

GLOBAL NEEDS AND SPECIAL RELATIONSHIPS

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[penultimate draft]

The question that Peter Singer and I address gnaws at the conscience of relatively affluent people in the per-capita richest countries, on account of the staggering scale of global inequality: “To what extent am I morally obliged to make sacrifices in order to help needy people, who mostly live abroad in countries with meager resources for relieving their burdens?” An argument that Singer first presented in 1973, in “Famine, Affluence and Morality,” which he has vigorously defended in the decades since, remains at the vital center of the search for a principled answer. Singer claims that nearly all of us would be forced by adequate reflection on our own deep moral convictions to impose a huge demand in response to the gnawing question, an obligation to give that is so demanding that, for example, it prohibits spending money on clothing “not to keep ourselves warm but to look ‘well-dressed’.”¹ Radical though his answer is, Singer says that it follows from uncontroversial empirical claims about global poverty together with a general principle of beneficence that most people find to be “undeniable” (p. 241) if they adequately reflect on their secure convictions about moral equality and duties of rescue, as in his famous story about rescuing a drowning toddler.

I think that Singer's project of deriving the radical from the obvious depends on misinterpretations of the deepest convictions of ordinary morality. If your deepest convictions are like most people's (including mine), you have grounds for rejecting the huge duty to donate that Singer would impose. Adequate reflection will lead you to embrace a more moderate principle of general beneficence, as an expression of the equal respect you owe to all: one's

underlying responsiveness to neediness ought to be sufficiently demanding that greater concern would impose a significant risk of worsening one's life. Although this duty does require most relatively affluent people (American professors very much included) to give more than we do, it does not dictate giving up all luxuries and frills. For this would worsen the lives of people who are attached to worthwhile, expensive personal goals. Other duties of aid add further requirements to give up advantages in the interests of needy people in developing countries, but these further demands depend on specific relationships and circumstances.

Both the argument of Singer's that I will criticize and the position that I will defend start within the circle of ordinary morality, and seek to describe the outcome of rational self-scrutiny on the part of most people of good will. Of course, there are other starting points. One of them is utilitarianism, the doctrine that one has a duty always to make a choice that creates as much over-all wellbeing as one can. Singer himself is drawn to this doctrine, so my concentration, throughout this essay, on ordinary moral convictions might seem unfair. But in fact, this emphasis is a tribute to what is powerful and innovative in his discussions of aid. Utilitarianism does, obviously, require someone to give up luxuries and frills to help the needy, and more besides: it requires a person to contribute funds to help the needy until giving more would create as much suffering on her part as she relieves. But this isn't the end of the remarkable dictates that seem to follow from utilitarianism. Others are outlandish, even appalling. If I know that I can save someone from death by buzz saw but only at a sacrifice of both my arms, those arms must go, or I do wrong. If four young people can be saved from imminent death but only by transplants requiring the harvesting of my vital organs, surgeons operating on my gall bladder who could harvest me without serious adverse consequences beyond my mysterious death in gall bladder surgery are wrong not to seize the opportunity and cut out my organs. This is just a

sample of the appalling apparent consequences that have led most philosophers (myself included) to reject utilitarianism. Singer's writings on aid to the world's needy have been profoundly influential and enriching, over the course of more than thirty years, precisely because he does *not* appeal to this embattled, extraordinary doctrine, but starts within the circle of ordinary morality and seeks to derive a conclusion about aid to the world's needy that is quite radical (if less radical than utilitarianism's.) His innovative work is a challenge to people with ordinary moral convictions to see if we can remain faithful to our own deepest moral beliefs while spending money to enjoy stylish clothes, more than basic stereo equipment and nice meals in restaurants.

In my response to this challenge, I will begin by comparing my principle of general beneficence with Singer's in more detail, showing why I take my principle to express the dictates of equal respect for all. Here, a disagreement about the moral status of special relationships, such as parental nurturance or friendship, will turn out to be crucial, producing different construals of the most fundamental principles of moral equality. Then, I will consider Singer's extremely powerful argument from ordinary judgments of the duty to rescue imperilled people close at hand to his radical demand for contributions to help needy people worldwide, arguing that special attention to those nearby is not, as he supposes, morally arbitrary. Finally, against the background of the limits to what we must do to help others apart from special relationships and circumstances, I will describe why current relationships between people in rich countries and people in poor ones dictate duties of aid to the foreign poor which are quite demanding, even if not as demanding as Singer requires. Despite large disagreements concerning the nature of moral equality, the demands of neediness and the moral importance of special relationships, Singer and I both think that relatively well-off people in per capita rich countries ought to do much more to

help needy people in poor countries. For example, we both think that a ten-fold increase in American aid would not be remotely adequate. Anyone who is at all satisfied with the current situation in which tax-financed development assistance in the United States is about \$40 per person per year, assistance financed by voluntary giving about \$162 should be disturbed by this convergence on sharp criticism of current practice from such different general perspectives.

Two Principles

Singer has claimed that the following principle, which I will call “the Principle of Sacrifice,” is “virtually undeniable” (p. 241):

“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.”³

Supplemented by a few further premises, which virtually all informed decent people would, on reflection, accept, this principle entails what I will call “the radical conclusion”:

Everyone has a duty to give up all luxuries and frills and donate the savings to help those in dire need (unless the purchase of a luxury or frill is part of a strategy that makes him or her more effective in relieving dire need.)

The parenthetical proviso permits someone to work as a lawyer for a Wall Street firm, dressing in the elegant suits that the firm requires, so long as this is part of a strategy of making and then donating big bucks that is a more effective way for her to help the needy than any less luxurious alternative. I will follow Singer in largely ignoring this proviso from now on, since it does not create a large loophole for most of us. A luxury or frill is an item of the sort that would make it plausible to say that someone is needy or poor because he can’t afford that sort of thing. So (apart from the proviso), the radical conclusion tells us that we have a duty to donate until donating more would impoverish ourselves or our dependents.

Two further premises connect the Principle of Sacrifice with the radical conclusion. First, on any particular occasion, or any small bunch of particular 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. If my sweater wardrobe is threadbare and I discover a stunning designer label sweater on sale for \$39.99, I may prefer buying it to buying a plain warm department store label sweater selling for \$22.95, but surely making the less expensive purchase is not a morally significant sacrifice. Second, because of the availability of international aid agencies, forgoing the choice of a luxury or frill and donating the money saved (perhaps combined with money saved on other similar occasions in a small bunch) is always a way of preventing something very bad from happening. For example, I can buy the less expensive sweater instead (or decide not to upgrade my stereo or decide to eat a cheap nutritious meal at home rather than a more interesting meal at a restaurant) and donate the savings to UNICEF, who will use the donation to immunize a children (or many children, in the case of the stereo) who will otherwise be in serious peril of death or crippling by readily preventable infection.

People find this argument frightening, and rightly so. It makes a shopping mall seem a site of grave moral danger. If you are drawn to buying that stylish designer-label sweater and realize that you could save a child's life through donating money saved by not purchasing it, it seems quite wrong to go ahead and buy it. Given the stakes for needy people in poor countries, a valid justification of going ahead and spending will not rest on the moral importance of having that designer-label sweater, but, rather, on replacement, on more general grounds, of Singer's principle by a suitably moderate rival. I will call my rival candidate, used, like Singer's, to

describe our duty to help others when no special relationship, circumstance or past history is in play, “the Principle of Sympathy”:

One’s underlying disposition to respond to neediness as such ought to be sufficiently demanding that giving displaying greater underlying concern would impose a significant risk of worsening one’s life, if one fulfilled one’s other responsibilities.

Someone’s choices or a pattern of choices on his part violate this principle if and only if they could not express the attitude of responsiveness it dictates if he is relevantly well-informed.

This principle looks at the impact of basic concern for neediness on how well someone is apt to fare in her life as a whole, an impact that depends, in part, on the worthwhile goals to which she is actually attached and from which she could not readily detach, the goals that give point and value to her particular choices. Its central question is, "Would an underlying attitude of greater concern create a significant risk that I could not pursue worthwhile goals with which I identify enjoyably and well?" Most of us do identify with goals requiring some purchases of luxuries and frills. For example, most of us identify with the goal of displaying one’s aesthetic sensibility and engaging in the fun of mutual aesthetic recognition through the way one dresses, which requires some purchases of clothing more expensive than the functional and plain. This goal, like other common, somewhat luxurious personal goals, is worthwhile. If no one had an interest in connecting dress with aesthetic fun, not just with covering up and keeping warm, and everything else were the same, the world would be worse. (In contrast, if no one cared about such silly competitions as the best-dressed lists, the world would be better.) In general, if the Principle of Sympathy puts the right ceiling on our duty to make sacrifices in response to neediness as such, it is not wrong sometimes to buy luxuries and frills, just as means of enjoyed

consumption. The crucial reason is one of legitimate self-interest: observing a sterner prohibition would worsen your life.

Within the circle of ordinary morality, which is the startingpoint of Singer's argument about aid as well as mine, the fact that a change would impose a significant risk of worsening someone's life certainly counts as morally significant. The sensitivity to neediness that the Principle of Sympathy regulates includes a concern to prevent very bad things from happening. So the difference in the demands imposed by the two principles depends on what is scrutinized in order to determine whether neglect of neediness has an appropriately serious justification: the impact of particular choices on particular occasions or the impact of an underlying attitude on a life as a whole. The Principle of Sacrifice scrutinizes particular occasions of choice for relevant moral significance, and only permits the choice not to prevent something very bad from happening when abstention from spending on luxuries or frills on those particular occasions would be morally significant. There is no occasion or small bunch of occasions on which my declining an opportunity to buy a stylish, more expensive article of clothing, buying a plain, cheap one instead, constitutes a morally significant loss. After all, such a choice never makes my life worse; at most it involves a minor episode of frustration.⁴ So, because of the opportunity presented by aid agencies, abstention is dictated by Singer's principle. But by prohibiting luxurious purchases on all particular occasions, it prohibits them, period (with the usual proviso about strategic use of luxuries.) This would make it impossible for a typical, relatively affluent person to pursue, enjoyably and well, goals that are worthwhile objects of secure attachment, according to ordinary moral thinking, such as the sartorial goal that I described. So observance of the principle would have an impact on someone's life as a whole in virtue of which it is to be rejected, as too demanding, if the Principle of Sympathy is right. No purchase prohibited by

Singer's principle is morally significant, but the loss imposed by 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.

Still, even though the Principle of Sympathy does not support Singer's radical conclusion, it does have a moderately demanding outcome: most of us ought to give more than we actually do to help the needy, even though we are not obliged to give up all luxuries and frills. Most people who identify with worthwhile, relatively expensive goals could devote far fewer resources to them and still pursue them enjoyably and well. We are constantly tempted to exaggerate what is really just a matter of frustration into a harm that worsens our lives. Moreover, our choices tend to be distorted by excessive anxiety that leads us to treat insignificant possibilities that more altruism will worsen our lives as significant risks of self-worsening. The Principle of Sympathy contributes to my agreement about the moral necessity of doing more for the world's poor.

Equal Concern and Equal Respect

The Principle of Sympathy stands in need of some sort of grounding in something more general. This is not just a philosopher's demand imposed from outside the circle of ordinary morality. For ordinary morality is not a mere collection of relatively specific principles governing particular spheres of conduct, such as responsiveness to neediness. Most reflective, decent people are committed to comprehensive precepts linking moral duty to a perspective of moral equality. We think that a choice is wrong if and only if it could not be made, under the circumstances, by someone displaying equal respect for all persons; if and only if it is incompatible with the ascription of equal worth to every person's life; if and only if, under the circumstances, it violates every moral code that no one could reasonably reject. These (and, no

doubt other) coextensive, mutually supportive principles are different ways of describing the perspective of moral equality from which choices should be scrutinized. Each sometimes requires interpretation in light of further, particularly compelling moral judgments, in much the same way as a general phrase in the U.S. Constitution such as “equal protection of the law” is clarified in hard cases by finding interpretations that fit obvious applications and established findings. Still, the dictates of these comprehensive precepts (again, like the sentences in a constitution) are, on reflection, sufficiently clear that they can guide and organize our scrutiny of more specific norms.

The Principle of Sympathy, I would claim, is an adequate expression of this fundamental 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 other responsibilities does attribute less value to others' lives than to his own. Someone who is unresponsive to another's deprivation does not treat her life as equally important unless his lack of responsiveness is supported by adequate reasons, which the person who violates the Principle of Sympathy lacks. On the other hand, someone whose responsiveness to neediness as such is as limited as the Principle of Sympathy permits can appreciate the equal worth of everyone's life, express equal respect for all, and reject self-governance by a more stringent principle as unreasonably demanding. “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 own life if I live up to my other responsibilities” is not an internally inconsistent self-portrayal.

No doubt, a more demanding principle, at least as demanding as the Principle of Sacrifice, would be endorsed from a perspective of equal *concern* for all. But equal respect does

not entail equal concern. I am, for example, more concerned for my daughter than for the daughter in the family that lives across the street, but I do not regard her life as more valuable. When my wife and I pay for our daughter's education at an excellent college, to avoid a significant risk of worsening her life, we do not express the view that her life is more valuable than the lives of several children in poor countries – yet we know that several children are apt to die at an early age because we do not insist that she go to a much cheaper college, not so good, in order to make a very big contribution to Oxfam. This unequal concern expresses a proper valuing of the history of nurturance and dependence that we share, not the appalling assessment of the lives of five children in Mali as worth less than the life of my daughter. And if one can respond to another's relationship of intimate dependence through such favoritism while equally respecting all, one can also equally respect all in spite of special concern for one's most intimate dependent, oneself, if this concern, analogously, avoids significant risks of worsening one's own life.

In defending a moderate principle of aid, I have just touched on a disagreement concerning the nature of moral equality. Although Singer and I agree that our duties reflect a comprehensive imperative of equal respect, we disagree as to whether attitudes compatible with equal respect must be certified from some further, authoritative perspective of equal concern. In his resourceful discussion of special relationships in his recent book, *One World*, Singer seems to take the view that an attachment such as my parental tie is only legitimate to the extent that it makes the person who is so attached more productive of over-all wellbeing, so that the partiality would be approved from a fundamental perspective of impartial concern.⁵ This seems wrong to me. If my daughter became a salesperson and I were in the horrible situation of only having time to save one person from a burning building, her or a brain surgeon with special lifesaving skills, I

would not do wrong or show unequal respect for persons if I saved my daughter. A skillful doctor working in a chronically understaffed inner city emergency room, routinely tired, emotionally frayed and preoccupied, but functioning well enough to enormously benefit humanity, does not show that she regards the lives of people in the hospital's neighborhood as less valuable than lives in her family if she quits and sets up a much less beneficent suburban practice when she sees that she is becoming detached from her family through the wear and tear of her beneficent work.

My point is not merely that certain relationships entailing special concern are inherently valuable – an assessment that might also be affirmed by a utilitarian who insists that one always act so as to maximize total value. The failure to shift spending from tuition to Oxfam leads to the early deaths of people who would otherwise become nurturant parents themselves. The medical shortfalls that I have just described would, similarly, reduce the prevalence of nurturance by increasing mortality among the medically deprived. Rather, my point is that the proper appreciation of an inherently valuable relationship to another, such as the parental nurturance of one's child, is expressed in special concern for the other, even when this reduces one's contribution to total value. I would not properly value my relationship to my daughter if I were willing to abandon her if this were a necessary part of a strategy for introducing nurturant relationships into the lives of two other parents and their children.

Similarly, I do not just mean to insist on the value of a system of social norms which enjoin special beneficence in special relationships such as parenthood. A "rule utilitarian" might acknowledge this, while arguing that facts of global poverty and inequality justify the inculcation of a norm of beneficence that is much more demanding than the Principle of Sympathy. But the rule utilitarian's determination of right and wrong by the most beneficent set of social rules is

unsatisfactory. If the efficiency of raising children in group nurseries without the intense particular attachment of parental love were, in fact, a means of increasing total well-being, people could still rightly refuse to swallow a pill which allows them to blithely participate in the project, refusing because of their actual enmeshment in their children's lives or because of goals of parenting with which they actually identify. And similarly for children's loyalty to their parents, friends' mutual loyalties and other pills. (There is also the notorious difficulty of explaining why beneficence is all important in determining what social rules are to be inculcated, but fails to determine what is wrong and what is right in individual choices not to promote the most good, such as those described in the previous paragraphs.)

Peter Singer and I agree that the mere warm glow of closeness -- celebrated, for example, in songs of Nazi stormtroopers -- has no serious moral standing. Special attachments generating special duties must be valuable. To be valuable, they must be well enough integrated with other moral duties and obligatory goals. Our disagreement concerns whether a single impartialist test, such as the production of maximum over-all wellbeing, is what we must impose and the only test we ultimately need.

Rescue and Closeness

Like a sneaky lawyer, I have, so far, made my case for a moderate duty of general beneficence while pretending that a certain powerful contrary argument did not exist, namely, Singer's famous argument from a duty to rescue a drowning toddler that nearly all of us would strongly affirm to his Principle of Sacrifice. It is time to confront it. (In the course of my struggle, I will also confront Peter Unger's similar reasoning from another story of impending catastrophe, which Singer now uses to strengthen his own, pioneering argument.)

If I were rushing to a lecture and encountered a toddler drowning in a pond, it would be wrong of me not to stop and rescue him, even if I had to ruin a three hundred dollar suit. The lives of children in distant villages who are currently imperilled by lack of access to safe water and basic medical facilities are no less valuable because they are not near. So mustn't I be willing, now and so long as I live in such a grim world, continually to make sacrifices to rescue such people from peril, whenever the sacrifices are on the same scale as nearby rescue can require?

The formulation of the nature of moral duty that appeals to moral codes that no one could reasonably reject is a helpful framework for responding to this challenge. (Thomas Scanlon's writings have revealed the fundamental role in moral reasoning of this aspiration to reconciliation by shared principles.)⁶ A choice is wrong if and only if it would be prohibited, under the circumstances, by any moral code that no one could reasonably reject as providing shared terms of self-governance for each to impose on herself. Any such code, I would argue, would include both the Principle of Sympathy, as its description of the general duty of beneficence, regardless of special relationships or circumstances, and a principle asserting a special connection between nearby peril and a definite, potentially demanding duty of rescue, along roughly the following lines:

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

The case against rejecting either principle in our moral code provides grounds for insisting on my duty to save the nearby toddler (which Nearby Rescue does demand) without requiring my

saving all equally imperilled people near or far whenever the cost is no greater (which exceeds the demands of Sympathy.)

One alternative to such a moral code, the alternative most directly evoked by Singer's argument, would delete the restriction to those nearby in the Principle of Nearby Rescue, requiring rescue of those in peril near or far. Because of the facilities of aid agencies, this distance-deleted requirement would impose beneficent sacrifices on the scale of the Principle of Sacrifice. For reasons that I brought forward in my critique of the latter imperative, relatively well-off people could reasonably reject the distance-deleted alternative as too demanding. In contrast, in the normal circumstances of human life (which are presupposed in the Principle of Nearby Rescue), the net expected costs of sharing in a general commitment to the Principle of Nearby Rescue are trivial, at most. The small likelihood of costly rescue dictated by the principle is virtually balanced by a prospect of need for rescue that we all face because of human vulnerability.

This is not to deny that the Principle of Nearby Rescue could come due in burdensome ways in particular, exceptional circumstances. This is Bob's fate in Peter Unger's story of the man who must sacrifice the Bugatti in which he has invested his savings in order to save a child from being crushed by a train. However, when we identify demands of equal respect by asking what principles would be part of a moral code that no one could reasonably reject, the acceptances and rejections that concern us are not judgments of what to do in response to particular circumstances. The moral code that someone accepts is in the background of her responses to particular current circumstances, defining an enduring commitment that a person of moral integrity brings into interactions with others as they arise. Correspondingly, the rejection of a moral code 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 likelihood, before the fact, that circumstances of various kinds will arise. From this perspective, Bob, like the rest of us, could not reasonably reject the Principle of Nearby Rescue, since the relevant expected cost of shared compliance is trivial, at most.

The Principle of Nearby Rescue, then, is not to be rejected as excessively demanding, while some could reasonably reject, as too demanding, its replacement by an otherwise similar distance-neutral requirement. Still, the principle's special emphasis on nearby perils and nearby means of rescue might be objectionable, as elevating one personal policy for rationing the demands of Sympathy into a policy that all must follow. Why can't anyone reasonably reject a specific commitment to help those encountered in peril, on the occasion of encounter, so long as he commits himself to the Principle of Sympathy, which requires a general level of concern without demanding aid on any specific occasion? If there is no good answer, then the Principle of Sympathy itself is threatened. For the duties to save the imperilled children remain to be explained, and rival, demanding principles of general beneficence are waiting in the wings to explain them, such as the Principle of Sacrifice or the even more demanding principle that would dictate Bob's sacrifice of his Bugatti.

If someone were to reject the Principle of Nearby Rescue because he does not want to make a specific commitment to help those encountered in nearby peril on the occasion of encounter, he fails to adequately appreciate certain values that are tied to closeness in the normal human background circumstances that Nearby Rescue presupposes. For one thing, such a person would not properly value the relationship of encounter, the minimal relationship among humans that is our pervasive basis for mutual recognition. Quite apart from any actual need for aid, any

self-respecting person cherishes participation in a milieu in which people who encounter one another can expect the good will that *would* be expressed by aid like that dictated by the Principle of Nearby Rescue should the need arise. Even if a cerebral hemorrhage instantly kills me in ripe old age, ending a life in which I never needed help from a stranger, I would be profoundly deprived by a milieu in which passersby would simply have stepped over me if I had collapsed on a sidewalk. Someone who adheres to the Principle of Sympathy but is not specially attentive to the needs of those closeby fails to do his part in sustaining a milieu that all should cherish.

In the second place, the failure to adopt the special policy of aiding those in peril closeby which the Principle of Nearby Rescue prescribes would be a failure to participate in a current, widely shared disposition that is part of the best feasible basis for effectively coordinating individual aid initiatives. A joint project of alleviating neediness is considerably advanced by a prevalent means of allocating responsibilities which tends to assign responsibilities to those who are in a position to help. Without such coordination, people are apt falsely to assume that someone else will come to the aid of a victim and people who do help are apt to find that the difficulties of aid are more severe because those who could have helped earlier and more easily did not. A strong inclination to help those in imminent physical peril who are close at hand is, in fact, widely shared, and serves as a fairly effective coordinative mechanism, playing an important role in the joint project of relieving neediness that the Principle of Sympathy describes. So it would be unreasonable, in a parasite's way, for a person of moral integrity, who must be committed to this project, to refuse to share this relevantly undemanding coordinative disposition.

Finally, special attentiveness to needs in one's immediate environment is acceptance of a responsibility that balances a self-respectful person's insistence that others be specially willing to respect her space. We expect others to be strongly (though, of course, not absolutely) disinclined to stop us in our tracks or to impose immediate barriers to our physical activities. It would be unreasonable to insist on this special solicitude for control over one's immediate environment without accepting a corresponding spatial trusteeship, a special responsibility to attend to events within one's immediate environment that are cause for concern.

Granted, human fellowship would be even greater if the strong inclination to help an encountered victim were part of an inclination to help on any occasion on which one has an opportunity to relieve distress; and 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. But these are not prevalent inclinations, actually benefitting all. And a proposal that we should all be so responsive could reasonably be rejected by some, as imposing a significant risk of worsening their lives.

Singer and I do not entirely disagree about the moral status of mere closeness. In imaginable circumstances, very different from the normal circumstances of human life, nearness (I accept) would not characterize a special duty of aid. For example, imagine a future form of life in which people grow up with monitors and keyboards grafted onto their bodies, communicating via the internet, with only the most awkward and obscure awareness of their immediate environments. In this world, a special duty of nearby rescue would be out of place, even though the Principle of Sympathy would still bind these cybernauts. The Principle of Nearby Rescue presupposes the background circumstances of people who are embodied, aware and capable in the actual human way. In these circumstances, there is a special connection between closeness

and the morally important values of personal encounter, coordinative efficiency and spatial trusteeship, a connection that would have lapsed among the cybernauts.

Limits to Global Beneficence

Now that the differences in general approach are clearer, it is time to re-examine the gnawing question of duties of relatively affluent people in per-capita rich countries to give up advantages in the interest of needy people in poor countries, approaching the issue from the standpoint that I have begun to defend. This approach certainly does not lead to demands for aid to needy foreigners that are as extensive as Singer's. I will begin by examining the reasons why in more detail, describing ways in which limits to responsiveness to foreign needs are justified by personal prerogatives and by special responsibilities to others. Yet, ironically, (as I will try to show, in conclusion), a deeper understanding of these prerogatives and responsibilities, which Singer's argument underrates, also establishes a demanding duty to help needy people in poor countries, a duty that is especially demanding now because of the relationships that bind relatively affluent people in rich countries with needy people in poor ones.

If, as I have argued, people in the per-capita richest countries are typically attached to personal goals that are both relatively expensive and worthwhile, then the restriction of obligatory concern for neediness to what does not pose a significant risk of worsening the benefactor's life is an important limitation on the duty to respond to global poverty regardless of special relationships toward the needy. Other features of the Principle of Sympathy lead to other important limitations, as well.

Because of the challenge posed by Singer's extremely attractive general Principle of Sacrifice, I have, until now, treated neediness generically, without distinguishing among the many different needs that provide worthy objects of giving. Once one considers their diversity, a

corresponding freedom in allocating what Sympathy requires further limits the duty to help needy people in poor countries. For the duty to respond to neediness does not entail an exclusive concern with those who are neediest or whose urgent needs are most readily relieved – people who live, quite disproportionately, in developing countries with meager local resources. Those who have serious needs of other kinds could reasonably complain of a moral code requiring such an exclusive focus. So could benefactors who seek to honor other worthy causes, close to their hearts. When benefactors express their love of opera by giving that avoids cultural deprivations or express their attachment to their town by contributing to the local United Way, they do not place a lesser value on the lives of the world’s neediest, even though Oxfam would use that money to relieve more urgent needs more efficiently. Of course, they would also do no wrong by embracing the cause of the world’s poorest more wholeheartedly, and giving to Oxfam. But in practice, the exercise of the prerogative to favor worthwhile causes closest to one’s heart strongly favors giving within the borders, even in the per-capita richest countries. In the United States, only about 2 percent of donations to tax-exempt non-profit organizations go to those whose primary interest is international, including those concerned with international security, foreign affairs and cultural exchange rather than development and humanitarian assistance.⁷

Finally, the concern for neediness that Sympathy requires is limited by one’s other responsibilities, including responsibilities to be specially concerned for those to whom one stands in special relationships. In arguing for the Principle of Sympathy itself, I emphasized intimate relationships, such as parenting and friendship, which are the clearest sources of special responsibilities. However, the assessment of political duties toward those with whom one shares the cooler relationship that binds compatriots is exceptionally important in assessing duties of foreign aid. In the first place, aid financed by taxes in developed countries is, potentially, the

most powerful device for helping needy people in developing countries. It overcomes individuals' reluctance to give voluntarily to needy foreigners. It can sustain the large-scale, coordinated projects improving infrastructure on which development depends. And by imposing burdens of giving uniformly and fairly among compatriots, it can limit the force of complaints that one's giving to the foreign poor will worsen one's life by reducing resources to compete with compatriots who are not so ready to give. In addition, duties toward compatriots are the prime example, in ordinary moral thinking, of duties of aid that can properly override the familiar partialities of private life, even those binding parents and children. The thought that effective educational help to disadvantaged children in my school district will make it harder for my child to get into a good college should not lead me to vote against a candidate for the school board who is committed to improving educational opportunities for the disadvantaged. Unless a special political obligation to relieve disadvantages of compatriots can be shown to reflect the special relationship that binds compatriots, an extrapolation of this duty to the world at large might generate an extremely demanding duty of foreign aid.⁸

Unlike Peter Singer, I share the common view that people have a special responsibility to help needy compatriots through tax-financed aid, even if they live in one of the per-capita richest countries and others, in poor foreign countries, could more effectively be helped to cope with even more serious needs (such as the health needs of children in low income countries, where 12% die before the age of five.)⁹ This duty of special concern for compatriots is political, a matter of choices concerning what laws to support. Only a patriotic nut would object to an American's checking the "Where the need is greatest" box, not the "United States only" box, when sending a private donation to the Save the Children Foundation. The duty has its sources,

correspondingly, in political relationships of mutual coercion and mutual expectations of political loyalty.

If I am politically active, as I ought to be, then, if my political projects succeed, I will have helped to create laws which people living in the territory of my government are forced to obey, on pain of dangerous encounters with cops, courts and jails. These laws describe permissible ways of getting ahead economically. In order to show respect for those whom I help to coerce, I must be responsive, in my political choices, to complaints of disadvantage due to the laws that I help to impose. Suppose compatriots are burdened by inferior life-prospects due to the current system of laws; their life-prospects are significantly less because their parents did not do well under the imposed terms of self-advancement and because those terms tie life-prospects to family resources. If these burdens could be relieved by changes that do not impose losses on the same scale on those who are socially advantaged, then I would be wrong to support the current system. As a politically active person I must support the change in the benefits and burdens of the system, on pain of taking part in unjust coercion. After all, if someone significantly disadvantaged by laws imposed on her finds that her compatriots do not take her disadvantage to be a serious reason for change, she cannot reasonably be expected to loyally, actively, willingly support her country's political arrangements, and a political system that does not merit such support is unjust.

Institutional loyalty also gives rise more directly to special duties to compatriots. Within any reasonably just political community, stability is based on loyalty. People expect their compatriots loyally to support their shared institutions, engaging in principled compromise on the basis of shared political values, making sacrifices when the shared arrangements are under special stress, even, in some circumstances, risking their lives for their country. In general, the

proper valuing of others' expected loyal participation in a shared institution on whose thriving one's own well-being depends is expressed in loyalty to co-participants, a special concern to use the shared arrangement to help them when they are in need. This connection between loyalty to a shared arrangement and loyalty to fellow-members is quite general. It generates duties of special concern among department colleagues and fellow-members of a team, as well as compatriots. However, the strength of one's duty of special concern depends on the importance of the shared arrangement to one's well-being and on the potential demands of loyalty to it. On both dimensions, loyalty to shared political arrangements is specially important, creating specially demanding duties of special concern.

If, in my political choices, I do not choose to relieve significant burdens of social disadvantage due to norms that are imposed on my compatriots or do not display special loyal concern for needy compatriots, and my only reason is that resources could be used more effectively to relieve more serious needs among the foreign poor, then I am like a feudal overlord who exploits his serfs to extract revenues that he uses to help the much more miserable serfs in the neighboring valley. In all or virtually all developed countries, certainly including the United States, there are people whose life prospects are threatened by serious social disadvantages and by misfortunes with which they cannot adequately cope without tax-financed aid. So patriotic responsibilities properly restrict aid to the world's neediest, who tend to live in developing countries.

Global Social Justice

These are, I think, the main limits of the duty of relatively affluent people in the per-capita richest countries to do what they can to relieve the burdens of desperate neediness worldwide. It might be feared that my approach justifies Scrooge-like neglect of the foreign

poor. But in fact, an accurate understanding of the prerogatives and responsibilities generating those limits establishes a demanding duty to help needy people in poor countries – not as demanding as Singer’s requirement but far more demanding than what most people in developed countries now impose on themselves, either in personal giving or political choices.

For one thing, giving to causes other than the effective relief of the most urgent needs is often more extensive than it has to be to express the strength of the benefactor’s intelligent attachment to a worthy cause, close to his heart. If so, then too much flows into these other channels. For giving to help the neediest or those whose urgent needs are most readily relieved – the cause that strongly favors the needy in developing countries -- is not just one worthy practice of giving among others. This concern is, as it were, the default stance of those who are adequately responsive to neediness. My giving to the opera, the United Way or alma mater what could serve those interests of sheer compassion instead can be justified in light of the legitimate strength of attachments of mine. But my giving where the need is greatest does not require any special justification in light of my personal history and values. If we were to ask whether the departure of our giving from the default stance is due to the legitimate strength of our attachments to other worthy causes, most of us, on reflection, would have to concede that it partly responds to irrelevant enticements and pressures (such as the regular calls from the class agent that lead to my disproportionate donation to Amherst College.) If we could keep a clear head about what actually poses a significant risk of worsening our lives and what actually draws us to local causes, the commitment to Sympathy would lead us to do more for the world’s neediest.

Still, personal causes, goals and relationships can impose large and legitimate demands. The question of the extent to which a relatively affluent person overestimates the legitimate force

of these personal concerns is both hard to answer and dependent on features of his outlook into which a government should not inquire – obstacles that create dangers of unjust intrusion when demands of general beneficence are enforced by tax-financed foreign aid. Because of these limits to the appeal to general beneficence, the moral obligations of relatively affluent people in the richest countries to give up advantages in the interest of needy foreigners in poor countries largely reflect specific interactions between them. This major part of the case for transnational aid takes the argument from compatriots' relationships to duties of patriotic concern as its model; it treats measures helping people in poor countries as means of preventing or repairing defects in relationships to them.

Transnational coercion. The bearing on foreign needs of the rationale for patriotic concern is most direct when a government coercively imposes its rules on foreigners. This is a routine practice at borders, where many who want to enter in order to take up opportunities to make an honest living would be stopped by officials with guns. Such uses of political coercion by developed countries mainly burden poor people in developing countries. They exclude them from important opportunities for legitimate self-advancement. (In one study of legal immigration from Mexico to the United States, Mexicans left jobs paying on average \$31 a week and on arrival immediately earned \$278.)¹⁰ And they worsen wages, working conditions and unemployment in developing countries, by increasing the competition among those desperately seeking to sell their labor. So the same argument from coercively imposed disadvantage that generates a political duty of concern for compatriots generates a political duty among citizens of developed countries to relieve the burden that these countries jointly impose on needy foreigners through immigration restrictions, either by reducing the restrictions or by reducing the poverty that makes them burdensome. In part because of the special dictates of civic loyalty, this duty

should be discharged in ways that are sensitive to the special vulnerabilities of needy compatriots to competition from immigrants. But the force of patriotic concerns in apportioning the costs of a task of transnational justice does not negate the task itself. No one, rich or poor, has a right to benefit from others' unjust coercion.

Exploitation. The difficulty of reconciling physical coercion with respect is especially clear and especially well-established as a topic of political philosophy. But exploitation of advantages other than superiority in physical coercive power can also express disrespect. If I am dying of thirst in a desert, someone might be able to use his special knowledge of where the water is to get me to accept an arrangement in which I wait on his caprices for the rest of my life. Even if he does not use or threaten physical coercion, he wrongs me by taking advantage of me. He wrongs me even if I am better off as a result of the bargain than I would be if I never met him. Similarly, unless they support special measures giving up advantages in the interests of people in developing countries, relatively affluent people in developed countries, who benefit from globalization, will unjustly take advantage of needy people in developing countries.

For one thing, the joint lowering of barriers to foreign trade and investment that characterizes the process of globalization quite disproportionately disrupts lives in developing countries, as farms and businesses go under in the face of competition from stronger foreign firms. Unless we support special measures to raise the safety nets that could reduce this suffering, relatively affluent people in developed countries, who benefit from cheaper prices for consumer goods and higher returns on investments without suffering concomitant costs, derive benefits from this joint activity without adequate regard for our dependence on the special fortitude of our co-participants abroad.

Also, the price of goods imported from developing countries is less and the return on investments there is greater because desperately needy people are driven to accept low wages and miserable working conditions to avoid even worse fates. Relatively affluent people in developed countries are no better than the desert dweller in my story if we are not willing to use these benefits from others' bargaining weakness to alleviate the dire need that generates the weakness.

Threats vs. reasonableness. The process molding the institutional framework of international economic life also generates special duties to improve current life-prospects in developing countries, to avoid undue influence of threat-advantages of developed countries, especially the United States. For example, the trade, investment and patent and copyright agreements that are now administered by the World Trade Organization were instituted in negotiations in which the United States exploited to the hilt threats addressed to needs and weaknesses in other countries, both threats of retaliatory tariffs (such as the warning that the United States would play a leading role in "trade wars over all sorts of silly things" if it did not get its way¹¹) and threats to exclude the recalcitrant from new, narrow circles of favored partners ("a market liberalization club' approach, through minilateral arrangements".¹²) In international political relationships, as in domestic ones, someone who adequately respects others' capacity for choice will not be satisfied by joint arrangements whose acceptance depends on fear of threat advantages she enjoys. She will seek outcomes that could be justified through reasonable deliberations over the best interpretation of relevant shared moral values. Such an outcome of reasonable deliberations over rules for trade, investment and property rights would substantially differ from current arrangements, in ways that would greatly help needy people in developing countries. For example, current outcomes combine prohibitions of government subsidies to

strengthen exports in developing countries with farm subsidies in rich countries of over \$300 billion a year (more than the total income of the poorest fifth of the world's people) which devastate farms in developing countries.¹³ Principled deliberation based on appeals to relevant shared moral values could not have this outcome. Nor could the reasonable outcome of trade deliberations resemble the current one in imposing average tariffs on exports produced by those whose income is less than \$2 a day which are twice as high as tariffs on exports produced by those whose income is greater.¹⁴

Subordination and inequality. In seeking processes and outcomes that respect other peoples' capacity for choice, rather than taking advantage of their weaknesses, a morally responsible citizen of one of the per-capita richest countries will also seek to reduce vast inequalities of income and wealth, which promote subordination in international politics as surely as they do domestically. Thus, her interest in political justice, not just her compassion for the world's needy, will lead to concern with the scale and growth of such inequalities. (For example, the ratio of the GDP in the highest-per-capita-GDP countries where a fifth of the world's people live to GDP in the bottom fifth grew from 60 to 1 in 1990 to about 70 to 1 in 2000, converting to dollars at rates of foreign exchange.)¹⁵

Whatever worthy causes are close to her heart, a morally responsible person must be willing to use benefits from these ways of taking advantage of people in developing countries to improve their situations, at least so long as this alleviates the plight of the world's neediest. Unlike the plea, "Take pity on us," the protest, "Don't take advantage of us," is not met by noting "I'm sorry, but I have other, legitimate goals."

Conclusion

Of course, a concern to repair relationships in which one would otherwise take advantage of others is quite compatible with a concern to relieve suffering as such. It is hard to imagine an effective movement to help people in poor countries that is not inspired by both motivations, and appalling to contemplate someone who cares about injustices done to people in poor countries but not about their suffering as such. Still, given the limitations of the duty of general beneficence, arguments from transnational relationships will be an especially fruitful source of transnational duties to do more to help needy people in poor countries. In making such arguments, friends of humanity ask relatively affluent people in developed countries to reflect on the reasons that already lead them to recognize a duty to help needy compatriots: given the moral force they already ascribe to relationships within borders, it would be arbitrary not to attribute similar force to other relationships across borders.

Some may think that the complex reasoning that I have sketched is messy. Maybe so, but it involves the interpretation of general vague principles in light of more specific findings that is the hallmark of sound legal reasoning, and the tolerance for the theoretical complexity that specific observations require that is the hallmark of good science. And perhaps this reasoning has a practical advantage, for those of us who think much more should be done to advance the well-being of needy people in poor countries. I hope that the less radical, though demanding view of our duties to the foreign poor, rooted in principles that often parallel sources of special concern for poor compatriots, is a basis for more effective public arguments, less apt to produce a cynical backlash based on the sentiment, "If this is what morality requires, morality isn't for me."

I have called for many departures from Peter Singer's classic discussions of sacrifice and beneficence. But my effort, like his, is an attempt to derive duties of aid that most of us are

reluctant to acknowledge from ordinary strong moral convictions. In this way, my rival to his account of aid and obligation pays homage to his groundbreaking work.

¹ See “Famine, Affluence and Morality,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1 (1973), pp. 235. Unadorned page numbers will refer to this article.

² See World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003* (Washington: World Bank, 2003), p. 336; OECD, *2002 Development Cooperation Report*, www.oecd.org/xls/M00037000/M00037866.xls, Table 13.

³P. 235. In explaining the force of the “ought,” Singer notes that it 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.”

⁴Some might disagree, claiming that such a choice does worsen my life, but only insignificantly. There is no need to pursue the disagreement here. A reader who takes this view of minor frustrations should simply recalibrate my discussion, treating “significant risk of worsening one’s life” as short for “significant risk of significantly worsening one’s life” and so forth.

⁵ See *One World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 154-67.

⁶ His most detailed discussion is *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.)

⁷ Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, *Giving USA 2002* (Indianapolis: AAFRC Trust for Philanthropy, 2002), pp. 19, 125.

⁸ For simplicity’s sake, I will treat the relationship binding compatriots as identical with fellow-citizenship. In fact, citizens of a country can be tied, as compatriots, to noncitizens, on the basis of co-residence and appropriate commitments. My arguments for duties of special concern for compatriots will suggest the general shape of these commitments, but I lack the space to develop a more precise account.

9 See World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003*, p. 114. The World Bank counts countries as “low income” if per capita annual Gross National Income, converted to U.S. dollars at foreign exchange rates, is no more than \$745. Two-fifths of the world’s people live in such countries. In current usage, there are many terms for each of the opposite ends of the world spectrum of national prosperity and poverty, but distinctions among them will not affect the issues at hand. I will treat “rich country” and “developed country”, “poor country” and “developing country,” as respectively coextensive, sometimes using more elaborate phrases such as “per-capita rich” and “per-capita richest” as reminders that countries at the rich end of the spectrum contain individuals who are far from rich.

10 See Paul Collier and David Dollar, *Globalization, Growth, and Poverty* (Washington: World Bank, 2002), p. 44.

11 A threat by Carla Hills, the most important U.S. negotiator, who had promised that she would open other countries’ markets with a crowbar, if need be. See Jarrod Wiener, *Making Rules in the Uruguay Round of the GATT* (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing Co., 1995), p. 186.

12 Secretary of State James Baker; see Ernest Preeg, *Traders in a Brave New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 80.

13 See Luis Bernal, Antonio La Vina and Vicente Yu, “The Doha Trade Negotiations and Local Communities” (2003) www.southcentre.org/publications/occasional/paper10/toc.htm, p. 4; Oxfam, *Rigged Rules and Double Standards* (2002) www.makefairtrade.com, p. 113.

14 World Bank, *Economic Prospects and Developing Countries 2002*, www.worldbank.org/prospects/gep2002/chapt.2.pdf, p. 21.

15 See United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1999*, hdr.undp.org/reports/global/1999, Overview, p. 17, ending with a 1997 ratio of 74 to 1. In

assessing differences in global economic power, incomes outside the United States are best converted to dollars at foreign exchange rates. In contrast, in comparing material standards of living, the right rate is so-called “purchasing power parity,” which reflects the relative cheapness of goods and services that are locally generated and consumed in developing countries. Inequalities measured by this standard are less, but still severe. The 15% of the world’s people who live in countries ranked “high income” by the World Bank have five times the Gross National Income, at purchasing power parity, of the 40% in “low income” countries (World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003*, p. 16.)