

Beneficence, Duty and Distance

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RICHARD W. MILLER

## Beneficence, Duty and Distance

According to Peter Singer, virtually all of us would be forced by adequate reflection on our own convictions to embrace a radical conclusion about giving. The following principle, he says, is “surely undeniable,” at least once we reflect on secure convictions concerning rescue, as in his famous case of the drowning toddler.

*The Principle of Sacrifice.* If it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything else morally significant, we ought, morally, to do so.<sup>1</sup>

Combined with further, uncontroversial premises, this principle leads to a demanding imperative to give which I will call *the radical conclusion*:

Everyone has a duty not to spend money on luxuries or frills, and to use the savings due to abstinence to help those in dire need.

For example, Singer condemns buying clothes “not to keep ourselves warm but to look ‘well-dressed’” (p. 235), and insists that everyone who is not needy has a duty to donate until donating more would

I am indebted to the Editors of *Philosophy & Public Affairs* who provided extremely helpful criticisms and suggestions in response to earlier versions of this article. I have also benefited from the insightful comments of Harry Brighouse, Claudia Card, Carolina Sartorio, Peter Singer, and others in discussions under the auspices of the University of Wisconsin (Madison) Philosophy Department and the Cornell Center for the Study of Inequality.

1. See Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence and Morality,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1 (1972): 241, 235. Unadorned page numbers will refer to this article. Singer quickly adds that “ought, morally” is meant to single out a dictate of moral duty, “not an act that it would be good to do, but not wrong not to do.”

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impoverish her or a dependent.<sup>2</sup> The first of the two further, auxiliary premises needed to derive the radical conclusion is an uncontroversial assessment of importance: on any particular occasion, or small bunch of occasions, on which one has the opportunity to buy a luxury or frill, the choice, instead, to spend no more than what is needed to buy a plain, functional alternative is not a morally significant sacrifice. After all, no one outside of the inevitable minority of eccentrics would claim that I make a morally significant sacrifice if I buy a plain, warm department-store brand sweater for \$22.95 instead of a stunning designer label sweater on sale for \$49.95. The second auxiliary is an uncontroversial claim about current consequences of giving: because of the availability of international aid agencies, donating money saved by avoiding the purchase of a luxury or frill (perhaps combined with money saved on similar occasions in a small bunch) is always a way of preventing something very bad from happening. For example, I could buy the cheaper sweater and donate \$27.00 to a UNICEF campaign in which it will be used to immunize a child in serious peril of death or crippling by readily preventable infection. If I buy the designer label sweater instead, I do wrong, violating the Principle of Sacrifice.

I believe that Singer's effort to derive the radical from the obvious misconstrues ordinary morality. Adequate reflection on our most secure convictions would lead most of us to embrace a less demanding principle of general beneficence, which permits many purchases that Singer would prohibit while condemning callous indifference. I will begin by describing this alternative moderate principle and its implications for beneficence, defending it against some initial criticisms. Then, I will describe how ordinary secure convictions concerning special relationships and partiality lead to an interpretation of the demands of equal respect that justifies this principle. Finally, with these resources in hand, I will confront Singer's most powerful appeal to those who start within the circle of ordinary morality, his attempt to derive the Principle of Sacrifice from ordinary secure convictions concerning rescue, as in his famous case of an encounter with a drowning toddler.

2. See p. 242, and Singer, "Reconsidering the Famine Relief Argument" in *Food Policy*, ed. Peter Brown and Henry Shue (New York: Free Press, 1977), p. 49. Singer would exempt purchases that are essential to someone's most effective strategy for helping the needy, say, the purchase of a fancy suit in order to maximize donations through use of income earned at a dressy Wall Street law firm. Similarly, the radical conclusion about spending money on luxuries or frills is only meant to prohibit purchases of luxuries or frills, at additional expense, for the sake of enjoyed consumption.

## THE PRINCIPLE OF SYMPATHY

Like Singer's Principle of Sacrifice, the more moderate rival is meant to describe our duty to give to others apart from special relationships, circumstances, and shared histories. I will call it

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

Someone's choices or a pattern of choices on his part violate this principle if he would not so act if he had the attitude it dictates and were relevantly well-informed.

The "neediness" in question is the sort of deprivation that Singer labels "very bad." By "a significant risk of worsening one's life," I mean a nontrivial chance that one's life as a whole will be worse than it would otherwise be. The untoward episodes that make a life worse than it would otherwise be need not extend through a long period of someone's life or impose grave burdens. Still, the mere fact that things could have gone better for me at a certain time or that a desire of mine is unfulfilled does not entail that my life is worse than it would have been had things gone my way. When I eat in a restaurant and am not served as good a meal as might be served, I do not, by that token, have a worse life.<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, some would respond to this example with a judgment that my life is worse, but only insignificantly. There is no need to pursue the disagreement here. Rather, I ask such a reader to recalibrate the Principle of Sympathy and my subsequent discussion to fit this other appraisal: treat "significant risk of worsening one's life" as short for "significant risk of significantly worsening one's life."

By "underlying disposition to respond to others' neediness," I mean the responsiveness to others' neediness as a reason to help that would express the general importance one ascribes to relieving neediness, in other words, one's basic concern for others' neediness. This is the

3. In *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 241–43, Joseph Raz presents similar examples as part of a case for the thesis, "When happiness is understood as a quality of a person's life or of periods of his life, the pursuit of happiness is . . . satiable [i.e., involves a goal that can be completely met]," p. 241.

disposition that would figure in a judgment of one's character as kind or callous. Underlying dispositions, expressing basic concerns, need not, by themselves, entail any very definite association of specific conduct with specific circumstances. In their bearing on conduct our basic concerns are usually coarse-grained. Still, in processes that Harry Frankfurt and Michael Bratman have trenchantly described, basic concerns rationalize and are manifested in more specific determinations to act in certain ways.<sup>4</sup> In particular, basic concern for others' neediness rationalizes and is manifested in more specific inclinations to aid others in certain ways in certain kinds of circumstances. I will call such specific standing commitments *personal policies*, in contrast to the deeper and vaguer "underlying dispositions" which are the immediate subject of the Principle of Sympathy. Clearly, different people can express the same underlying responsiveness to neediness through different sets of personal policies. Thus, some are inclined to contribute to cancer research, while others, whose basic concern with human neediness is the same, are inclined to contribute to the relief of hunger.

#### A MODERATE DUTY

The Principle of Sacrifice only led to the radical conclusion in light of assessments of the moral significance of costs. Similarly, the impact of Sympathy on obligatory beneficence will depend on what counts as worsening someone's life. If these assessments are compatible with the judgments, on reflection, of most of us, as Singer's project requires, then the outcome is an intermediate position, in which it is typically wrong to fill vast closets with designer clothes in a world in which many must dress in rags, but not wrong occasionally to purchase a designer-label shirt that is especially stylish and, though not outlandishly expensive, more expensive than neat, plain alternatives.

Additional responsiveness to others' neediness worsens someone's life by depriving him of adequate resources to pursue, enjoyably and well, a worthwhile goal with which he is intelligently identified and from which he could not readily detach. By "a goal with which someone

4. See, for example, Harry Frankfurt, "The Importance of What We Care About" (1982) in his *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Michael Bratman, "Reflection, Planning, and Temporally Extended Agency," *Philosophical Review* 109 (2000): 35–61.

identifies," I mean a basic interest that gives point and value to specific choices and plans. Such a constituent of someone's personality might be part of her description of "the sort of person I am." Suppose her affirmation of a goal in such a self-portrayal would properly be unapologetic. Given her other goals and capacities, her attachment to this goal is an interest that enriches her life if she can pursue it well. Then it is, for that person, a worthwhile goal.

On certain puritanical conceptions of what goals are worthwhile, no goal requiring the occasional acquisition of a luxury or frill should be affirmed without apology; every such goal ought to be condemned as a source of corruption rather than enrichment. But these are minority doctrines, not elements of the ordinary moral thinking to which Singer appeals. In ordinary assessments, my worthwhile goals include the goal of presenting myself to others in a way that expresses my own aesthetic sense and engages in the fun of mutual aesthetic recognition. I need not apologize for being the sort of person who exercises his aesthetic sense and social interest in these ways. My life is enriched, not stultified by this interest, given my other interests and capacities. And to pursue this goal enjoyably and well, I must occasionally purchase a luxury or frill, namely, some stylish clothing, rather than a less expensive, plain alternative. Similarly, I could not pursue, enjoyably and well, my worthwhile goal of eating in a way that explores a variety of interesting aesthetic and cultural possibilities if I never ate in nice restaurants; and I could not adequately fulfill my worthwhile goal of enjoying the capacity of great composers and performers to exploit nuances of timbre and texture to powerful aesthetic effect without buying more than minimal stereo equipment. So I do not violate Sympathy in occasionally purchasing these luxuries and frills.<sup>5</sup>

Granted, others' lives are illuminated, as least as brightly, by the pursuit of less expensive goals than my goals of sartorial expression,

5. In these cases, a goal consists of doing well in certain activities. But in general, I intend "goal" broadly, to include the full range of ways of doing well, including doing well in relationships one values and in expressing traits one values. One worthwhile trait that virtually all of us value is relaxed openness to occasional harmless indulgences that do not promote the goals that structure our lives as a whole by focussing our strivings. So sufficient success in "just this once" choices contributes to our sufficiently successful pursuit of our goals in the relevant broad sense, even though it departs from a narrower goal-directedness. (I am indebted to a comment by an Editor of *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, which revealed the importance of this distinction.)

gustatory savoring, and music appreciation. Perhaps I could have identified with their less expensive goals, if helped to do so at an early age, so that these would have been the goals giving point and value to my choices. However, since the Principle of Sympathy regulates my duty of beneficence by what threatens to worsen my own life, the limits of my duty are set by the demands of the worthwhile goals with which I could now readily identify. For if someone cannot readily identify with less demanding goals, the possibility that they might have been his does not determine what would actually worsen his life. Many poor people in the United States would not be burdened by their poverty if, through some project of self-transformation, they made their life-goals similar enough to well-adjusted hermit monks' and nuns'. This does not entail that their lives are not worse because of their poverty.

In general, in order to respect others, one need not be prepared to do violence to who one is, radically changing one's worthwhile goals in order to be a more productive satisfier of others' urgent needs. Just as parents have a prerogative, within limits, to try to pass on their way of life to their children, I can reasonably reject a rule that requires me to end the continuing presence of my current personality in my own life even though my goals are worthwhile. This prerogative of continuity does not just reflect costs of disruption, assessed, like moving expenses, apart from the personal discontinuity itself. I need not take a pill, with no side-effects, that will give me a new outlook that would lead me to join an ascetic monastic order after donating my savings to worthy causes, even if I have reached a point at which this change of course would be my most effective way of contributing to human well-being.

Even though Sympathy permits lots of nonaltruistic spending that Sacrifice would forbid, it still requires significant giving from most of the nonpoor. The underlying goals to which most of us who are not poor are securely attached leave room for this giving: we could pursue these goals enjoyably and well and fulfill our other responsibilities, while giving significant amounts to the needy. This is, then, our duty, according to Sympathy. Indeed, this principle preserves some of the critical edge of the radical conclusion, since people are prone to exaggerate risks of self-worsening. It is hard to avoid overrating what merely frustrates, blowing it up into something that worsens one's life. It is extremely difficult to avoid excessive anxieties about the future that make insignificant risks of self-worsening seem significant. It is easy to convince oneself that one

cannot readily detach from a goal that one could actually slough off with little effort, developing or strengthening cheaper interests instead. Because of these enduring pressures to misapply the Principle of Sympathy, it is a constant struggle to live up to its demands.

Admittedly, the demands of Sympathy are sometimes lower because someone cannot readily detach from an exorbitantly expensive goal that most of us lack or could readily do without. Perhaps some people are like Louis, in Ronald Dworkin's parable of expensive tastes.<sup>6</sup> What they can ultimately care about is dominated by an extremely expensive, worthwhile goal of ultra-refined savoring of food and drink meriting such sensory discrimination. On account of a sufficiently strong attachment to such a goal, someone might need to retain much more than he otherwise would to avoid worsening his life. But although Sympathy reduces the demands of general beneficence in such cases, it does not coddle high-fliers in ways that violate ordinary moral convictions. For it does not make someone's secure attachment to a worthwhile exorbitant goal a reason why others should, if necessary, help this person pursue his exorbitant goal enjoyably and well. A middle-income Louis would need more than he has to pursue his underlying goals enjoyably and well, but this does not make him needy *simpliciter*, in the sphere of those with whom Sympathy is concerned.

#### ULTIMATE CONCERNS AND RELEVANT LIMITS

Because I am seeking a principle allowing consumption that Singer would forbid, I have emphasized the relevance of costly personal goals to obligatory beneficence, according to the Principle of Sympathy. But the incremental nature of this principle, its focus on worsening rather than some absolute threshold, might still seem to generate Singer's radical conclusion, in the end. After all, at any level of monthly giving above the level of material deprivation, if anyone asks herself, "Would giving a dollar more each month impose a significant risk of making my life worse than it would be if I did not give this little bit more?", the answer is "No." So her underlying responsiveness to neediness would

6. See Ronald Dworkin, "What Is Equality? Part I: Equality of Welfare," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1981): 228–40 (also in Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000], pp. 48–59).



seem to be less than the Principle of Sympathy demands, until she has brought herself to the margin of genuine material deprivation, which is all that Singer's radical conclusion requires.<sup>7</sup>

On the face of it, this argument is an exasperating trick, like a child's recurrent objection, "You're being too strict. What difference will it make if I stay up ten minutes more?" The trick is the confusion of underlying dispositions with personal policies that might express them. In typical cases, how kind one is, how concerned one is for neediness as such, does not depend on whether one gives a dollar more or less a month. Underlying concern for neediness, at the level of what is ultimately important to a person, is not that fine-grained. By the same token, a situation in which greater underlying concern would impose a significant risk of worsening one's life will be a situation in which one could not have a policy of giving a *significantly* greater amount without imposing this risk.

What makes insistence on the coarse-grainedness of underlying attitudes seem, nonetheless, an inadequate response to the argument from the trivial burden of giving a little bit more is the naturalness of being drawn to more giving by the thought, "Giving even one more dollar a month would save innocent children from desperate peril," and the typical absurdity of reassuring oneself that one's unrevised practice is all right by the further thought, "But after all, underlying concern for neediness is not subject to such fine distinctions." This is an absurd response to nearly all actual nagging self-doubts, among affluent people, when they read appeals from Oxfam and other groups noting how much difference a small contribution would make. But nearly all of us affluent people are aware that substantially greater helping of the needy would not significantly risk worsening our lives—or, in any case, Oxfam appeals trigger such awareness. In this context, the thought based on the fact about a little bit more that ought to prompt more giving is: "I should be doing lots more, but temptations abound and worries about what I may need are hard to keep in perspective. Still, without struggle and anxiety, I could do this little bit of all that I should be doing, and it would still do much good."

7. At the end of "International Aid and the Scope of Kindness," *Ethics* 105 (1994): 126f., Garrett Cullity offers a similar argument as the most powerful basis for insisting that a duty of kindness requires a "huge" sacrifice by the affluent in response to worldwide suffering. He says that this argument can be blocked, but not by any means as yet presented in the literature.

Suppose, in contrast, that someone can assure herself that her ongoing pattern of giving adequately expresses her underlying concern for neediness and that the significantly greater giving that would express greater underlying concern would impose a significant risk of worsening her life. After reading an Oxfam mailing describing the relief provided by a small donation beyond her pattern, she could, cogently, tell herself, "I could have arrived at a slightly larger aid budget, but this slight difference would not have made me someone with greater underlying concern for the needy. Underlying concern for the needy is not subject to such fine distinctions. Since I am sufficiently well-disposed in my underlying attitude toward the needy, I do not have to give a little bit more, through extra donations on this scale."<sup>8</sup>

In addition to evading the incremental argument for excessive sacrifice, emphasis on basic concern for neediness also avoids a rigidity in the setting of thresholds of sacrifice that could require too little, in the face of changed needs. Liam Murphy asks people who set a threshold on mandatory giving to "suppose that the amount of good there is to be done in the world increases dramatically. Catastrophe on an unprecedented scale hits some part of the world, and many millions will die unless *all* of us in the industrial West give up a great deal of money over a period of years. Are we content to say that once the upper limit to demands is set . . . no change in the circumstances, no amount of increase in the amount of good to be done, can increase the demands of beneficence?"<sup>9</sup>

This is an appropriate warning of the moral danger of any personal policy setting a moderate limit to costs of aid that is insensitive to changes in needs. However, the Principle of Sympathy is about the basic concern for neediness that characterizes a whole personality, regulating personal policies in the course of a life. Quite generally, the strength of a concern at this level involves a commitment to sacrifice within a

8. This is not to say that there can never be an obligation to do a little bit more to provide for others' needs even though one's basic concern for neediness meets the demands of Sympathy. For example (as an Editor of *Philosophy & Public Affairs* has pointed out), a scientist might be obliged to check a calculation one more time, even if her life is made worse by the scrupulousness that leads to such rechecking. However, this obligation will reflect the special responsibilities of her role, not her duty of general beneficence, regardless of special relationships.

9. Liam Murphy, *Moral Demands in Nonideal Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 66ff.

normally expected range in response to normally expected opportunities to protect from peril *and* a commitment to greater sacrifice in connection with circumstances of extreme peril that are not expected normally to occur. Someone's underlying concern that opera thrive in her community, which was previously expressed in a small donation, does not become greater when the local opera house burns down and she responds with a specially large donation. Perhaps I would not have become someone's friend if I thought that he would routinely be in need of support, and my inclination to help him, while he is doing fairly well, is not very demanding. Still, the same underlying concern for my friend could lead me to do a great deal more if he were struck by an unexpected catastrophe. A "fairweather friend" is no friend at all. Similarly, a reasonably beneficent friend of humanity, no more disposed to aid than Sympathy requires, may have to do much more than usual to avoid being a fairweather friend of humanity in the face of Murphy's "catastrophe on an unprecedented scale."

#### GROUNDING SYMPATHY IN RESPECT

Some philosophical systems, such as utilitarianism, require a grounding of the specific on the general of the following kind: any specific moral duty is entailed by a comprehensive, determinate principle of duty together with a description of relevant nonmoral facts. Most of us do not require a grounding of this kind. Yet ordinary morality is not just a collection of principles governing specific fields of conduct, such as responsiveness to neediness. In addition to our inclinations to affirm specific principles and judgments of particular cases, most of us are committed to vague yet comprehensive principles of moral duty. For example, in ordinary moral thinking, a choice is wrong if and only if it could not be made under the circumstances by someone displaying equal respect for all persons; equivalently, a choice is wrong if and only if it is incompatible with the ascription of equal worth to everyone's life. These are vague precepts, in need of further interpretation, like crucial precepts in most countries' constitutions, such as the guarantee of "equal protection of the laws" in the U.S. Constitution. Still, they are important constraints. Like a responsible Supreme Court Justice determining whether a law is constitutional, a morally responsible person will seek specific principles of obligation that satisfy demands imposed by the best interpretation of

the general precepts, the one that best fits the most secure specific judgments.

The Principle of Sympathy is an adequate expression of the fundamental general perspective of moral equality. On the one hand, a person who would not display greater basic concern for neediness even if this imposed no significant risk of worsening his life and did not detract from his responsibilities treats others' lives as less important than his own. On the other hand, someone whose responsiveness to neediness as such is as limited as Sympathy permits can appreciate the equal worth of everyone's life and show equal respect for all. "I show appreciation of the equal worth of everyone's life through sensitivity to others' neediness as such, but stop short of a sensitivity that would impose a significant risk of worsening my life if I live up to my other responsibilities" is not an internally inconsistent self-portrayal.

Of course, these claims require further scrutiny in light of alternative interpretations of the fundamental moral perspective. If equal respect for all required equal concern for all, then the Principle of Sympathy would be much too permissive. I show much less concern for imperiled children in developing countries than for myself when I spend money on stylish clothes, nice restaurant meals and excellent stereo equipment that could be used to save a child from early death. But equal respect does not entail equal concern. Because we are rightly wary of giving too much weight to our own interests (recall the worries about misapplying Sympathy), the difference between equal respect and equal concern is clearest when a valuable special relationship to another leads to special concern. I do not regard the life of the girl across the street as less valuable than the life of my daughter, but I am not equally concerned for her; I am not inclined to do as much for her when she is just as needy as my daughter, even if her parents have reached their limit.

Singer himself could and does endorse particular attitudes of unequal concern to this extent: such an attitude is a desirable feature of a person if it leads her more effectively to contribute to overall well-being, the ultimate goal (in his view) of impartial concern.<sup>10</sup> In a highly unequal world with effective international aid agencies, Sympathy permits attitudes of partiality that exceed this limit. So, if the moral acceptability of

10. See, for example, Peter Singer, *One World* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 154–67.

an attitude of partiality depended on that instrumental role in promoting well-being, the Principle of Sympathy would be excluded from a morality of equal respect. But in ordinary moral thinking, the compatibility of an attitude of unequal concern with equal respect for all does not depend on that role. If my daughter became a salesperson and I faced the ghastly choice of saving one of two people from a burning building, her or a surgeon with exceptional life-saving skills, my attachment would be responsible for a choice that reduces my contribution to overall well-being in the course of my life, but the choice would be compatible with equal respect for all.<sup>11</sup> Nor does the compatibility with equal respect of an attitude of unequal concern depend on its being likely to maximize production of well-being in foreseeable circumstances (as opposed to such ghastly surprises as the forced choice in front of the burning building). Perhaps a doctor working in a chronically understaffed inner city emergency room would be apt to do more good in foreseeable circumstances if he weakened his attachment to his family, embracing a workoholic way of life in which saving lives is the central motivation. Still, he does not show that he regards the lives of people in the inner city as less valuable than others' if he sustains and expresses his attachment to his family by quitting to set up a suburban practice, when he sees that his family life is in jeopardy because he is returning home numb after long hours of lifesaving work.

In sum, if the comprehensive principles of moral obligation are interpreted in light of ordinary, secure convictions concerning partiality, the equal respect that determines moral duties is not itself an attitude of equal concern and does not require certification by a test of general benefit. But is the specific sort of unequal concern that Sympathy permits compatible with equal respect for all? The plausibility of this claim is strengthened by further scrutiny of valuable special relationships, in particular, by reflection on the parallel between the non-self-

11. William Godwin, who framed the original version of this incendiary thought experiment, believed that he ought to let his wife burn if her expected contribution to the general good were humble and he could thereby save someone who was writing a highly edifying novel. This is an appalling episode in the philosophical defense of impartial concern, from the ordinary moral perspective that I am describing. See Godwin, *Enquiry concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, ed. F. E. Priestley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946), v. I, pp. 127f., v. III, p. 146.

worsening rule and prerogatives that ordinary morality securely connects to parental nurturance.<sup>12</sup>

Consider situations in which I could contribute resources to activities of my daughter that might, alternatively, help needier people to whom I have no valuable special relationship, to whom I have made no commitment, and whose needs I do not encounter in a special circumstance meriting special concern. It would be wrong for me invariably to devote the resources to my daughter in this kind of situation. This would involve my never giving to charity if I have a daughter (utterly different from my actual daughter) who always wants a new expensive trinket. But if greater responsiveness on my part to neediness as such were to pose a significant risk of worsening my daughter's life, then I do no wrong in failing to be more responsive.

The threat of worsening is most important, and the compatibility of partiality with equal respect is clearest, when doing less for a dependent child risks depriving her of access to extremely important capabilities. I do not manifest unequal respect or show that I attribute less worth to some lives than to others when I use money to pay for an excellent college education for my daughter, rather than not doing so and risking worsening her life; yet I know that the money I could save by insisting that she go to a much cheaper college that is not so good could be used by Oxfam to save many children from early death. But reasons for special concern need not be that strong to sustain a prerogative of partiality. Suppose that my daughter has identified with the humble but worthwhile sartorial goal that I previously described, and can no more readily detach from it than most adults can. She has become her own person in this and other ways, although she will remain a financially dependent person for several crucial years, most of her childhood. Her life will be worse, in ordinary moral thinking, if I do not provide her with the means to pursue this humbler worthwhile goal enjoyably and well. Because of this, I do no wrong in providing a corresponding clothing allowance. Alternatively, by financing nothing more than neat, warm, plain clothing and donating the savings to an aid agency, I could prevent the early

12. Such reflections combine two central topics of Samuel Scheffler's work, the prerogative of self-concern and the special concern for others that expresses valuable relationships to them. See, for example, *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982 [rev. ed. 1994]); "Relationships and Responsibilities," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 26 (1997): 189–209.

deaths of several other children. But my choice to make it possible for my child to exercise her sense of style as she grows up expresses an appropriate valuing of our special relationship, and not the horrendous view that her life is worth more than the life of a child in a village in Mali. (On the scale of early death, the badness of plain dressing for a typical child with typical sartorial goals is not so different from the badness of going to a cheap mediocre college.)

The subject of Sympathy is a person's relationship to himself, as provider of his own resources. Of course, the sort of thing that a competent adult seeks, as a means of pursuing his goals, is, on the whole, very different from what a parent would provide to a dependent child. But in other ways, his relationship to himself is quite similar. He is his own most intimate dependent, profoundly reliant on his own efforts to provide needed resources and guidance, just as a child depends on a nurturant adult. And he has the primary responsibility for his life's going well, just as parents have the primary responsibility for their young children's lives. In ordinary moral thinking, there is a prerogative to express one's valuing of a parental relationship to one's child in special concern for her, so long as greater sensitivity to others' neediness as such would impose a significant risk of worsening her life. If so, it is hard to see why this same prerogative would not govern one's relationship to that other intimate dependent for whom one is responsible, oneself. Here, the avoidance of arbitrary distinctions, much emphasized by Singer and his allies as forcing the shift to radical beneficence, favors the relatively permissive Principle of Sympathy.

#### REJECTING SINGER'S PRINCIPLE

If the Principle of Sympathy is compatible with equal respect, then Singer's Principle of Sacrifice should be rejected. Given ordinary judgments of what worsens a life, judgments that Singer's argument does not criticize, the crucial difference between the principles is what gets scrutinized: the impact, on particular occasions, of particular choices, or the impact of an underlying attitude on a life as a whole. On particular occasions on which donating the difference would prevent something very bad from happening, the Principle of Sacrifice only permits the more expensive purchase of a luxury or frill if choosing the cheaper, plain alternative would constitute a morally significant sacrifice. There is no

occasion or small bunch of occasions on which my declining an opportunity to buy a more luxurious item, buying a plain, cheaper one instead, constitutes a morally significant loss. After all, such a choice never makes my life worse; at most, it involves mere frustration. So, because of the opportunity presented by aid agencies, Sacrifice dictates abstinence. And what prohibits luxurious purchases on all particular occasions prohibits them, period. This would make it impossible for a typical, relatively affluent person to pursue, enjoyably and well, worthwhile goals to which he is securely attached, such as the sartorial goal I described. So observance of Sacrifice would have an impact on someone's life as a whole in virtue of which it is to be rejected as too demanding, if Sympathy is right. No purchase prohibited by Singer's principle is morally significant, but the loss imposed by enduring commitment to the principle is, i.e., it is the sort of loss that can make it all right to embrace a less demanding commitment, which would otherwise be morally inadequate. (Although I lack the space to examine the general role of dispositions in morality, it is worth noting the good fit of a principle scrutinizing the impact of underlying concerns and enduring commitments on a person's life with a morality based on an enduring, underlying attitude of equal respect, governing a morally responsible person's life.)<sup>13</sup>

Of course, the thought that a donation could relieve desperate needs does, properly, lead people not to make a luxurious purchase on partic-

13. Rule-utilitarianism provides an alternative way of avoiding excessive demands by giving priority to the whole impact of general constraints. But the rule-utilitarian project of basing moral obligation on the rules whose general inculcation would be optimific has further liabilities. The typical positive impact of personal attachments on the tendency to do good, which is the source of rule-utilitarian limits on duties of general beneficence, does not provide a plausible reason why someone such as the emergency-room doctor I described, whose attachments, atypically, reduce his tendency to do good, has, like the rest of us, a prerogative to cultivate these attachments. Even putting atypical people to one side, the overall goodness of consequences of implementing alternative norms does not determine the moral significance of actual people's actual attachments. Perhaps the needs of people in the least developed countries are so desperate that overall well-being would be increased if everyone took a pill transforming special attentiveness to the near and dear to impartial benevolence. A parent, child or friend in an affluent country would still be justified in rejecting this transformative project on account of his commitment to his actual relationships. In response, rule-utilitarianism could be mitigated by adding a personal prerogative. Indeed, my arguments for the permissive aspect of Sympathy could be seen as establishing such a prerogative. But if ordinary moral convictions include materials for reconciling this prerogative with equal respect, they also seem to include materials for prohibiting further measures, such as optimific but oppressive divisions of labor, that the hybrid doctrine allows.



ular occasions, even when the purchase would advance a worthwhile goal. The Principle of Sympathy provides a basis for such reasoning, just as much as the Principle of Sacrifice. Recognizing both his inclination to purchase that stylish, somewhat more expensive shirt *and* the troubling possibility of relieving desperate needs by a donation, a conscientious shopper might ask himself whether his life would really be worse if his inclination to spend money on nice clothes were more tightly constrained by concern for neediness. His judgments of his inclinations, under the guidance of Sympathy, might, then, support a decision not to buy that particular luxury on that occasion, for one of the following reasons. Perhaps he realizes that the luxurious purchase would violate a personal policy that is his way of conforming to the demands of Sympathy, say, a policy of only buying fancy clothes on sale and a considerable time after the last such purchase. Then, he ought to stay the course unless other considerations intrude. (An occasional “just this once” departure from his policy might be a means of pursuing the goal of avoiding rigid regimentation. But hasn’t he been using this excuse rather often lately?) Or perhaps he realizes that the luxurious purchase would violate a personal policy that he should adopt, but hasn’t yet, as a means of resisting departures from Sympathy; or he sees that he is simply spending more on nice clothes than he has to in order to avoid worsening his life. Then, in the absence of special considerations (say, a truly once-in-a-lifetime sale), he ought to implement such judgments of inadequate general sensitivity to others’ needs through abstinence and donation now. The appalling ease with which one can submerge insight into one’s deficient concern for neediness is a powerful reason to respond right away to the realization that one is moved by inclinations violating Sympathy.

#### RESCUE AND DISTANCE

Within the circle of ordinary morality, this case for Sympathy is threatened by Singer’s most famous argument, which appeals to very widely shared secure convictions concerning rescue. Singer notes (p. 235) that it is a secure conviction of virtually everyone that if he walks past a shallow pond on his way to give a lecture and sees a toddler drowning, he must wade in and save the child so long as he only incurs a morally insignificant loss, for example, muddied clothes. It would be “grotesque”

to deny this.<sup>14</sup> But by giving to international aid agencies, one can also rescue distant people from peril, for example, children in distant villages imperiled by lack of access to safe water and basic medical care. And someone's life is no less valuable because she is not near. So if we have a duty to prevent something very bad from happening to a nearby toddler at morally insignificant cost, it might seem that we have the same duty of aid to everyone in peril near or far, just as Sacrifice requires. Indeed, similar extrapolation to those near and far of plausible variants of Singer's example would impose even more serious demands than Sacrifice. Suppose Bob is rushing to catch the only flight that will enable him to give the job talk that provides his one remaining realistic prospect of a career in philosophy before he must abandon this life goal; it seems that he must take the time to extract a toddler whom he encounters sinking into quicksand, even if he knows he will miss the flight and may well have to lead a less satisfying life.<sup>15</sup>

Do these arguments succeed in exposing a conflict between Sympathy and secure convictions in ordinary morality, namely, convictions concerning duties of nearby rescue and the fundamental duty to display an equal appreciation of the value of everyone's life? This would certainly be the case if the commitment to moral equality required someone to be sensitive solely to the degree of neediness of others, the extent of her capacity to relieve it, and the cost of the relief, when she chooses whether and how much to help those in dire straits. However, the ordinary construal of equal respect does not impose this requirement: for example, while appreciating the equal worth of everyone's life, one can also be specially responsive to the needs of one's child, friend, or spouse. Of course, in the toddler examples, rescuer and victim are not bound by any special relationship. But even when no special relationship or past interaction is in play, the requirement of sensitivity to neediness, capability, and cost alone oversimplifies most people's conception of equal respect.

According to the argument for Sympathy, appreciation of the equal worth of everyone's life does entail a basic concern for neediness as such.

14. Singer's apt comment in a recent presentation of the argument, *One World*, p. 156.

15. In support of a radical conclusion about donations to lessen the serious suffering of others ("a typical well-off person, like you and me, must give away most of her financial assets, and much of her income"), Peter Unger has appealed to a duty to rescue in an analogous case, involving sacrificed resources for retirement, the Case of Bob's Bugatti. See Unger, *Living High and Letting Die* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 134–39.

For someone who is faithful to this concern, a commitment to aid that does the most to help those in direst need is, as it were, the default personal policy: in allocating the demands of Sympathy, he only departs from it for adequate reasons. However, adequate reasons for departure do not have to appeal to costs or to any especially weighty consideration. The only large charitable bequest in my step-father's will was to help the blind. He was aware that the same donation to the fight against infectious disease in developing countries (the leading worldwide cause of death before the age of five) would have more effectively helped those in direst peril. But he gave to help the blind because his own vision problems made their plight especially poignant to him. In ordinary moral thinking, my step-father's reason was good enough to reconcile his departure from the default policy with equal valuation of everyone's life. (In contrast, a rationale involving contempt for those whose needs he did not serve would have displayed unequal respect, even if the bequest helped those in need.) Similarly, someone who appreciates the equal worth of everyone's life could be specially responsive to urgent needs encountered close at hand because actual presence makes an urgent plight especially vivid and gripping to her. Her allocating aid on the basis of this reason no more expresses devaluing of distant lives than my getting my car's brakes checked once a year expresses contempt for those whom my car approaches eleven months later.

However, appreciation of the diversity of reasons that make special responsiveness all right is only the first step in meeting the challenge of the toddler judgments. More must be done to explain the duties toward the toddlers in a way that fits the case for Sympathy. In ordinary moral thinking, specific, potentially demanding responsiveness to imminent peril encountered close at hand is not just a personal policy compatible with equal respect for all. It is a requirement of equal respect. Yet the case for Sympathy depended on an interpretation of equal respect that might seem too permissive for such a requirement. The concern for neediness as such that equal respect requires was supposed to be an underlying disposition, regulated by its impact on one's life as a whole; the fact that one could relieve a dire burden on a particular occasion at no morally significant cost was not supposed to dictate aid on this occasion. Why, then, does equal respect require responsiveness to urgent peril of those encountered close at hand on the occasion of encounter? Equal respect was supposed to be compatible with unwillingness to display basic

concern for neediness that would impose a significant risk of worsening one's life. Why, then, is Bob required to pull the toddler from the quicksand? If ordinary morality cannot explain the toddler duties *and* Sympathy while answering these questions, then, given the appeal of the toddler judgments, Sympathy is threatened. For (as Shelly Kagan has emphasized in similar contexts) we want our moral principles "to hang together, to be mutually supportive, to be jointly illuminated by the moral concepts to which we appeal."<sup>16</sup> In the absence of an explanation that fits Sympathy, sterner principles of general beneficence, based on more demanding construals of equal respect, are waiting in the wings, to explain the toddler duties as specific consequences of their general demands.

To meet this challenge, I will begin by describing how reasons shared by everyone who equally respects all lead to a policy of special responsiveness to those encountered closeby in urgent peril, even though concern for neediness as such is governed by Sympathy's occasion-neutral requirement. Then, vindicating and extending assumptions in this rationale, I will consider how demanding a policy of nearby rescue a morally responsible person must adopt. Here, I will argue that appropriate deliberations over the burdens of requirements of aid would lead everyone who equally respects all to adopt a policy of nearby rescue stringent enough to require rescue by Bob, even though such deliberations do not dictate basic concern for neediness as such beyond the demands of Sympathy. My goal in both parts of the argument is to show that an appropriate duty of rescue exists given a normal background of human interaction, which this duty, like virtually all definite duties, presupposes.

In the normal background of human interaction, at least three mutually reinforcing considerations, shared by all who appreciate the equal worth of everyone's life, are compelling grounds for adopting a policy of special responsiveness to those in urgent peril who are near. First, any human who is, in other ways, disposed to display equal respect for all finds in herself a strong impulse to come to the aid of those whom she encounters in urgent peril close at hand. Assuming that she has no adequate reason to rein in this impulse as too demanding (an assumption that I will make in this paragraph and argue for later on), she ought to

16. See Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 14.

embrace it as a personal policy. Equal respect for all requires responsiveness to neediness that does not impose a serious risk of worsening one's life, and it is very hard to live up to this demand. It would be the height of arrogance to restrain a powerful impulse that helps to fulfill this imperative, if there is no reason to reject the impulse as excessively demanding. In the second place, the prevalent special inclination to respond to nearby calamity with aid plays a distinctive coordinative role in advancing the general project of alleviating neediness that Sympathy imposes on us all: if people take on a special personal responsibility to aid someone in urgent peril encountered close at hand, then the probability of disastrous delay in meeting urgent needs is much less than it would be if no such specific allocation of responsibility were prevalent.<sup>17</sup> An otherwise responsible person who lacks this special tendency takes advantage of others' having it, in advancing a cause he shares, while lacking an adequate reason to abstain. Finally, the expectation that others who encounter us would help us if we needed to be rescued from imminent peril makes us much less alone, much more at home in our social world. Even if I were guaranteed not to need help in emergencies from mere passersby—say, because official emergency services were so wonderfully effective—I would be profoundly deprived of fellowship if those whom I encountered typically had no such inclination to help me if need be. (We find it chilling if someone “looks straight through us,” even if we know this person is intensely active in relieving neediness worldwide.) So deep social interests of any self-respecting person are served by the prevalent inclination to help those encountered in distress; if she does not share it, she takes advantage of others' good will, not joining in a stance whose prevalence vitally concerns her, while lacking an adequate reason to abstain.

Of course, neediness would be relieved even more effectively if the inclination to nearby rescue were just one consequence of a demanding inclination to relieve dire burdens whenever one is in a good position to do so; and human fellowship would be even greater if the strong inclination to help an encountered victim were part of a strong inclination

17. In “The Possibility of Special Duties,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16 (1986): 651–76, Philip Pettit and Robert Goodin emphasize the coordinative benefits of widely shared norms allocating special responsibilities. However, they are not concerned with the moral status of closeness, and they deploy a rule-consequentialist framework that would yield Singer's radical conclusion in current global circumstances of neediness and inequality.

to help on any occasion on which one is aware of an opportunity to relieve distress. But these are not prevalent inclinations, actually benefiting all, and a proposal that we should all be so responsive could be rejected by some who have equal respect for all, as imposing a significant risk of worsening their lives.

(What if we lacked an inclination to help those in urgent peril encountered close at hand? If our capacities and interests were otherwise the same, each of us, if morally responsible, would have reasons to want all to share in such an inclination, in order to coordinate the advancement of Sympathy and satisfy the interest in fellowship. Such an aspiration provides a morally responsible person with a reason to be a good model and act in accordance with the inclination so long as the costs of doing so when others do not are not excessive. This is a weaker reason than the avoidance of parasitism, and noncompliance by others would increase net expected costs. Still, at least some specific concern for those closeby would be a duty. As we shall see, an even more radically altered world, in which interests and capacities are changed, could break the tie between nearness and duty entirely.)

These reasons for responding to nearby perils on the occasion of encounter will only make a specific policy of special responsiveness compelling for all if no one who respects all can reject the policy as too demanding. It might seem that a view of equal respect requiring responsiveness so demanding that Bob must save the toddler is incompatible with the previous case for Sympathy. But there is no such conflict if burdens are appropriately assessed.

In asking whether a choice would be morally wrong, one faces a question of principles. In effect, one asks whether the choice would be permitted by a system of principles that no one, while equally respecting all, could reject as a moral code for everyone to follow. The choice is wrong just in case it would be ruled out by any such moral code.<sup>18</sup> If the toddler

18. This formulation further develops the descriptions of moral wrongness on which I have already relied, making explicit some features that are especially salient in the judgment of Bob. As I noted in the course of arguing for Sympathy as against Sacrifice, equal respect for all is most plausibly viewed as an enduring personality trait, specified by describing enduring commitments that guide particular choices and reasons as circumstances arise. Also, if one respects all, one will commit oneself to ultimate principles of moral obligation that are the same as those incumbent on others, despite different ramifications in different circumstances: the denial that one is on a par with others to this extent expresses contempt ("I don't have to observe the standards that bind the likes of you") or condescension ("I am made of finer moral stuff and do wrong unless I follow a higher standard.")

judgments are right, then no one who respects all could reject a principle along the following lines:

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

The worry is that the arguments for Sympathy create a need to amend Nearby Rescue with the following proviso, which exempts Bob: “unless rescue imposes a significant risk of worsening one’s life.” However, this worry reflects a misconstrual of the deliberations over costs that ought to guide the acceptance and rejection of a moral code. These deliberations involve individuals’ reflections, *ex ante*, on expected costs to them of general observance of alternative codes.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately for Bob, a moral principle that he could not reasonably reject in the relevant, *ex ante* deliberations has come due in circumstances that were not to be expected.

In negotiations over the terms of a particular joint project, each party’s particular current circumstances determine what terms she could reject while showing equal respect for all (perhaps rejecting the terms “only for now, because of the fix I am in”). But we are trying to determine what personal concerns are an acceptable basis for rejecting or accepting a moral code that would be in the background of responses to particular current circumstances; this is the sort of enduring commitment that a person of moral integrity brings into interactions with others, as they arise. Here, greater abstraction from current particular circumstances is appropriate. The rejection of a proposed moral principle as too demanding should be tied to the assessment of likely costs and benefits in light of the background of resources and underlying goals with which the agent approaches particular circumstances and the *ex ante* probabilities

19. If extensive noncompliance is actually expected, further deliberations may be needed, along the lines at which I briefly gestured in the parenthetical discussion of a world lacking the pervasive inclination to aid those encountered in dire peril. Even in these further deliberations, the relevant costs are *ex ante* expectations. In the case at hand, inclinations corresponding to Nearby Rescue are sufficiently prevalent that no such complication is needed.

of the various particular circumstances in which the sharing of the proposed commitment would affect her life. Decisions made behind a veil of ignorance blocking all awareness of personal resources and concerns would abstract even more strenuously from full knowledge of current circumstances. But the requirement of this much abstraction would impose principles of moral obligation that can, in fact, be rejected, without unequal respect, if previous arguments are right. The intermediate level of abstraction further specifies the morally decisive deliberations.

In the relevant *ex ante* reflections, Bob would note that the Principle of Nearby Rescue may require him to give up a great deal. But the chance of his being called on, through encounter with someone in imminent severe peril, is quite small. The costs of his monitoring his circumstances and conduct to insure commitment to the Principle of Nearby Rescue are exceptionally small, adding nothing significant to his normal attention to his immediate environment. Moreover, from the appropriate *ex ante* perspective, Bob must consider the possible consequences for him of general acceptance or nonacceptance of the Principle of Nearby Rescue if he should be the one in dire straits: in such circumstances, he obviously has much to gain from a demanding general commitment that binds people closeby, the people who, in general, most readily notice such peril and initiate aid.

The result of these facts in the background of the relevant *ex ante* assessment will be a no more than trivial net risk that his life will be worsened by participation in general acceptance of the Principle of Nearby Rescue. Thus, in the relevant assessment of moral codes, Bob could not reject the principle as excessively burdensome while treating others' lives as no less valuable than his own.

Of course, Bob could be any of us. Facts about everyone's capacities and potential needs make the expected net costs of the Principle of Nearby Rescue no more than trivial, from everyone's relevant *ex ante* perspective.<sup>20</sup> So, given the reasons for special attentiveness to closeness

20. "Nil," as opposed to "no more than trivial," would be an exaggeration. Some people, after all, are less vulnerable than most to catastrophes creating a need for rescue. So they have some net risk of serious loss, even from an appropriate *ex ante* perspective. The existence of such people seems an insuperable obstacle to grounding Nearby Rescue on a morality of mutual benefit. As Liam Murphy notes, in criticizing efforts to base restricted principles of obligatory rescue on "a mutually beneficial *ex ante* bargain," "a well-guarded



that were previously rehearsed, someone who equally values everyone's life must adopt this principle, as a basis for responding to neediness close at hand. From the relevant perspective, it meets the same test of demandingness that made Sympathy the right principle to govern general beneficence: it does not impose a significant risk of worsening one's life.<sup>21</sup>

Like virtually any definite principle of obligation, Nearby Rescue presupposes normal background circumstances of human interaction. A radical change in this background could qualitatively change ex ante expectations of the costs and benefits of adherence to Nearby Rescue. These departures deprive Nearby Rescue of moral force in ways that confirm the crucial status of such expectations in ordinary moral thinking about rescue. If encounters with those in imminent peril were as common as encounters with those in severe financial need or those in nonimminent physical peril, the expected net burden of rescue could be substantial. Similarly, the monitoring of what is nearby would be burdensome and would not be very useful for nearby victims in a future society in which people lead their lives with eyes fixed on computer screens and keyboards grafted onto their bodies, with only the most awkward and peripheral awareness of their immediate noncomputer environments. Just as the explanation of Bob's duty would lead one to expect, potential rescuers in these background circumstances do not seem to be bound by the most demanding constraints of Nearby Rescue, even though they would still be bound by Sympathy. Nearby Rescue

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billionaire who never . . . takes personal risks . . . might well be called on in emergencies . . . while his chances of needing a stranger's assistance are close to zero" (Murphy, *Moral Demands in Nonideal Theory*, p. 158). However, in the morality of equal respect, the role of reflection on the ex ante net expected costs of Nearby Rescue is not to establish universal mutual benefit, but to show that someone who regards others' lives as no less valuable than his own would not regard Nearby Rescue as too demanding, given the triviality of the ex ante risks it imposes.

21. There are, of course, people who respect all who would prefer that everyone had stronger commitments to rescue and beneficence than Nearby Rescue and Sympathy describe. These are people whose vulnerability is great and whose local sources of aid are meager. But they will hardly be opposed to the view that everyone should be at least as giving as Sympathy and Nearby Rescue require. Beyond this point, the relevant unanimity ends, and, with it, moral obligation. In the relevant moral reasoning, prohibitions are established and, then, permission follows according to the rule, "What is not prohibited is allowed." Indeed, someone does not respect all if he insists on a moral code with constraints that some could refuse to impose on themselves while respecting all.

binds agents who are embodied, aware, capable, and emotionally sensitive in the actual human way, in environments in which the propensity to encounter dire emergencies lies in a normal range.

#### BEYOND NEARNESS

Arguing for a distance-neutral morality of aid, Peter Unger has described a case in which rescue seems to be obligatory even though the one in peril is not close by: you might be driving in the countryside in a CB-equipped car, and receive a plea for rescue from someone stranded ten miles away, who will lose his mangled, bleeding leg unless taken to a hospital. You would be wrong not to save the one in peril, Unger says, even if you foresee that his bleeding will cause five thousand dollars' worth of damage to your car's leather upholstery.<sup>22</sup> This judgment seems to undermine the moderate view of beneficence that I have defended. For all the morally relevant factors mentioned in the Principle of Nearby Rescue are present in Unger's example, except for closeness, and no other morally relevant factor seems, at first glance, to be in play. If the absence of closeness does not eliminate the traveler's obligation, shouldn't the Principle of Nearby Rescue be rejected in favor of a principle requiring costly aid to those in dire peril regardless of whether they are close?

Rejection of closeness as irrelevant to duties of rescue would be a misguided response to Unger's example. Rather, the example shows that in the absence of closeness other relevant special features of a circumstance of urgent need can also give rise to a definite, significantly demanding obligation to aid. A plea for help from someone who shares a sparsely inhabited territory is a circumstance of this kind, for reasons resembling those that establish the duty of nearby rescue.

Unger seems to have in mind a traveler in a sparsely settled countryside. A rule requiring people who are in a sparsely settled territory to respond to the discovery of someone's urgent peril elsewhere in this territory, even in a distant part, is not excessively demanding. The odds of being singled out as a source of rescue are low, while the probability that one's nearest potential rescuer will be distant, if one is oneself in peril,

22. See Unger, *Living High and Letting Die*, pp. 34f. Some previous stage-setting is on pp. 24f.

is high. So the net expected burden of adherence to a shared code including this rule is trivial, at most. In contrast, in a densely populated territory in which such distant pleas are frequent, a requirement of aid in response to a distant plea would be much more demanding. And there does not seem to be a similarly strong duty to respond to every such plea in this different sort of circumstance. Fortunately, fellow-residents of a densely populated place normally are provided with facilities including public employees responsible for rescue. But if such facilities are absent (say, because some strange calamity has befallen the public employees), someone is not morally obliged to respond to every overheard cross-town CB plea for rescue, even when rescue would not place her in serious physical jeopardy.

Granted, a form of responsiveness to need that is not excessively demanding can merely be one of the personal policies through which the duty of Sympathy may be discharged. For it to be obligatory, there must be reasons why this specific form of responsiveness should be in everyone's package of beneficent policies. In cases such as Unger's, considerations reminiscent of the rationale for Nearby Rescue provide such reasons. We are drawn to help when we become aware that someone is in urgent physical distress, that we are in a good position to relieve it, and that no one else is apt to respond. This inclination is a psychological resource for holding oneself to the demands of Sympathy; so one should not restrain this inclination in ways that are not necessary to avoid excessive demands. In addition, if the traveler were not responsive to urgent pleas in sparsely populated territories, he would fail to take part in a strategy for allocating responsibility that advances Sympathy's project of relieving suffering, and he would lack an adequate reason to abstain. Finally, just as his interest in fellowship leads him to value the normal inclination to nearby rescue, he should cherish normal dispositions to respond to urgent expressions of distress with aid, as valuable aspects of human relatedness, valuable apart from their pay-off in aid actually given. Regardless of how often people benefit from rescue, the capacity of communication to summon aid makes communication more valuable, an appropriate antidote to loneliness, not just a vehicle of information.

Of course, in the mail and from television, a person in a rich country might very well frequently receive a plea to help desperate people in poor countries, in a communication of a kind that could generate a duty

to help if it linked the traveler and the victim in Unger's example. But relatively affluent people can reject a moral code requiring response to all such pleas, while showing equal respect for all. Given global inequality, poverty and communication, their acceptance of this code would impose a significant risk of worsening their lives, when assessed from the relevant *ex ante* perspective.

#### BEYOND BENEFICENCE

In Singer's effort to derive the radical from the obvious, a principle of general beneficence, regardless of special relationships, circumstances or shared histories, is the immediate source of the radical demand. So, in response, I have concentrated on the defense of a rival principle of general beneficence, only defending further, special requirements as needed to cope with examples meant to undermine it. However, in ordinary morality, duties to give up advantages in the interests of others respond to a great variety of special relationships to them, not just intimate relationships, such as parenting or friendship, but relatively impersonal relationships, such as fellow-citizenship. Might it be that current relationships between relatively affluent people in developed countries and needy people in developing countries generate extensive obligations to transfer benefits, in addition to the demands of Sympathy? Poor people in developing countries seem to hold this view. Their most insistent plea seems to be "Stop taking advantage of us," not "Take pity on us." Might duties to repair defects in specific transnational relationships combine with Sympathy to create a demand for transfer that goes far beyond current aid, even if it falls short of prohibiting luxuries and frills? I think that this can be shown, through adequate reflection on secure moral convictions and empirically accurate descriptions of global interactions. If so, the critique of Singer's argument should be a preliminary to a better, more political argument in the interest of those he seeks to help. As an effort to base a fairly radical conclusion about giving on ordinary moral convictions, this further project pays homage to Singer's pathbreaking work.