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ABSTRACT

Few people doubt that severe poverty is a pressing moral issue. But what sorts of obligations, if any, do affluent people have toward the severely poor? If one accepts the idea that one has *some* obligations to the severely poor there still remains disagreement about the magnitude of this obligation and when it obtains. I consider Peter Singer's influential "shallow pond" argument, which holds that affluent people have greater obligations toward the severely poor than ordinary moral judgments suggest. Critics hold that Singer's view is excessively demanding and therefore untenable. I thus turn to the parable of the Good Samaritan and Christian accounts of neighbor-love to help attenuate this criticism. Drawing from Christian conversations on neighbor-love, I attempt to demonstrate that accepting an obligation to assist does not necessarily result in one abandoning one's special relations, abnegating self-regard, or no longer pursuing other non-moral strivings.

KEY WORDS:

consequentialism, justice, moral demandingness, neighbor-love, severe poverty

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(1) *Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.*

(2) *Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.*

— Article 25, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Nickel 2007, 196)

The one-third of human beings who die from poverty-related causes includes no one we have ever spent time with. Nor do we know anyone who cares about these deceased—someone scarred by the experience of losing a child to hunger, diarrhea, or measles, for example. If we had such people as friends or neighbors, we would think harder about world poverty and work harder to end this ongoing catastrophe. — Thomas Pogge (2008, 4)

Introduction

Few people doubt that severe poverty is a pressing moral issue. People who live under conditions of severe poverty are subject to widespread exploitation, chronic malnutrition, and lack of access to safe water, sanitation, and adequate shelter.¹ Consequently, such persons lack the basic necessities needed to live a minimally decent and autonomous life. Severe poverty persists, on received views, because of the unjust way in which economic interactions between states or between states and multinational organizations occur. One response to severe poverty, then, is to make the global basic structure more egalitarian. Governments, multinationals, and other global actors are in a privileged position to respond to these issues. Such actors have standing sufficient to alleviate widespread suffering; moreover, their ability to further

¹ On severe poverty, Thomas Pogge writes: “It is estimated that 830 million human beings are chronically undernourished, 1,100 million lack safe access to water, 2,600 million lack access to basic sanitation, 1,000 million lack adequate shelter, and 1,600 million lack electricity. About 2,000 million lack access to essential drugs, some 774 million adults are illiterate, and there are 218 million child laborers. These severe deprivations persist because people in the bottom half of the world’s population are too poor to protect themselves against them. As of 2004, the last year for which full World Bank data are now available, 2,533 million or 39.7 percent of humankind were reportedly living in severe poverty—precisely: *in households whose consumption expenditure per person per year has less purchasing power than \$785.76 had in the US in 1993* . . . Each year, some 18 million of them die prematurely from poverty-related causes. This is one-third of all human deaths—50,000 each day, including 29,000 children under age five” (Pogge 2008, 2; emphasis mine). For recent data on severe poverty, see the World Bank’s Poverty Monitor (www.worldbank.org/research/povmonitor). Though these are the most readily available data, Thomas Pogge, Sanjay Reddy, and others believe the data-calculation methods to be flawed. For further comments on calculating the intensity and extensity of severe poverty, see, for example, Pogge 2004 and Pogge and Reddy 2009. Also note: I will use “severe poverty,” “absolute poverty,” and “poverty” interchangeably. I will also use “needy” to refer to people who live under such conditions.

global justice may prevent such suffering from even arising.²

For some moral and political theorists, though, such institutional change is not arriving quickly enough. To their minds, there thus exists a more pressing moral question: what sorts of obligations, if any, do affluent people have to the severely poor?³ Consequentialists argue that affluent people have a greater obligation toward the severely poor than ordinary moral judgments suggest.⁴ This obligation obtains regardless of whether affluent people are considered to have “directly” contributed to causing the plight of the severely poor. From this perspective, there is no distinction between doing harm and failing to prevent harm. In other words, an affluent person is responsible for all the consequences of his or her actions. If an affluent person spends money on luxuries instead of making charitable donations to help the severely poor, then that affluent person is responsible for any resulting death. Affluent people are thus morally obligated to simplify their lives in order to direct their charity toward the severely poor. Critics contend that the demandingness of the consequentialist view radically reduces the overall quality of affluent people’s lives and does not grant them the latitude to honor their personal commitments. For these critics, while it is praiseworthy and beneficent to help the severely poor, affluent people are not morally obligated to do so, especially if they did nothing to bring about the predicament of the severely poor.⁵

Commonsense morality nonetheless suggests that one has some minimal duties to prevent harm to others. But if one concedes there is *some* obligatory

² An anonymous reviewer flagged to me the moral and prudential importance of making the global basic structure more just. I am currently developing such an account elsewhere. See Ranganathan 2011.

³ How should we characterize affluence? Peter Singer offers a helpful definition: “Our affluence means that we have income we can dispose of without giving up the basic necessities of life, and we can use this income to reduce absolute poverty” (Singer 1993, 231; see also Singer 2004, 2006, and 2009). Also, on the relationship between affluent people’s charitable donations and institutional demands, see Herman 2001.

⁴ “Consequentialism” refers to a broad and diverse family of theories. The two most familiar versions are “act-consequentialism” and “rule-consequentialism.” On the one hand, act-consequentialists hold (roughly) that one should evaluate an action only in reference to the consequences it brings about. On the other hand, rule-consequentialists hold (roughly) that one should follow some rules whose acceptance would bring about some desirable consequences.

⁵ For criticisms, see, for example, Wolf 1982, Scheffler 1994, and Appiah 2006. For a libertarian view, see Narveson 2003

level of assistance to be given in order to prevent poverty related harms, there still remains disagreement about the degree of one's obligations to the severely poor and when this obligation obtains. In response to these concerns, I draw selectively on strands of "Christian ethics" and consequentialism to argue in favor of an obligation to assist one's severely poor neighbors.⁶ To articulate and defend such an obligation, I do not seek to fully reconstruct or defend an act-consequentialist ethics or a Christian theological ethics. Instead, I consider Peter Singer's "shallow pond" argument insofar as it is one of the most salient accounts available on global justice.⁷ More specifically, one appeal of his argument turns on its "moral cosmopolitan" characterization, which holds that all persons stand in certain moral relations with one another and that requires individuals to consider one another's status as the focus point of their moral concern. There are three further facets common to moral cosmopolitan theories:

[f]irst, *individualism*: the ultimate units of concern are human beings, or persons—rather than, say, family lines, tribes, ethnic, cultural, or religious communities, nations, or states. Second, *universality*: the status of ultimate concern attaches to every living human being equally—not merely to some subset, such as men, aristocrats, Aryans, whites, or Muslims. Third, *generality*: this special status has global force. Persons are ultimate units of concern for everyone—not only for their compatriots, coreligionists, or such like. (Pogge 1992, 48–49)⁸

But despite this cosmopolitan appeal, the moral implications of Singer's account may be in tension with (and may even require one to violate) what one ordinarily holds to be morally required. On critical interpretations, then, the demandingness of this account would require one to violate one's moral integrity (that is, actions that override an agent's identity-forming moral or non-moral commitments) or moral status (that is, actions that override a person's moral status qua person).⁹ I thus turn to Christian accounts of neighbor-love to help attenuate the critic's view on the demandingness of such an obligation to assist. Conversations within the Christian tradition have long focused on adjudicating the competing demands of self-regard, neighbor-love, and special relations. I believe these conversations shed new light on an obligation to assist while still carving out space for self-regard, special relations, and other non-moral strivings. I ultimately hope to show that accepting something like a demanding version of an obligation to assist need not necessarily violate one's moral status and moral integrity nor preclude one from special relations and other non-moral strivings.¹⁰

⁶ For an overlapping consensus approach to ethics that covers both theistic and nontheistic traditions, see Reeder 1996. For an explicitly Christian theological account of duties to the severely poor, see Gregory 2008.

⁷ See Singer 1972. One might interpret Singer's view as a version of "maximal Samaritanism." For an account of "minimally decent Samaritanism," see Thomson 1971.

⁸ I draw on Pogge's account in order to characterize the moral cosmopolitan position. But there are, to be sure, differences between his institutionally focused deontological account and the consequentialist account advanced by Singer. Both theorists are obviously committed to advancing global justice. Differences between the two, though, focus on how the demands of justice are to be characterized. Singer is interested in advancing a positive interpersonal account. That is to say, one has a positive obligation, "off his or her own bat," to aid others; this obligation arises independent of any interaction between the benefactor and beneficiary. An ethics of love, that is, a Christian universalist approach to neighbor-love, I believe, overlaps with such an account. Pogge argues for a negative institutional approach to global justice. One may characterize his position in this way. One's fundamental human rights are held primarily against coercive social and political institutions, that is, a global basic structure, and only secondarily against the individuals who uphold such institutions. These institutions are responsible for the just distribution of fundamental rights and goods, including, for example, basic necessities. Evaluations of justice, he believes, are most useful when directed at such social and political institutions. Such evaluations are especially salient when one asks whether the global basic structure is justifiable to someone who is severely poor. The rights one possesses, on this approach, are negative. Moreover, on an institutional conception of rights, ordinary individuals cannot violate the human rights of others directly; such violations occur only when a threat to people's human interests is systemic. That is to say, absent such institutions one cannot characterize someone's violations of another's rights as "human rights violations." But Pogge presupposes the existence of such institutions. Our routinized (unjust) economic interactions, to his mind, do result in such violations (see Pogge 2008; compare Pogge 1989, 211–80). For a positive, institutional approach to global justice, see Beitz 1999, 124–76.

⁹ For criticisms focusing on consequentialism's putative propensity toward violations of moral status and moral integrity, see Williams 1973, Williams 1981, and Williams 1985. For a response to Williams's view, see Ashford 2000.

¹⁰ I focus on ethicists for whom the crux of the Christian ethical life follows from the "love commandments" (Matthew 22:37–40) calling on one to love God, neighbor, and self. On some representative characterizations, such an "ethics of love" is theocentric. Therefore one's first and greatest love is to God. But when one loves God in this way then one properly loves both one's neighbor and oneself. I draw from such ethicists to develop a modest representative account of self-regard, neighbor-love, and special relations. I do not offer a comprehensive treatment of the assorted theorists I consider. There are, to be sure, many complicated and subtle differences between their respective positions. But their characterizations nonetheless retain several overlapping facets pertaining to what the Christian ethical life should display. I also neither seek to ground this ethics of love in its theological backdrop nor do I consider other Christian sources of ethical normativity. I consider such accounts of agapic love only insofar as they help explicate an obligation to assist. Hereafter, when I refer to the "Christian view" or say "for Christians" it refers back to my effort to develop such a modest account. To develop such an account, I have taken direction from, among others, Ramsey 1950; Outka 1972 and 1992; and Reeder 1992, 1996, and 1998. My development of this modest account is intended neither to commend a commitment to Christianity as such, nor to "abandon the enterprise of developing secular modes of liberal thought." Instead, in turning to Christian conversations on neighbor-love, one may follow Jeremy Waldron's suggestion: "Our interest is that we might reasonably expect to find further clues to a rich and adequate conception of persons, equality, justice, and rights in what is currently being made of the Christ-centered tradition by those who remain centered in Christ" (Waldron 1993, 848).

The Shallow Pond and the Good Samaritan

Consider two examples. First, Singer's shallow pond: "If I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out. This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing" (Singer 1972, 231). And, second, the parable of the Good Samaritan:

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:25–37)

The normative implications of these two examples overlap in important respects. But there are also differences and ambiguities over the claims that each issues. I focus here on the obligation to assist one's neighbor, especially the idea that one ought to make sacrifices in order to direct charity toward the severely poor, and the idea that one is morally obligated to help regardless of whether others assist as well.

Toward Developing an Obligation to Assist

The actions of the benefactors in both examples suggest that one ought to give time, money, and care—that is, make sacrifices of some measure—in order to help a person in need. In both cases, the life of a dying or severely injured person is saved. On the shallow pond, Singer argues, "if it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral

significance, we ought, morally, to do it.” But in response a critic might ask, “What constitutes comparability?” Singer’s response is as follows: “By ‘without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance’ I mean without causing anything else comparably bad to happen, or doing something that is wrong in itself, or failing to promote some moral good, comparable in significance to the bad thing that we can prevent” (Singer 1972, 231).¹¹ Singer makes two further points about this principle. He says:

For the principle takes, firstly, no account of proximity or distance. It makes no moral difference whether the person I can help is a neighbor’s child ten yards from me or a Bengali whose name I shall never know, ten thousand miles away. Secondly, the principle makes no distinction between cases in which I am the only person who could possibly do anything and cases in which I am just one among millions in the same position. (Singer 1972, 231–32)

Therefore, the argument runs, affluent people should forego designer clothes, luxury cars, expensive electronics, and other such goods—all things that enhance one’s life in different ways but are incommensurable with the life of a person—and instead direct charity toward the severely poor. The fact that affluent people have means beyond those necessary to meet their basic necessities suggests that they have the wherewithal to act on an obligation to assist without sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance. Singer also grants that if aid only comes in small amounts then severe poverty will not be wholly eradicated. Nevertheless, providing aid offers respite to some individuals living under conditions of severe poverty. And, on his view, preventing some severe poverty and the harms it causes is a worthwhile endeavor.

For Christian ethicists, agape is a defining normative concept. What agape requires at minimum is that an agent consider the interests of others and not simply his

¹¹ There is one further analytic point to consider, namely, how should we interpret Singer’s comment on not “doing something that is wrong in itself”? If we interpret this comment to mean that, insofar as they pose potential threats to one’s moral status or moral integrity, some acts are impermissible on a consequentialist view, then we can more readily find overlaps between these two normative traditions. Commenting on utilitarian and Kantian conceptions of human rights, Elizabeth Ashford offers another useful interpretation. She writes: “On a utilitarian analysis, human rights are particularly heavyweight contenders against rival moral claims but are not immune to trade-offs. Given the importance of the interests they protect, it will take them to be resistant to trade-offs. On a credible conception of measuring well-being, moreover, there is discontinuity in value between basic interests and relatively trivial interests. This means that one person’s human right could never be outweighed by any number of others’ trivial interests” (Ashford 2007, 188).

or her own. This other-regarding love is directed toward the neighbor for his or her sake, taking into account his or her particular needs, and does not assess whether the neighbor will bring benefits to the benefactor (Outka 1972, 7–8).¹² By directing this love toward another person solely for that person's sake, one acts in a disinterested or selfless way, that is, absent expectations of reciprocity. Moreover, one must act in a way that is appropriate given a particular neighbor's needs.

The actions of the Good Samaritan not only epitomize this view, but they also accord with Singer's view on refraining from sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance. The Samaritan sees the fallen Jew (a particular neighbor) and takes pity on his predicament (the special needs it brings about). He recognizes the distinct moral status possessed by the Jew and the claim the Jew, qua neighbor, makes on him, and the Samaritan's reasoning moves quickly from empathy to sympathy and finally to benevolence. When the Samaritan acts on the commandment to assist his neighbor he does so in a thoroughly compassionate manner. He gives freely of his own time, energy, and money to help the man in need. Moreover, when he acts, he provides some lifesaving aid and prevents some further harm.

Consequentialist and Christian ethicists believe that helping one's neighbors who are in need of aid is not merely laudable but morally required. But not all ethicists share this view. For example, in response to the shallow pond argument, Kwame Anthony Appiah raises what Pogge calls the "jeopardy objection."¹³ Appiah says,

¹² An act that seeks reciprocity, on Kierkegaard's view, is reducible to self-love. On loving one's neighbor, Kierkegaard proclaims: "It is in fact Christian love that discovers and knows that the neighbor exists and, what is the same thing, that everyone is neighbor. If it were not a duty to love, the concept of 'neighbor' would not exist either; but only when one loves the neighbor, only then is the selfishness in preferential love rooted out and the equality of the eternal preserved" (Kierkegaard 1995, 44).

¹³ Pogge describes the jeopardy objection in response to Richard Rorty. For Rorty, Pogge says, "ending poverty for over 2.5 billion human beings would put us, the 1 billion in the high-income countries, in jeopardy, would sap our arts and culture and our capacity to achieve social justice at home. It would greatly damage our lives and communities and thus is clearly unfeasible" (Pogge 2008, 10). Singer also expresses doubts about the polemical force of the jeopardy objection. Consider specifically his Fairhaven example. Fairhaven, he says, is a fallout shelter surviving in the wake of a Middle Eastern nuclear war. Before this nuclear war, though, Fairhaven was not needed as a fallout shelter and was instead used as a luxury resort. In the wake of the nuclear winter, affluent people who have residences at Fairhaven are able to live comfortable lives while they wait for outside conditions to normalize. Those people living outside are subject to horrific conditions of a nuclear winter, including unclean air and water, food contaminated with radiation, and high rates of cancer and bodily malformation. Survivors, this example continues, show up at the gates of Fairhaven. But who should be admitted? One group,

“[s]aving the child may be preventing something bad; but *not* saving the child might, for all we know, prevent something worse” (Appiah 2006, 160).¹⁴ The fact that we could save the drowning child, Appiah says, is not in itself reason for affluent people to do so. He continues to say that giving away most of his means would radically reduce his overall quality of life. Moreover, if affluent people were to spend *all* of their money donating to Oxfam or UNICEF, and not a penny patronizing the arts, the world, on Appiah’s view, would be a “flat and dreary place.” He then asks (Appiah 2006, 166), “[w]ould you really want to live in a world in which the only thing anyone cared about was saving lives?”

What’s striking about Appiah’s comment is not only that it is antithetical to consequentialist and Christian views but that it also contravenes commonsense morality.¹⁵ Specifically, his comment does not accord with one’s ordinary, minimal duties to prevent harm to others. Also, what greater existing wrong that may be prevented by *not* pulling the child out of the pond is unclear. The fact that pond is *shallow* further suggests two things. First, the cost to the benefactor is minimal. For instance, wading into the pond might ruin Appiah’s suit; but the suit, however expensive, is incommensurate with the life of the child that will be lost unless he or others like him act. Letting (preventable) harm befall one’s neighbor, the Christian would add, is morally impermissible.

“the bleeding hearts,” suggests taking 10,000 people—the high end. The Moderates suggest taking 500—taking this many people in, they think, is a sufficiently benevolent act; the outsiders’ claims, they think, should not affect the insiders’ quality of life. On another extreme, a third group suggests that no one be admitted. Taking individuals in, Singer notes, allows those persons to live decent lives. All that is given up by admitting more people are luxuries. To his mind, the good done by admitting large numbers of outsiders far outweighs anything given up by the existing community (see Singer 1993, 247–62 and Singer 2004).

¹⁴ Appiah does not think that by virtue of being a cosmopolitan there exists any special obligation for him to help eradicate world poverty. I also do not think there is a *special* obligation for cosmopolitans to meet this duty. Instead, I think cosmopolitans have an obligation to assist just like other affluent people do.

¹⁵ On commonsense morality, Thomas Nagel says, “Common sense suggests that each of us should live his own life (autonomy), give special consideration to certain others (obligation), have some significant concern for the general good (neutral values), and treat the people he deals with decently (deontology). It also suggests that these aims may produce serious inner conflict. Common sense doesn’t have the last word in ethics or anywhere else, but it has, as J. L. Austin said about ordinary language, the first word: it should be examined before it is discarded” (Nagel 1986, 166). I bring up the commonsense view here not to make any special appeal to it but to suggest that Appiah’s comment conflicts with the general intuitive response to this sort of case.

Helping someone in need identifies the beneficiary as one's neighbor, that is, as an object of one's love. Gene Outka offers one interpretation of this view. He says, "for Christians to be neighbors in the fashion of the Good Samaritan assuredly means that we are to promote good and not simply refrain from diminishing it. . . . No specified limits constrain what we are to do on behalf of others" (Outka 1992, 23). Following Outka's description, giving of oneself to provide for one's neighbor is morally required as part of one's day-to-day life. Again, this reading accords with Singer's view on the morally obligatory nature of such giving. This view also recognizes and emphasizes the moral status of another person and the normative claim he or she makes on one instead of the cost to oneself. One's neighbor-love, then, is a response to the particular needs of other persons.

On both of these views there thus exists a putative obligation to assist. But there is a second point to consider from the shallow pond example: while severe poverty affects a seemingly overwhelming portion of the global population it would not take much from the world's affluent people to combat and eradicate it altogether. On this point, Pogge makes some useful observations. Because an overwhelming number of people suffer from severe poverty, some critics raise the "futility objection"—that is, devoting money to the world's poor in order to grapple with poverty is, quite simply, an exercise in futility. But Pogge believes this objection can be dismissed: "[s]eeing the global poor as one vast homogenous mass, we overlook that saving ten children from a painful death by hunger does make a real difference, *all* the difference for these children, and that this difference is quite significant even when many other children remain hungry" (Pogge 2008, 7–8). He also says that "[w]orld poverty is much larger and much smaller than we had thought. It kills one-third of all human beings born into our world. And its eradication would require no more than 1 percent of the global product" (Pogge 2008, 264).¹⁶ Thus, while the problem of severe poverty may seem originally insurmountable, relatively simple actions by affluent people toward the global poor can achieve meaningful results. In the short term, these results may only affect a

¹⁶ On acting in a relatively simple manner, Peter Unger also challenges our thinking with his "vintage sedan" and "envelope" examples. See Unger 1996, 24–27.

portion of those living under such conditions. But there is certainly belief that aid, along with other developmental programs, will provide more lasting solutions.¹⁷

Moral Dimensions of an Obligation to Assist

Both the consequentialist and Christian accounts hold that one has an obligation to assist regardless of whether others assist as well. In the case of the parable, others (the priest and the Levite), despite their immediate proximity, did nothing to help the wounded Jew. Even more striking, by crossing over to the other side of the road, they went out of their way not to help. Jeremy Waldron characterizes their actions as “a decision to cross the road, a choice to go out of the way to avoid the predicament” (Waldron 2003, 343).¹⁸ Comparable to Appiah’s remarks on the shallow pond, the actions of the priest and the Levite flout the commonsense view. More morally pressing, though, is that they not only avoided the predicament but also the needy person in the predicament. By crossing over to the other side of the road, the priest and the Levite believe that they can escape the claim the wounded Jew makes on them. On one interpretation, their actions suggest that they placed a higher premium on not delaying their own personal commitments than on helping him. But on the consequentialist and Christian views explored thus far, their actions make them morally blameworthy for leaving the wounded Jew to die.

On one reading of neighbor-love, one is required to recognize all other persons—not just compatriots, co-religionists, etc.—as his or her neighbors (see Outka 1992). Neighbor-love, one might thus observe, shares moral cosmopolitan features. One is required, at some level, to attend to his or her neighbor’s individual needs. In the context of providing life-saving aid, then, love calls on one to provide assistance to the wounded Jew or the drowning child. Such lifesaving acts, especially since they require little cost to the benefactor, are not supererogatory but morally required. These

¹⁷ Some developmental economists have turned to field experiments to determine which social-policy ideas will find success, in any given region, in combating severe poverty. For an overview of such an approach, see Parker 2010.

¹⁸ For further discussion of “proximity” and “distance,” see Hare 2007. See also Temkin 2004, especially 356–57, for a variation of and commentary on the shallow pond.

two examples also suggest that awareness of another's suffering demands that one positively responds to offer help. Awareness in these two cases obtains in virtue of one's immediate proximity to the suffering neighbor. But as I discuss below, "proximity" and "moral distance" mean different things now than they did in the Samaritan's time. Moreover, one's intuitive response to another's suffering does not mean one's response is or should be limited to direct action. Following Singer's recommendation, affluent people should make donations to charitable organizations, for example, Oxfam or UNICEF, in order to provide life- saving aid to the severely poor. Directing one's charity toward the severely poor through such organizations allows affluent people to love and positively affect even his or her most distant neighbors.

Acting positively in order to help one's neighbor does not necessarily require deliberation on the cause of the beneficiary's predicament. So, to provide lifesaving aid, one need not wonder why the child is drowning in the pond or why the Jew was not more cautious traveling on the highway. Instead, one is required to help meet an individual neighbor's particular needs. Consider a possible communitarian deliberation on these sorts of cases. On one possible communitarian view, for example, one only has a responsibility toward members of one's own community or those persons whose plight one brought about. These sorts of persons are the ones to whom goods and services are allocated.¹⁹ Thus if one's countrymen were stricken on the side of the road or if one had caused the child to be dropped in the pond, then one would be obliged to act. These special commitments notwithstanding, communitarians believe, provision of life- saving aid is not required.

But can affluent people cling to this sort of reasoning in the face of such dire and immediate need? I think not. One may presume that the priest, Levite, and Samaritan were not members of the band of thieves that befell the Jew. They perhaps didn't feel warranted to aid him. But the Samaritan abandons recourse to any such deliberation. He crosses communitarian boundaries when he helps the Jew who is neither part of his community nor someone whom he directly caused to suffer. His response is simple and direct. One might also warn the traveler to be more cautious after the fact but this lack of

¹⁹ For the development of one communitarian view, see Walzer 1983, especially 41–63.

caution should not be an obstacle to receiving lifesaving aid. The drowning child, however, cannot be held to such expectations. He or she is likely simply an unfortunate victim of circumstance—one of the 29,000 children under the age of five who die each day from poverty related causes.

Singer's consequentialist view also holds that one is morally required to help. For consequentialists, there is not a moral distinction between doing and allowing. In this context, then, there is not a distinction between killing and allowing to die—an agent, on this view, is judged from the point of view of consequences. Thus, whether one actively dropped the child or simply walked by the pond and allowed the child to drown, one is morally blameworthy for the resulting death.²⁰ To avoid blame and heed the claim another person makes, then, one is required to provide lifesaving aid. But even if one does not accept the consequentialist rejection of the distinction between killing and letting die there is still motivational force to this argument. Blame understood on different terms is still a form of moral sanction that is meant to motivate affluent people to help others in need; blame does not exist merely to assign culpability for some (in)action. The normative force of the consequentialist view also strikes against communitarians and libertarians who believe that affluent people are not morally required to give aid to the severely poor in these cases. What do these ideas suggest about today's increasingly interconnected and globalized world? On Singer's view, responsibility toward the needy is not limited by distance. The needy ought to be objects of one's concern whether they are immediately proximate or on the other side of the world.

I do not think I need to say much in defense of the refusal to take proximity and distance into account. The fact that a person is physically near to us, so that we have personal contact with him, may make it more likely that we *shall* assist him, but this does not show that we *ought* to help him rather than another who happens to be further away. If we accept any principle of impartiality, universalizability, equality, or whatever, we cannot discriminate against someone merely because he is far away from us (or we are far away from him).

²⁰ This description is perhaps also familiar as James Rachels's "equivalence thesis." See Rachels 1975 and 1979.

He further elaborates:

From a moral point of view, the development of the world into a “global village” has made an important, though still unrecognized, 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. (Singer 1972, 232)²¹

For Singer, in sum, a life of luxury for a handful of persons or even a single person is unacceptable if that means assistance is not being directed toward the world’s severely poor population. Moreover, on his view, affluent people’s assistance cannot rightly be limited by geographic distance. Affluent people “selfishly” indulging themselves while others are dying preventable deaths makes them morally blameworthy for those deaths, regardless of their proximity to those in need of lifesaving aid.²² This moral obligation to assist, then, obtains for every affluent person with the capability to help. The more affluent one is the more one should be able—and is thus required—to give. Writing as a Christian ethicist, Edward Vacek makes a related claim, arguing, “[f]rom those who have been given much, much is expected. Those with the ten talents of agape must be especially generous, but even those with one talent must extend themselves” (Vacek 1994, 161).²³ One might interpret this as follows: even if one cannot provide for all his or her neighbors, one can still act on the obligation to assist and promote the welfare of some portion of the severely poor. Even if these efforts are only able to save a small portion of the severely poor, one should note, providing lifesaving aid is morally commendable and worthwhile.

Self-Regard, Special Relations, and an Obligation to Assist

So far, I have focused on Christian and consequentialist views on an obligation

²¹ For Singer’s more recent comments on our world representing a “global village,” see Singer 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2009.

²² See the following section for Robert Adams’s view on “self-concern” and “selfishness.”

²³ I am not wholly clear what Vacek means by the “ten talents of agape.” But on one interpretation, this person is perhaps akin to Wolf’s “moral saint.” See also “the parable of the widow’s offering:” “He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had’” (Luke 21:1–4).

to assist. These two accounts offer overlapping views on providing lifesaving aid. More pointedly, though, both accounts hold that affluent people owe more to the severely poor than ordinary moral judgments suggest. But in arguing that affluent people have such a moral obligation I do not seek to advocate for an abstract moral universalism wholly devoid of those non-moral attachments and projects that may make one's life meaningful.²⁴ Two persistent criticisms, however, hold that the demandingness of helping one's severely poor neighbors does not permit one the latitude for proper self-regard nor the ability to maintain special relations. Thus, I want to locate an obligation to assist alongside one's ordinary commitments to self-regard and special relations.

On self-regard, the critic holds that consequentialist decision-making violates one's moral integrity since one is always required to act in order to maximize the overall state of affairs. This requirement, the critic continues, violates the commonsense view that one, in certain instances, may be warranted in not acting to promote the overall state of affairs; the failure to meet this requirement then is not morally wrong. If one is always pulling drowning children out of ponds or helping those fallen by the wayside, the critic believes, one's moral integrity is violated. On special relations, the critic suggests that one has a particular set of obligations toward one's loved ones and these obligations compete against one's disinterested love for others who are severely poor. In other words, one's agent-relative claims compete against the agent-neutral claims of the consequentialist view. These objections are leveled against an act-consequentialist view that always emphasizes an impersonal, or agent-neutral, calculus. In response, I want to focus on the competing demands of self-regard, neighbor-love, and special relations. The critic's view, I hope to show, rests on a mischaracterization of the relationship between equal regard and equal treatment.

When thinking about how one ought to assess his or her self-regard there are two extremes. As Robert Adams points out, (warranted) self-love, or self-interest, can be differentiated from (unwarranted) selfishness as follows:

²⁴ Jonathan Bennett suggests that the critic views this sort of morality as having too "tight reins," thus frustrating one's natural or non-moral desires. But this "frustration" is not a fact of "tight reins" morality as such. Instead, he says, "it arises only because of some facts about human life on our planet" (Bennett 1995, 147).

To have a rather abstract notion of one's own good on the whole is a rational achievement; so therefore is self-interest. That is enough to show that self-interest is not the same as selfishness, and even that selfishness is not necessarily a form of self-interest.... Selfishness is a tendency to seek or grasp things for oneself, *and to do so excessively*. But self-interest is not necessarily excessive or bad. Indeed it can be commendable, and is frequently commended, especially in children, who typically acquire a conception of their own good in being taught (as they must be taught) to take care of themselves. (Adams 1999, 137–38, emphasis mine)

On the one hand, as Adams suggests, one's self-love can become so overriding that it becomes selfishness. Here, an agent is excessively concerned with satisfying his or her own desires. He cooperates or cares for the neighbor only insofar as it benefits himself. In other words, the agent's self-love is really selfishness. On the other hand, one's neighbor-love may be so intense that it overwhelms one's self-regard. This sort of neighbor-love—what critics contend that a demanding account of an obligation to assist requires—violates individual integrity. In other words, it is self-abnegating or self-destructive altruism. Moreover, this sort of neighbor-love contravenes the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself. The self-destructive altruist fails to honor her own well-being. That is, the agent is treating her neighbors with such love that she fails to maintain equal-regard for herself. Thus, on one extreme, the selfish person represents the life of luxury decried by the consequentialist while the self-destructive altruist represents the model railed against by the critic.²⁵ What, then, is the proper balance between self-regard and neighbor-love, a balance that honors the agent's well-being but ensures that the agent is able to love the neighbor as well?

²⁵ One person who might be described as a self-destructive altruist is the (infamous) philanthropist Zell Kravinsky. A real estate investor, Kravinsky amassed a fortune estimated at \$45 million and gave nearly all of it away to health-related charities. His family lives in a modest home in Jenkintown, a Philadelphia suburb, and while he has put away funds for his children's college funds, he has otherwise only kept enough money to meet his family's ordinary expenses. None of this is very controversial. But upon learning about the number of people who die yearly while waiting for a kidney, Kravinsky contacted a Philadelphia hospital and donated one of his kidneys to a complete stranger. The chances of dying as result of donating a kidney, Kravinsky calculated, are 1 in 4,000. Not donating his kidney then, he added, means he values his life 4,000 times more than he values the life of a stranger. His actions have been lambasted, and his wife even threatened to leave him. He has since moved to a larger home and gone back into real estate, but still only keeps enough money to keep his family life peaceful. Kravinsky still contends, "No one should have a vacation home until everyone has a place to live. No one should have a second car until everyone has one. And no one should have two kidneys until everyone has one" (quoted in Strom 2003; see also Singer 2006).

Self-Regard

On liberal egalitarian views, all human beings are one another's moral equals. That is, they each have an equal moral status and are thus irreducibly valuable. Each individual, then, is the subject of moral attention and love. But how does one weigh self-regard against the seemingly demanding view of other-regard sketched here? What does it mean to love one's neighbor as *one loves oneself*? One's commonsense morality suggests that one, at the very least, ought to avoid the self-abnegating or self-destructive neighbor-love that the critic believes that a demanding account of one's obligations toward the severely poor requires. If morality were to be so overriding that it was in irreconcilable conflict with a considered account of one's well-being, then one would have grounds to doubt its claims. On this point, William Frankena observes that "[m]orality is made for man, not man for morality" (Frankena 1973, 139; compare Hurley 2006, 689).²⁶ Frankena's view is concordant with both accounts explored thus far. Acting for the sake of one's neighbor, for instance, does not mean one should overstep his or her (creaturely) bounds; in order to honor both one's own well-being and one's neighbor's, the beneficent agent must act within his or her means.

²⁶ One concern about Frankena's comment is that it accords more precisely with consequentialist (and other secular) accounts of morality. This concern, in a more pointed form, is about the relationship between morality's demandingness and individual well-being which seems, to some, a modern secular problem. This view is perhaps amplified when one takes into account the putative differences between Christian and secular morality's respective views on desert. On some Christian views, the good will be rewarded and the wicked punished. Therefore, the commentator says, the Christian believer does not have to struggle in the same way as the secularist in order to act in a particularly demanding moral manner. I believe this criticism can be attenuated in a few ways. The first suggestion is to point out that secular moralities, especially standard readings of act-consequentialism, have problems with moral demandingness and its relationship with and effects on individual well-being. So, this problem is not solely a Christian (or religious) one. Following Paul Ramsey, another counter to the critic's view is that Christian ethics does not draw its motivational force from concerns with desert. Doing so, Ramsey says, does not show proper love for God and neighbor, but instead reflects an improper self-love. He writes, "Christian love does not *claim* good works; it *gives* them. Christian faith does not seek its own salvation, even salvation by faith, for *faith is effective in love which seeks only the neighbor's good*" (Ramsey 1950, 136). On this reading, then, desert is not part of Christian moral motivation. Another way to blunt this criticism is to consider our operational definition of "religion." On his broad definition of religion, for example, John Reeder says, "[r]eligions search for the good in light of the limits and possibilities of the real" (Reeder 1998b, 160). This definition is useful for a couple of reasons. First, it gives us a definition of religion that focuses especially on a tradition's moral elements in order to speak to the very concerns that ethicists (religious or secular) try to address in light of the facts about our world and ourselves. Second, by defining religion in such a way that encompasses both theistic and nontheistic traditions under this rubric we thereby open ourselves up to draw normative resources from different traditions more freely in order to address the critic's concerns about a specifically Christian morality.

One should note, however, that what constitutes one's well-being more often than not includes attachments to particular persons and personal projects. But in many cases, which I consider below, honoring one's well-being does not accede ground to the critic's claims. Instead, autonomous agents should scrutinize their obligations in order to arrive at a set of commitments that would form the basis of an integrated life (Railton 1984, 147).²⁷ The task of weighing competing interests, however, is not an easy one.

For those affluent people who accept that they have an obligation to assist there remains a problem: the demandingness of this obligation is exacerbated because so many people are non-compliant with its claims. To get a handle on this problem consider another version of the shallow pond. In this particular pond there happen to be a hundred drowning children. Fortunately, on the banks of the pond, there are a hundred adults who are all able to save at least one child. A high school teacher might wade in and be able to pull out only one child; an engineer might grab two; while a professional baseball player might be able to grab three or four children. But some others who are capable of much more (including, say, a successful CEO) only grab one child or just stand and watch from the bank. Does the CEO act wrongly in this instance? According to the consequentialist and the Christian accounts, it would seem so. In one case, if the CEO only pulls one child out of the pond when he was capable of pulling out dozens the question, of course, is whether he is carrying his personal prerogatives too far. In another case, if he does nothing at all and claims it is not his problem, he is then in the wrong just as the Levite and the priest were. Relative to his means, one should note, it would have required far less of him to wade in and save many children than it required of the high school teacher to save one.²⁸

²⁷ Consider another example. In an episode of the fourth season of the US version of the comedy *The Office* entitled "Money," Michael works the nightshift at a call center. His and Jan's spending is putting him in financial difficulty. He sits down with Oscar (the accountant) to create a budget. Oscar creates three categories: necessities (for example, food and rent), luxuries (for example, magazines, dinners out, and entertainment), and "stuff nobody needs ever"—if I recollect correctly, Michael spent a lot of money on some sort of abdominal crunch apparatus, magic kits, and bass fishing equipment. Michael's lack of scrutiny about his and Jan's spending fails not only to maximize the overall state of affairs, but is also detrimental to his own well-being.

²⁸ On one's decision-making in regard to helping others or serving one's own interests, G. A. Cohen writes, "No similar paralysis affects them when they have a surfeit of restaurants to choose from. They simply choose one that they know or believe to be good, even if it is not the best, and they think that's

But there are others who are also able to pull some number of children out but still do nothing. Does this mean that the teacher now needs to jeopardize her well-being in order to pull out an extra child? Here, one finds tension between the teacher's obligation to provide lifesaving aid and her moral status and moral integrity. Consider one possible consequentialist response to this tension. Accepting that one has an obligation to assist does not mean one needs to fully live up to its expectations. For example, in order to do more to help, the teacher would need to abandon her non-moral strivings, that is, override her moral integrity, and potentially her moral status, because of others' non-compliance. I believe one should not (always) be forced to abandon his or her considered non-moral strivings because others do not do their share. But does this response weaken the pull of this moral obligation? The consequentialist may grant that many people fall short of their (maximal) moral obligations. But since people like the teacher are acting on an obligation to assist they should not feel guilty about not doing more. Such a response reflects to some degree ordinarily received views on an individual's moral status and moral integrity while still attending to a more robust account of one's responsibilities to others.

Let me try to spell out a bit more clearly how to honor both one's moral integrity and an obligation to assist. One strategy is to suggest that there needs to be a division of labor according to one's means. Such a division of labor would not only track one's financial means but also one's personal commitments. Thus, one beneficent agent, because of his or her means and commitments, may be able to pull only one child out of the pond while another agent may be able to pull out several. But even if one is only able to save a single child and another is able to save several, both act on an obligation to assist. More pointedly, then, such a division of labor suggests that one acts within some reasonable constraints in order to promote the well-being of

good enough. And people say you can't *know* that a given charitable donation will do any good, thereby erecting a standard for epistemic confidence which, if applied to their own interests, would deny them of a lot of enjoyment, such as that to be derived from investments that merely happen to pay off. People also press the Sorites question (where can one draw the line?) more insistently in a charities than in a self-interested context. People say 'If I give them \$10, why not give them \$15? Where am I going to stop?' But nobody says, 'If I spend \$10 on a bottle of wine, then why not \$15? Where am I going to stop?'" (Cohen 2008, 5–6).

the worst-off members of the global population. Reasonable constraints would include, for example, working out one's personal prerogatives with respect to one's moral integrity and also the obligation to assist. To establish some minimal standard of giving, that is, a standard of giving that would accord with an unconsidered commonsense view, Singer has recently claimed "[c]omfortably off Americans who give, say, 10 percent of their income to overseas aid organizations are so far ahead of most of their equally comfortable fellow citizens that I wouldn't go out of my way to chastise them for not doing more" (Singer 1999).²⁹ For affluent people, then, this minimal standard of giving would not bring harm to the beneficent agent. But one would still need to work out where one's level of giving would fall between this minimal standard and a more demanding view. This minimum standard of giving is important in two further respects. First, it sheds some light on the problem of weighing goods. On this minimal standard, then, the beneficent agent can make coarse considerations about the sorts of commitments he or she has taken up unchecked. Second, since it is a minimal standard, this view perhaps appeals to a broader and perhaps previously non-compliant set of affluent people. Such a set of people would be incredibly hard pressed to deny this minimum standard of other-regard.

Self-regard may also include the enjoyment of at least some aesthetic goods. Consider a doctor volunteering with Doctors Without Borders. Everyday she treats persons suffering from malnutrition or who are innocent victims of guerilla warfare. Her actions are morally exemplary. This doctor has an active love of William Faulkner and has brought a few novels with her, which she reads every night before going to bed. She also loves soccer, and every Saturday she plays for a couple of hours with some local children. Despite the backdrop of impoverishment and suffering, can she be faulted for doing either of these things? For a couple of reasons, I believe not. On one level, these activities may be instrumentally justified. Thus, in order for her to continue caring for those persons in need she must be sufficiently emotionally and physically fit.

²⁹ Coincidentally, 10% of one's income is also what Christians often give as their tithes and Muslims are required to give as alms. I should note that 10% as opposed to 2%, 20%, or any other number is a bit arbitrary.

If she were burned out from these exhaustive efforts then she would not be able to function as a doctor and instead many more would suffer. On another closely related level, she is promoting her own well-being by engaging in non-moral self-regarding activities. That is, she is ensuring her own self-preservation and well-being in a harsh and trying environment. But this is not to suggest that all activities that attend to one's personal well-being are justifiable on such terms. For example, I do not think the doctor would be justified in enjoying nightly lavish seven-course meals while numerous children were outside starving. Nor would she be permitted to play her weekly soccer game if an ambulance-load of gunshot victims had just arrived at her camp. The doctor's moral integrity, then, is honored insofar as she is allowed to pursue her personal projects by reading and playing soccer. But in certain instances, the moral weight of obligations to others is given priority.

Special Relations

Consider now special relations. In discussing special relations, I am not going to demarcate what one owes to particular types of special relations. Instead, I simply note that special relations are granted a different sort of consideration than those persons one interacts with solely on the level of neighbor-love. Such relationships, and the partiality they entail, are legitimate parts of one's life. That is to say, special relations are integral to most recognizable accounts of the human good. Friendship involves engaging in mutually regarding activities; one devotes time, energy, and concern toward one's friend and their mutual relationship. So, just as one's personal projects shape one's life, so too do one's special relations. But such a commitment arguably makes a competing demand against one's obligation to assist. I believe that one is not acting in a morally impermissible way when one dedicates time to his or her friends and yet claims to be committed to helping his or her neighbors.

On one interpretation, one stands in relations with one's friend in such a way that one "desire[s] the other's good as much as or even more than [one] desires [one's] own." In this way, John Reeder suggests "we learn in one form of special relations or the other to take the good of others 'as' our own" (Reeder 1998a, 54). A commitment to a friend thus forces one to appreciate the concerns of someone other

than oneself. But fostering and sustaining such relationships need not come into conflict with one's commitments to the severely poor. Instead, one may honor these preferential commitments but must at the same time remain open to all others. One must marshal oneself in such a way that is respectful of an integrated life, that is, one that honors both one's moral and personal commitments. Still, the claims of friendship, being preferential, cannot result in the complete abnegation of responsibilities toward the severely poor in order to instead act for a special relation's sake. Instead, as Vacek writes, "[p]references for one person over another must always take place only after basic human regard has been effectively affirmed" (Vacek 1994, 170). It seems that, at minimum, the mutuality endemic to special relations enhances the state-of-being for an individual or particular group of persons. But what does this say about one's role in helping the distant needy? And how, if at all, does this view accord with an agent-neutral account?

Consider another stock example of a special relation: parents and their child. Two parents decide to conceive, bear, and raise a child. They have an obligation to their child as such. This responsibility, moreover, is one of a particular sort. But this responsibility is something one always owes to this sort of special relationship. Furthermore, this relationship gives the parents' life a particular shape and meaning. That being said, it would be almost assuredly wrong for parents to neglect their child in order to promote a universal humanitarianism. Their child is the one they can affect most positively and most often. Giving special consideration to one's kin thus is not irresponsible in light of the obligation to assist. Instead, one must tend both to one's special relations and, if sufficiently able, to aiding the needy. The question remaining, then, is what sort of priority or weight one's special relations ought to be given.

One does need to stake out a place between properly loving one's child or friend and yet appropriately order this regard. In other words, acting on one's special relations, "a spouse may act toward his mate in a grossly overprotective way; a friend may indulge another in ultimately destructive tendencies; a parent may favor one child inordinately" (Railton 1984, 147). What happens in these instances, then, is that one's preferential love is so powerful that it affects not only oneself (just as one could be harmed while engaged in neighbor-love) but also acts against what is good for a

special relation from the point-of-view of equal-regard. Not wanting to act like one alienated from his or her special relations, one instead acts on improperly ordered love. This sort of preferential love, moreover, may actually lead to one harming a stranger on the basis that it was for the special relation's best interest.

Tying Together Normative Resources

The Christian and consequentialist accounts examined thus far are perhaps still subject to criticisms. The Christian, on the one hand, potentially has problems reconciling one's agent-relative special demands with the agent-neutral demands of equal regard. The consequentialist, on the other hand, is fixed on an impersonal calculus and faces the problem of weighing goods. So, how might we tie together the normative resources of these two traditions and respond to these concerns? One possible solution, I believe, is to suggest an obligation to assist that does not override one's moral status and moral integrity. On this solution, one would fulfill his or her moral requirement to help the distant poor but would simultaneously form special relations and pursue personal prerogatives. One would therefore not bring an agent-neutral calculus to bear on every decision; instead, one's obligation to assist would force one to scrutinize his or her commitments in order to form an integrated life. In emergency cases and in cases where it would be impossible to weigh competing goods, one may turn to other moral reflexes to decide how to act. Developing such moral reflexes, for example, an ethics of neighbor-love, would provide one the means for rapid deliberation. Standing views, such as a robust knowledge of neighbor-love, would thus allow one to act without being paralyzed by deliberation. Moreover, as a result, one may be opened up to other opportunities for helping one's neighbors that were otherwise lost because of an inability to act. Maintaining an objective stake in acting on an obligation to assist also acts as a mechanism against overindulging oneself and one's special relations.

But what, precisely, does this mean for special relations? One does indeed have distinct obligations toward one's special relations, as I noted with the example of the parents and their child. Equal regard requires that one ensure the well-being of one's special relations. It would be morally impermissible to be fixated on the state of

affairs in a distant impoverished country when one's own children were mistreated and ignored.³⁰ One's obligation to his or her special relation also means promoting the special relation's well-being. Thus, one may put special stock in the sorts of things she does for her special relations. And this stock reflects a preferential love. But this is a second-order preference, meaning that one does not harm others for the sake of promoting that special relationship. When one is called to love each person where they are and one at a time, this includes promoting the state-of-being of one's special relations. The benefactor in these cases enjoys not only the benefits of mutuality with the beneficiary but also promotes overall value through the beneficiary's well-being.

These prerogatives, however, are checked by the agent's stake in the obligation to assist. For some agents, who may abuse these prerogatives, there constantly needs to be a check against their actions. For others, though, there may be more leeway in adjudicating their commitments to the severely poor and their special relations. Therefore, one cannot *only* be concerned with creating value through mutually regarding special relations. Promoting the state-of-being of one's special relations at the cost of all others can be reduced to excessive self-love and fails to honor the claim other persons make on us.

Conclusion

In sum, commonsense morality requires one to provide some lifesaving aid to the person stricken on the side of the road or the child drowning in the pond. But as I have tried to show, in today's interconnected world, much more is required of the world's affluent people. Indeed, an affluent person would be hard pressed to deny or escape the claims an obligation to assist makes on him or her.³¹ Thus, one is morally

³⁰ On this point, see Waldron 2003, 339–42, for his discussion of the character of Mrs. Jellyby in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*.³¹ On drawing on the normative resources of other traditions, Temkin comments, "We should do this for consequentialist reasons—to make the world better; for virtuous reasons—because that is the kind of person one should be; and for deontological reasons—because aiding the needy is not likely to simply be an option, but a duty, and one that may be every bit as strict as our duties to respect rights and act justly. Moreover, the pluralism runs deep, as within each general approach various factors support aiding the needy, each of which must be given its due weight" (Temkin 2004, 359). See also Hare 2007, who holds that one must be either irrational or an ogre to have preferences that things be better off for the severely poor but then deny the claims made by such a view on one's actions.

obligated to scrutinize the personal prerogatives one has taken up unchecked and to locate these self-regarding actions against the demands of helping one's neighbors. Such scrutiny, I believe, would lead one to simplify his or her life in order to provide greater amounts of aid to the severely poor. Some regulatory benchmark, for example, Singer's 10% recommendation, provides affluent people with the bare minimum standard of giving. But affluent people are required to work out more fully how much more they would be able to give to the severely poor. Moreover, acting on one's regard for the severely poor does not prohibit the pursuit of personal prerogatives or the formation of special relations. Instead, taking the obligation to assist seriously means affirming both one's special relations and the distant stranger's being and significance. This does not require alienation from one's warranted ordinary actions; one is merely required to fit an obligation to assist into one's day-to-day framework.³²

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