more than 3 million children.” A second group was shown the photo of a 7-year-old Malian girl named Rokia, and told that she is desperately poor, and that “her life will be changed for the better by your gift.” People in the second group gave more.<sup>173</sup>

Anecdotes (rather than statistics) also allow readers to hear or read about experiences that may trigger empathic responses via mediated association. Also, anecdotes which highlight the

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<sup>171</sup> A brief survey of the many websites dedicated to raising funds to fight world hunger reveals that this is so. See [givingwhatwecan.org](http://givingwhatwecan.org), [thelifeyoucansave.com](http://thelifeyoucansave.com), [Oxfam.org](http://Oxfam.org) (under, for example, “Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo”), [worldvision.org](http://worldvision.org), etc.

<sup>172</sup> Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice*, 294.

<sup>173</sup> Peter Singer, “Charity: The Psychology of Giving - *Newsweek*,” n.d., <http://www.newsweek.com/2009/02/27/the-science-behind-our-generosity.html>.



similarity between emotions and struggles of the poor and the affluent may provide the means of reducing familiarity bias.<sup>174</sup> Films, commercials, or articles can also ask viewers/readers to imagine how someone close to them (e.g., a sibling) would feel if they were in a similar situation of the distant poor. For Hoffman, this recruits familiarity bias to work in favor of motivating action via the empathic mode other-focused role taking.<sup>175</sup>

The likelihood that empathic over-arousal will occur can be diminished if responses to empathically arousing situations are embedded in a moral principle. In other words, if moral agents have some idea of what and how much they ought to do, this, Hoffman hypothesizes, provides a stabilizing effect on the empathic affect.<sup>176</sup> This is so partly because “semantically integrated categorical knowledge ([the moral] principle) is stored in long-term memory (Tulving, 1972)” whereas empathic affect is not.<sup>177</sup> Thus, the principle of benevolence put forth in the second chapter is not only useful for determining the extent of the obligation to the poor, but also for stabilizing empathic affect thereby making an agent less susceptible to empathic over-arousal. Thus, presentations should contain moral principles to provide the cognitively stabilizing effect to the empathic affect that is provoked by the visual imagery.

Finally, presentations about the problem of world hunger would benefit from including information about the effectiveness of aid since, as noted above, distance prevents observers from experiencing empathic relief. If Hoffman is correct in noting that experiencing empathic

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<sup>174</sup> Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice*, 293.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

relief is a vital part of motivating moral behavior, then providing the distant affluent with a digital experience of empathic relief will increase motivation to aid the poor. This could be done by showing (visually) the positive effects that aid had on a previously impoverished person. The distant affluent could then be encouraged to reflect on the images as indicators that their donations are alleviating the suffering of distant others.

In summary, psychologically motivating others looks something like this: duty-bearers must overcome egoistic tendencies of a refusal to be empathically aroused (because of a rejection of the costs of being empathically aroused), deliberately expose themselves to images and messages of *individual* victims of world hunger, experience empathic distress, move to relieve that distress by acting (or donating), and experience the “good feelings” that result from alleviating distress. Reason also plays a role insofar as it allows us to construct moral principles that stabilize the empathic affect. This can be accomplished by altering the presentations of the problem of world hunger so that they will mitigate the negative impact distance, over-arousal, and bias has on motivating moral behavior.

### **Practical Objections: Self-Defeating Aid and Economic Collapse**

#### **On Decapitating Hydras: A Response to the Claim that Aid is Self-Defeating.**

One of the first attempts to increase the “moral distance” between the rich and poor was focused on a practical objection. It attacked the proposition that aid can actually affect positive change on the situation of the destitute. Pogge’s opening statement of his article entitled “Real World Justice” included the following criticism of philosophers’ theories of international justice:

“many philosophers working on global justice know too little about the real world.”<sup>178</sup> The claim that aid is necessarily self-defeating seems to be guilty of precisely the criticism Pogge levies against philosophers. Although the prescriptions of some philosophers were based on popular population growth models that were respected outside of the philosophical community (i.e., the Neo-Malthusian paradigm), it seems clear that even if these erroneous population models were correct, the arguments that were put forth rest on shaky framework and equivocations, which were the result of failing to take into consideration the facts of the “real world.”

Garrett Hardin is perhaps the best known philosopher who attempted to show that we ought not to give aid to countries that have exceeded their “carrying capacity.” According to Hardin, the result of not heeding his remarks will, according to him, be something like this: “their population [will] continue to grow unchecked and so will their ‘need’ for aid. In the short run, a world food bank actually may diminish the need, but in the long run it actually increases the need *without limit*.”<sup>179</sup> Hardin would agree, then, that an apt metaphor for seeing the practice of sending aid to countries that have already exceeded their “carrying capacity” is tantamount to attempting to kill a hydra by cutting off its heads.

More recent research in population growth, however, shows that quite the opposite is true. It seems that offering assistance to underdeveloped regions will result in a population

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<sup>178</sup> Pogge, “Real World Justice,” 29.

<sup>179</sup> Garrett Hardin, “Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor,” in *World Hunger and Moral Obligation*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh LaFollette, 1st ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 17.

growth *decrease*. If this is the case, then Hardin's argument cannot succeed.<sup>180</sup> Several studies were conducted that seem to suggest that poverty results in high fertility rates, not the other way around. Two studies in particular are especially relevant.

The first study found not only that there where nations are more highly developed the fertility rates are lower, but also that seemed to hit on the reason why this is so,

The prevailing birth rate, coupled with mortality and morbidity characteristics of the population, generally yield child survival expectancies, or probabilities, consistent with the size of completed family that parents want. Increasing the chance of child survival by improved nutrition, public health, sanitation, etc. so the argument runs, will lead to a perception by parents that fewer pregnancies and births are necessary to secure the desired size of the surviving family. The (child survival) thesis argues that if food aid and nutrition programs increase infant survival, parents will desire fewer children and will be motivated to use birth control to achieve that result.<sup>181</sup>

The second study asked parents in privation why they had so many children. Interestingly, they saw children as a form of security against the difficult life that poverty brought, and in short, the study seemed to suggest that "...people are not poor because they have large families. Quite contrary: they have large families because they are poor."<sup>182</sup>

However, even if these claims are incorrect and high fertility persists when aid is rendered to these nations, there is a serious flaw in Hardin's argument: William Aiken has shown that it rests on an equivocation of the phrase "carrying capacity." Aiken proceeds to criticize

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<sup>180</sup> Nathoo, "Rationalized Self-Interest or Reasoned Skepticism? Objections to Singer and Unger on the Obligations of the Affluent," 30.

<sup>181</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>182</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *The Myth of Population Control: Family, Caste, and Class in an Indian Villaae*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 14.

Hardin's argument with what, retrospectively, seems like a rather obvious observation that can be seen as long as the world hunger problem is not viewed from the arm chair: "humans have the ability to artificially extend the carrying capacity of their environment [specifically, their nation]" via improvements in agriculture and trade. This is not an entirely environmental matter (as Hardin claims); it is an economic one.<sup>183</sup> Indeed, Aiken reduces to absurdity Hardin's carrying capacity argument when he notes that taking Hardin's argument seriously would imply that international trade is immoral since, "we would be assisting that nation to exceed its carrying capacity...this is absurd...International purchasing power extends a nations carrying capacity because this is not a biological limit – it is a complex social, economic, and political limit."<sup>184</sup>

In short, it seems that the neo-Malthusian paradigm of population growth is incorrect, but even if this is not the case, philosophers like Hardin are a still a long way from demonstrating that their concept of "carrying capacity" can be taken seriously enough to eliminate any obligations to the distant destitute.

**Twin Faces of Despair.** Jan Narveson's opinion on the moral obligation of the affluent to the world's poor shifted since he wrote his article in the 70s entitled, "Morality and Starvation." He no longer argues that the affluent have any obligation to the indigent. In a more recent article, he makes some comments that could form the basis for another practical objection:

It is characteristic of thinkers like Singer to suppose that we can just convert Mercedes Benzes and fine houses overlooking the Riviera into thatched hospitals in the Congo. If you do think that, you might first have a word or two with the millions of people in this

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<sup>183</sup> William Aiken, "The Carrying Capacity Equivocation," in *World Hunger and Morality*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 19.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

world who make their living by assembling Mercedes Benzes or high class condos, or who wait tables in the fine restaurants Singer wants us all to shun.<sup>185</sup>

Narveson's claim here brings up an important moral objection that may arise when one considers the economic consequences of "shunning" fine restaurants and Mercedes Benzes.

The objection might be stated as follows: If affluent individuals refuse to purchase superfluous goods and donate all their funds to charity, then the industries that thrive on excess consumption will suffer and the desperate faces of these business owners and workers will begin to look markedly similar to the desperate faces of the "distant" poor.

A basic understanding of economics seems to show that this objection is worth considering. In order for an economy as productive as ours to maintain its health it must produce superfluous "consumer goods" (e.g., ipods, expensive clothing and/or "accessories", etc.). Production of these superfluous goods provides jobs, which in turn provides more income for families to purchase necessities along with more...consumer goods. Economic analyst Victor Lebowich perhaps put it best roughly sixty years ago, after the enormous growth in national productive capacity (directly as a result of WWII), "Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life...that we transform the buying and selling of goods into rituals."<sup>186</sup> Thus, spending money on "donations" to international organizations might be seen as economically noxious. Large amounts of spending on charitable donations might

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<sup>185</sup> Narveson, "Welfare and Wealth, Poverty and Justice in Today's World."

<sup>186</sup> Annie Leonard, *The Story of Stuff: How Our Obsession with Stuff is Trashing the Planet, our Communities, and our Health--and a Vision for Change*, 1st ed. (New York: Free Press, 2010), 160.

result in massive job loss and industry collapse since the monies that would usually be dedicated to consumer goods is diverted to the well-being of citizens of poor countries.

If this is the result of a moral prescription which instructs us to donate to OXFAM, for example, then how should the prescription itself be evaluated? The supposition behind Narveson's comment/objection is something like this: a morally favorable status should not be ascribed to a prescription that, if it was universally followed, would result in negative consequences. This objection is founded on premises that are both ethically and, when applied to the problem of world hunger, empirically problematic.

Taking this objection seriously would result in some very odd conclusions about our obligations. It would require, for example, that saving money be considered immoral since if everyone in the nation simultaneously decided to save their money, the economy would suffer. It would also require that becoming an artist is immoral, since if everyone in a nation became an artist, the nation would be less prosperous (since artists presumably do not have all of the necessary "nation running skills").

Moreover, moral actions cannot be condemned because of the negative consequences that would result from the moral action *within a certain system*. This says more about the system than it does about the moral act itself, and while it may be debatable whether or not one should perform some action in a system that will result in negative consequences, it seems likely that a system which produces negative consequences for moral acts is morally problematic.

For example, if a German citizen encountered a Jewish person in distress in Nazi Germany, he may have a moral obligation to help him. However, it is easy to image a case where

fulfilling that obligation may result in the death of both of the parties involved. Again, here it is debatable whether the German citizen should assist the Jewish individual *within that system*, but we cannot condemn the act of helping the distressed Jew in general based on these negative consequences because the consequences occur within a certain system that is created and maintained by people. The system (in this case, the Third Reich) itself is immoral, and creates negative consequences for moral acts. Similarly, national and international economic policy is a system created and maintained by people, and widespread donation to OXFAM may cause negative consequences. If this response to the objection is correct, then the question then becomes, “how can the international economic system be reworked?”, i.e., how can our economy be reconstructed in a way that efforts to help the cadaverous will not result in dire consequences? This is precisely the question that I have attempted to answer with the above suggestions.

Fortunately, even if the above suggestions are not feasible, there is little reason to think that widespread donation would lead to total economic collapse. According to estimates from the United Nations Development program (as quoted on the “Giving what we can.org” site), the cost of provided basic health and nutrition to all those who are in need would cost 13 billion dollars, which is about the amount of money that the United States and Europe spends on perfume.<sup>187</sup> It also appears that the value of economic growth and assisting other developing nations may be reconcilable. Thomas Friedman notes that when persons in the Third World are lifted out of poverty, they often purchase more goods, many of which include American products.<sup>188</sup> The new demand for American products would clearly have a positive impact on domestic economic

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<sup>187</sup> “Giving What We Can,” n.d., <http://www.givingwhatwecan.org/>.

<sup>188</sup> Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, 234.



growth. Aiding the Third World, then, could be seen as a long-term investment for more developed economies.

In sum, the aforementioned objection is founded on some ethically problematic premises, but even if that was not the case, a closer look at global economies reveals that effective aid for The Third World can result in a win-win situation.

## **SHRINKING WORLD, EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY: CONCLUDING REMARKS**

David Crocker, a former president of the international development ethics association, notes that “philosophers can play a role in...reducing world hunger.”<sup>189</sup> This thesis, then, was written partially in the hope that Crocker was right. I began this thesis commenting on the remarkably perpetual Good Samaritan situation the affluent find themselves in. Ultimately, I’ve sought to establish that the affluent have an obligation to the indigent, to understand the limits of that obligation, and to provide practical suggestions on how to fulfill that obligation.

More specifically, I have sought to decrease the “moral distance” between the world’s rich and poor by arguing that the affluent have an obligation to those who are in need of life-saving care from two ethical perspectives: libertarianism and partialism. Within the libertarian paradigm, I have argued that the world’s affluent are harming the poor by supporting an economic order that hinders the development of poor nations, that the distant poor present a conflict of liberties between the rich and poor, that a moral resolution of this conflict would demand that the rich sacrifice the liberty to hold on to their luxurious goods, and that if liberty is truly valued by libertarians, they should take seriously the lives of the distant poor (since life is a necessary precondition of liberty). From a partialistic perspective, I have argued that both cultural and politico-ethical homogenization has occurred and that this homogenization is reason enough for partialists to consider the poor within the same constitutive community as the rich.

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<sup>189</sup> Crocker, “Hunger, Capability, and Development,” 225.

Because some of the world's poor and the affluent are in the same constitutive community, partialists ought to take seriously the obligation that they have towards those individuals.

I have sought to show the problematic nature of previous principles of benevolence when they are applied to the issue of world hunger, and to end the conceptual nightmare of attempting to formulate a principle of benevolence that accurately describes the limits of the affluent's obligation to the Third World. Singer's principle is too demanding and conflicts with our intuitions about filial obligations. Frankena's principle contains an ambiguity which renders the principle largely useless. Noggle's imperfect duty cannot be applied to world hunger because every sacrifice (especially for achieving non-ultimate ends) that an affluent person makes of the indigent's well-being is a sacrifice that results in their death. Arthur's principle is too weak in that it fails to prescribe moral growth. It also fails to take into account the intrinsic moral worth of relationships since it only allows moral agents to care for others when doing so is important to that agent's long term happiness. Finally, on a more practical level, the principle seems obtuse in that it does not allow agents to pursue projects that are substantively significant to them in a reasonable manner. Again, here is the principle that, I believe, ends the aforementioned conceptual nightmare:

PB4: If providing lifesaving care will not result either in 1) a substantive sacrifice on the part of the moral agent, 2) an abandonment of attending to substantively significant projects, or 3) a substantive sacrifice of those close to the moral agent who could benefit from that moral agent's benevolence, then one ought to provide lifesaving care, and one ought to grow in one's capacity to behave benevolently.

Finally, I have attempted to escape the philosopher's vice by providing practical suggestions about how to end world hunger. These suggestions are largely taken from the recent

work of Pogge and Kuper. However, I have also included prescriptions from the WTO's *World Development Report* and from Friedman's work on social entrepreneurship. Essentially these prescriptions recommend that aid be made more effective, that affluent individuals look for products that benefit both themselves and the poor, that the international economic order be adjusted, and that social entrepreneurship is an effective means of creating economic growth in developing countries. On a more individual level, I attempted to show why efforts toward ending global poverty are so weak and capricious by detailing the various modes of empathic arousal and by pointing out the psychological difficulties that plague the affluent-indigent interaction. Finally, I have attempted to provide suggestions based on Hoffman's work that, I think, will allow moral agents to increase the capacity to behave benevolently and will allow persons interested in motivating others to aid the poor to construct more effective presentations of the problem of world hunger.

The obligation that we, as affluent persons, have towards the world's poor is indeed a weighty one. If my arguments are correct, then it is likely that it is immoral, for me, to eat a ChickfilA sandwich since eating there is not necessary for my long-term happiness and I can receive comparable items for cheaper and donate the excess to OXFAM. Am I even ethically permitted to purchase an extra copy of this thesis to keep in my personal library as a souvenir of a rather modest accomplishment (assuming it is an accomplishment at all)? Morality does indeed *seem* inconvenient and troublesome sometimes. In Singer's words, "Unfortunately, for those who like to keep their moral responsibilities limited, instant communication and swift transportation have changed the situation. From the moral point of view, the development of the world into a

‘global village’ has made an important...difference to our moral situation.”<sup>190</sup> Is it *really* unfortunate that the world has shrunk?

I am inclined to answer, “no.” While it may be the case that the world has shrunk and, as a result, our obligations to the distant destitute have increased, living in this shrinking world is an incredible opportunity. In the history of mankind, who else has been able to affect positively so many lives in such a significant manner with such little effort? It is my hope that we can continually see the shrinking world as a wonderful opportunity and the arguments put forth in this thesis will aid the affluent (myself included) in understanding their perpetual Good Samaritan status, and provide them the conceptual and practical tools necessary to act in a way that puts the “Good” in “Good Samaritan.”

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<sup>190</sup> Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality,” 25.

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