https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

INTERNATIONAL AID: WHEN GIVING BECOMES A VICE*

By Neera K. Badhwar

I. Introduction

A. The Singer-Unger thesis

Is giving up all one's "unnecessary" pleasures, all one's luxuries, in order to help the hungry and naked of the world essential to leading a morally decent life, or even the ideally moral life? Peter Singer and Peter Unger would have us believe that it is.[1] According to these two theorists, moral decency requires that the affluent—and nearly all residents of affluent countries count as affluent—donate all their surplus to relieving poverty and its consequences. Although Singer also calls for higher levels of government-to-government aid, his main concern, like Unger's, is to exhort us as individuals to give more.

Despite the clash of this view with common sense and common (almost universal) practice, it seems to have strong popular and philosophical appeal. Singer's provocative 1972 article "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," written at the time of the civil war in East Pakistan, led to the establishment of Oxfam America[2] and spawned dozens of articles and comments, both supportive and critical.[3] Since its original publication, Singer's article has been reprinted in over two dozen books. It also inspired Unger to write *Living High and Letting Die* in the hope of providing a

* I am grateful for helpful comments on this paper from Ellen Frankel Paul, Larry White (who commented on the paper at the 2005 conference of the Association for Private Enterprise Education), David Blumenfeld, and Garrett Cullity (whose comments from Australia were a wonderful example of voluntary international aid to a stranger). I would also like to thank Georgia State University, Bowling Green State University, and the Association for Private Enterprise Education for inviting me to present this paper, and the audiences at these presentations for their helpful discussion. Finally, I would like to thank Harry Dolan for his expert copyediting, which saved me from some embarrassing mistakes and infelicities.

[1] See Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (1972): 229–43, revised version at http://www.petersingerlinks.com/famine.htm; Singer, *Practical Ethics,* 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 230; Singer, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); Singer, "The Bread Which You Withhold Belongs to the Hungry: Attitudes to Poverty," http://www.iadb.org/etica/documentos/dc_sin_elpan-i.htm (2003); Peter Unger, *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). All further references to Singer's "Famine" are to the revised version.

[2] Oxfam is an abbreviation for the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief.

[3] See, e.g., the essays in Dale Jamieson, ed., *Singer and His Critics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999).

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stronger and more detailed defense of Singer's thesis against actual and possible objections. Unger's book also generated intense discussion in philosophy journals, and Singer himself has written on the topic several times since his 1972 article and has talked about it in interviews in the print media.[4]

One reason for the persuasive power of the Singer-Unger thesis, as I shall call it, is that the ideology of aid to the poor, especially poor children, has long been revered and, like all ideologies, rather uncritically so. Thus, politicians who launch new programs that claim to help the needy are hailed by people of different political and religious persuasions (whatever the politicians' motives or the actual results of their programs), and those who claim to love "the poorest of the poor" are everywhere hailed as saints (no matter how weak the evidence for their claim).[5] Even totalitarian leaders who have committed mass murder in the name of "justice for the poor," such as Mao Tse-tung, have been admired the world over

[4] See, for example, Peter Singer, "Should We Let Them Starve?" *New Humanist,* June 1974; Singer, "The Right to Be Rich or Poor," *The New York Review of Books,* March 6, 1975; Singer, "Greed Is Stupid," *Australian Business Monthly,* March 1992, 78–81; Singer, "Not What You Produce, But How Much You Spend," *Modern Times,* March 1992, 16–17; and Singer, "The Drowning Child and the Expanding Circle," *New Internationalist,* April 1997, 28–30.

[5] "Compassionate" conservatism in the United States seems obviously to be a response to the public adulation of "generous" politicians; and the belief in the "saintliness" of Mother Teresa, based almost entirely on uncritical acceptance of her own claims and those of a few hagiographers, persists despite the vast evidence for the fact that very little of the tens of millions she received in donations every year worldwide was spent on the care of the poor. Instead, nearly all of it was spent either directly on missionary work or repatriated to the Vatican for its missionary work. The evidence comes from former nuns, lay helpers in her missions, and the poor of Calcutta, including those in the immediate vicinity of her homes in the city. The results are reported and discussed in books and articles based on years of research. See, in particular, Aroup Chatterjee, *Mother Teresa: The Final Verdict* (Kolkata, India: Meteor Books, 2003), http://www.meteorbooks.com/index.html; Christopher Hitchens, *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice,* reprint ed. (New York: Verso, 1997); Hitchens, "Less than Miraculous," *Free Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (2004), http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/hitchens_24_2.html; Susan Shields, "Mother Teresa's House of Illusions," *Free Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (1997/1998), http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/shields_18_1.html; and Walter Wuellenweber, "Mother Teresa: Where Are Her Millions?" *Stern,* September 10, 1998 (English translation available at http://are.berkeley.edu/~atanu/Writing/teresa.html and http://members.lycos.co.uk/bajuu). Before the publication of Chatterjee's book, Christopher Hitchens and Tariq Ali produced a documentary based on Chatterjee's research called *Hell's Angel* for Britain's Channel 4. Hitchens also accused Mother Teresa of celebrating suffering instead of alleviating it. A nice summary of the findings in these works and in the works of other investigators may be found online at "Missionaries of Charity," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Missionaries_of_Charity, and "Mother Teresa," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother_Teresa. A somewhat different perspective is provided by Clifford Orwin in "Compassion and Christian Charity: Princess Diana versus Mother Teresa," in Amy L. Kass, ed., *The Perfect Gift: The Philanthropic Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 188–211. Orwin argues that although it is true that Mother Teresa did not do much to help relieve suffering, and thus was not charitable in the modern meaning of the term, she did help sufferers see Christ in their suffering and take joy in it as a path to redemption, and thus was charitable in the original meaning of the term. This, however, does not exempt her from criticism. When a person refuses to relieve the suffering of another because, according to her own beliefs and wishes, not those of the sufferer, suffering will bring the sufferer closer to Christ, her "charity" is cruel and immoral.

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by many people, educated and uneducated alike.[6] Hence, it is not surprising that many philosophers accept the idea that if donating all one's surplus would help the poor, it would be a worthy ideal.[7] And indeed, when one thinks of the condition of those who live in "absolute poverty" (as Robert McNamara, former president of the World Bank, called it),[8] poverty that reduces people to an existence on the margins, it can seem that there is no justification for not giving one's entire surplus to the poor if doing so would relieve poverty.

[6] Of course, in all these cases the motivations for the praise are more diverse than I have described them here, including both self-interest or envy (on the part of the worse-off) and guilt (on the part of the better-off).

[7] See, for example, Richard Arneson, "Moral Limits on the Demands of Beneficence?" in Deen K. Chatterjee, ed., *The Ethics of Assistance: Morality, Affluence, and the Distant Needy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 33–58; Thomas W. Pogge, "Real World Justice," *Journal of Ethics* 9, nos. 1–2 (2005): 29–53, reprinted in an abbreviated form as "A Cosmopolitan Perspective on the Global Economic Order," in Harry Brighouse and Gillian Brock, eds., *The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 92–109; and Thomas W. Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002). Pogge's main theme in these works, however, is not the positive duty to aid but the negative duty to change the global economic order which, he argues, is unjust and partly responsible for much of the poverty of the developing world. In "Duties to the Distant: Aid, Assistance, and Intervention in the Developing World," *Journal of Ethics* 9, nos. 1–2 (2005): 151–70, Dale Jamieson argues that aid, both governmental and private, has been harmful overall to its recipients, but takes pains to state that if this were not the case, he would accept Singer's view of the duty to assist. In "Famine Relief: The Duties We Have to Others," in Andrew I. Cohen and Christopher H. Wellman, eds., *Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 313–25, Christopher Heath Wellman defends Singer's "less demanding principle" that we have a positive duty to give to famine relief "until we sacrifice something 'morally significant'," but rejects the "more demanding principle that we ought to contribute until we are sacrificing something 'morally comparable'" (323 n. 1). In *The Moral Demands of Affluence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), Garrett Cullity argues that beneficence requires giving of one's time or money to the cause of global poverty or some other comparable philanthropic cause, but rejects the view that its demands are as high as Singer and Unger claim. (Unfortunately, the book came out too late for me to take its arguments into account.) In his review of Unger's *Living High and Letting Die* ("Sacrificing for the Good of Strangers—Repeatedly," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 59, no. 1 [1999]: 177–81), Brad Hooker argues that we face a dilemma: accepting an endless duty to give to the world's needy can seem counterintuitively demanding, but rejecting it "can seem counterintuitively mean" (181). Among those who have questioned the ideal qua ideal are Fred Feldman, "Review of Unger's *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence*," *Noûs* 32, no. 1 (1998): 138–47; Feldman, "Comments on *Living High and Letting Die*," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 59, no. 1 (1999): 195–201; David Schmidtz, "Islands in a Sea of Obligation: Limits of the Duty to Rescue," *Law and Philosophy* 19 (2000): 683–705; Raziel Abelson, "A Middle View," in Raziel Abelson and Marie-Louise Friquegnon, eds., *Ethics for Modern Life*, 6th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), 341–47; John Arthur, "Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code," in Hugh LaFollette, ed., *Ethics in Practice: An Anthology*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 582–90; and Andrew I. Cohen, "Famine Relief and Human Virtue," in Cohen and Wellman, eds., *Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics*, 326–42. There are several points of overlap between some of my arguments and some of the arguments offered by these critics, but I develop my arguments differently and offer a different conception of the role of beneficence in a morally good life.

[8] Cited in Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 218. Robert McNamara, who served as secretary of defense under presidents Kennedy and Johnson, was president of the World Bank from 1968 to 1981.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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These ideological and moral reasons are not, however, the only reasons for the wide acceptance of the ideal put forward by Singer and Unger. Another is that, although their ideal is counterintuitive, their argument for it is thought by many philosophers to be rationally compelling or, at least, hard to refute.

B. A doubly flawed argument

The failures of most governmental aid programs to date—indeed, even their long-range harmful effects—are by now well-documented.[9] The net effect of private aid programs, according to some former aid workers, is almost as disastrous, though some would disagree or offer a mixed view.[10] Singer acknowledges that if aid were harmful, or even if it were not efficacious, we would not be obligated to give.[11] But he usually assumes, as do Unger and other advocates of aid, that both private and (at least in recent times) governmental aid *are* efficacious, and continues to exhort people to give more.[12]

I will not be concerned to settle the practical issue here, other than noting that, however efficacious, aid cannot be a big part of the solution or its lack a big part of the problem. If it were, it would be a mystery how

[9] See Peter T. Bauer on the history of harmful or wasted foreign aid, in Bauer, *The Development Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 38–55. In "The New Approach to Foreign Aid: Is the Enthusiasm Warranted?" Cato Foreign Policy Briefing No. 79 (September 2003), http://www.cato.org/pubs/fpbriefs/fpb-079es.html (accessed March 11, 2005), Ian Vasquez questions many of the positive claims the World Bank makes in its book *Assessing Aid: What Works, What Doesn't, and Why* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), www.worldbank.org/research/aid/aidpub.htm, and the claims made in the essays in Roger D. Cowe, ed., *A Case for Aid: Building a Consensus for Development Assistance* (Washington, DC: World Bank Publications, 2002). The *World Development Report 2005,* released on September 29, 2004, accepts the main points long made by the World Bank's critics, namely, that the way out of poverty is private investment, not aid, either private or (especially) governmental, and that the way to invite private investment into a country is for governments to define and enforce private property rights and end corruption. See *World Development Report 2005: A Better Investment Climate for Everyone* (Washington, DC: World Bank Publications, 2004). Another World Bank publication, *Doing Business in 2005: Obstacles to Growth* (Washington, DC: World Bank Publications, 2004), cites weak property rights and too many regulations creating barriers to doing business as two of the main obstacles to growth in poor countries, and argues that these barriers hurt the poor (unskilled workers, women, and the young) most of all.

[10] For a criticism of aid agencies' work and many aid workers' motives, see Michael Maren, *The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity* (New York: Free Press, 1997); interview with Maren, "A Complete Waste of Money That Succeeds Primarily at Keeping Westerners Employed," *Might Magazine,* March/April 1997, http://www.netnomad.com/might.html. For a mixed view, see David Rieff, "Charity on the Rampage: The Business of Foreign Aid," review of *The Road to Hell,* in *Foreign Affairs,* January/February 1997, http://foreignaffairs.org/19970101fareviewessay3744/david-rieff/charity-on-the-rampage; and Mary Andersen, "Some Moral Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid," in Jonathan Moore, ed., *Hard Choices* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), reprinted in James P. Sterba, ed., *Morality in Practice,* 6th ed (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001), 104–10.

[11] Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," 9.

[12] Singer, *One World,* chap. 4.

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the East Asian Tigers—Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea—ever became rich. Rather, I will focus on the question of whether the Singer-Unger ideal would be a worthy ideal even *if* private aid were beneficial overall.[13] Hence, we need to be clear about the implications of this ideal. If Singer and Unger are right about what is required for moral decency—or even for the ideally moral life—then practically no one is morally decent, and certainly no one even approaches the moral ideal. Moreover, a well-off person who gives *nothing* to help alleviate the desperate poverty of fellow human beings in distant lands (or in her own land, if she lives in a poor country) is positively indecent. It little matters, on this view, what else is true of this person's character or actions, including how beneficent or charitable she might be in other respects, let alone how honest, just, courageous, generous with her friends, and so on. Indeed, on Unger's view, other forms of moral decency—such as honesty or respect for what are usually called negative rights, especially property rights—are utterly dispensable if they stand in the way of helping the desperately poor.[14]

Any thesis with such radically counterintuitive implications had better be supported by very strong arguments, especially since both Singer and Unger claim that their thesis and arguments are addressed to everyone, and not only to utilitarians. I will argue that Singer's and Unger's central argument, though initially seductive, is doubly flawed. Their central argument is an argument by analogy with a life-threatening emergency. If the analogy they rely on turns out to be weak—and I will argue that it does—they are left without solid ground for their thesis. Moreover, their thesis is subject to four independent, but related, moral objections (which I will discuss in subsection C). If, however, we assume for the sake of argument that the analogy is strong, then it proves too much, for it shows that the relief of global poverty does not occupy a privileged moral status. This means that Singer and Unger must modify their thesis; but the modified thesis, I will argue, is even more vulnerable to the moral objections than the unmodified thesis.

C. Four moral objections

First, the thesis is monomaniacal. The world offers a rich variety of values that can make a life morally good: many goals and activities worth pursuing, many moral personalities worth developing, many ideals worth

[13] For an impressive attempt to assess the case for private aid, see Cullity, *The Moral Demands of Affluence.*

[14] Unger, *Living High and Letting Die,* 62–63. And Singer makes it clear that giving away all our surplus would not be "charitable, or generous" or "supererogatory," since this implies that to do so would be to go beyond the call of duty and, therefore, not wrong not to do ("Famine," 4). His view is that we *owe* our surplus to the poor, and that therefore withholding it is simply wrong. I disagree with Singer on both points here: we do not "owe" what we have justly acquired to the needy, and certainly not all our "surplus"; nevertheless, withholding charity is wrong if it comes from a deficiency or lack of concern for others.

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cherishing and emulating.[15] A good person must be beneficent—this is true on practically all conceptions of morality, and certainly on the everyday common-sense conceptions most people endorse. However, beneficence need not take the form of big contributions of time or money to aid agencies for the prevention or relief of absolute poverty—or, for that matter, of *any* great evil.

Second, if taken seriously, the Singer-Unger ideal is deeply misanthropic, because, with rare exceptions, it is incompatible with that which makes life worth living: the pursuit of happiness, by which I mean the attempt to forge a life that is both objectively meaningful or worthwhile, and meaningful and enjoyable to the individual concerned.[16] By "rare exceptions" I have in mind people who have a special interest in the relief of poverty, as some people have a special interest in, say, fighting fires or rebuilding houses destroyed by tornadoes—or, for that matter, in *studying* tornadoes. For people with a special interest in the relief of poverty, devoting most of their spare time and money to the cause of poverty relief, whether over their entire lives or during a period of their lives, is not only compatible with, but necessary for, making their lives truly rewarding.[17] And it is necessary because it is dictated by their own particular interests and aptitudes, and not by the (as I will argue, mistaken) belief that this is what a one-size-fits-all morality requires of them, or by a desire to prove their worth or assuage their guilt.[18]

The problem is that the Singer-Unger ideal claims allegiance from all of us, regardless of our vocations, moral personalities, individual histories, or the effect of adopting such an ideal on our lives. To put it differently, it fails to recognize the variety of moral ideals and of individual personalities and vocations, arbitrarily putting relief or prevention of absolute

[15] Feldman makes a similar point about there being other goals worth pursuing in "Comments on *Living High and Letting Die*," calling Unger's view fanatical. Unger rejects this characterization in his reply, but without addressing the point that there are other goals worth pursuing ("Replies," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 59, no. 1 [1999]: 203–16).

[16] I have defended this "objectivist" conception of happiness in my "Happiness as the Highest Good," unpublished manuscript.

[17] What I have in mind here is charity, that is, voluntary work for the poor motivated by beneficence, and not a career in poverty relief or prevention. A career in poverty relief is no more charity than, say, a career in medicine. Nor can we assume that everyone or even most people involved in aid work as a career must have a stronger-than-usual sense of beneficence. See Maren, *The Road to Hell.*

[18] For an example of someone whose obsessive giving has been motivated by all these reasons, see the story of Zell Kravinsky as told by Ian Parker in "The Gift," *The New Yorker,* August 2004, 54–63. Kravinsky started by giving away his millions, went on to donate a kidney, and at the time of his interview for "The Gift" had graduated to unhappily obsessing about giving his other kidney away and living on dialysis, or even giving his entire body away to be harvested for his organs. Predictably, Peter Singer has called him a "remarkable" and admirable person, while allowing that we shouldn't blame people who don't go as far as Kravinsky in their self-sacrifice (Singer, quoted in "The Gift," 63). A nondirected live donation of a kidney (the name for the kind of donation Kravinsky made) can, of course, be motivated by perfectly good reasons, such as the desire to relieve suffering or, more positively, to share with others one's good fortune and joy in living. See Marc Ian Barasch, "Extreme Altruists," *Psychology Today* 38, no. 2 (March/April 2005): 78–82, for stories of live donors motivated by such reasons.

poverty through massive sacrifice at the top of the "right" hierarchy of values. As a result, the Singer-Unger ideal effectively denies that we are entitled to use our time and resources to lead a worthwhile life that we find meaningful and enjoyable. But this, I will argue, also makes their ideal of self-sacrificial giving pragmatically self-defeating.

Third, because most of us feel entitled to pursue our happiness, regardless of what our theories tell us we *ought* to feel, and because the Singer-Unger ideal is incompatible with happiness for most of us, endorsing this ideal leads to doublethink and doublespeak. Its endorsement is, thus, incompatible with integrity for most of us. Regard for individuals' integrity, concern for their happiness and, indeed, a proper understanding of beneficence itself, require recognition of the fact that our moral ideals must respect the constraints of human nature and the variety of humanly worthy pursuits. In particular, our ideals must recognize the importance of creativity or productivity in human life, acknowledging that creating wealth, whether material, intellectual, or artistic, is more fundamental in happiness and the formation of individual identity than receiving wealth, and that beneficence itself aims, in the final analysis, to make people independent creators of wealth. The Singer-Unger ideal seems to value the creation of wealth only as a means to giving it away.

Fourth, even if the activities of aid agencies in themselves were beneficial overall, if most of us did start living by the Singer-Unger ideal, the effects of giving away all our "spare" money instead of investing it in worthwhile enterprises or spending it on "luxuries" would push even more people into the ranks of the absolutely poor. Although Singer and Unger offer extensive empirical data about the incidence of absolute poverty and its rise or fall over the years, their arguments are striking in their neglect of, or only cursory attention to, some fundamental commonsensical economic principles.

My discussion in the remainder of this essay will proceed as follows. I will begin, in Section II, with my first objection to the Singer-Unger ideal, namely, that it is monomaniacal, and the problems I see with the life-saving analogy that Singer and Unger employ. In Section III, I will go on to argue that their ideal is misanthropic. In Section IV, I will contend that (for reasons related to its misanthropy and its disregard of the constraints of human nature and the importance of wealth-creation) endorsement of the Singer-Unger ideal is incompatible with integrity for most of us. Finally, in Section V, I will argue that if most of us did start living by this ideal, the effects would be disastrous for everyone, including the poor.

II. Moral Monomania and the Life-Saving Analogy

A. Moral monomania

The Singer-Unger ideal is monomaniacal for the simple reason that positive aid for the prevention or relief of absolute poverty is not the only,

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or even the highest, goal worth pursuing. Almost anyone would agree that a morally decent person must be beneficent as well as just and, therefore, must have *concern* for those living in absolute poverty—as she must for the victims of other misfortunes, such as the thousands of prisoners of conscience in the jails of despots, or the millions living in absolute unfreedom (many of whom also live in absolute poverty, such as in North Korea). And to the extent that her country's policies perpetuate poverty in poor countries through such mechanisms as tariffs or subsidies or restrictions on "outsourcing," her concern must lead her to refrain from supporting these policies, directly or indirectly. Indeed, that we thus refrain is a requirement of justice, which tells us to do no harm to the innocent, and justice is presupposed by beneficence, which tells us to help those in need.[19] A beneficent person may also spend a portion of her time or money on trying to prevent harmful policies by actively supporting programs or organizations that work against them, or she may lend her support to organizations that try to bring hope to prisoners of conscience or to relieve poverty. But she does not fail in beneficence or, therefore, in moral decency, by not giving time or money to institutions that help relieve absolute poverty, such as UNICEF or Oxfam. This is the case not only because there are many well-fed, well-sheltered people just as worthy of help, both in one's home country and abroad, but also because one can be sufficiently beneficent even if one's contributions to institutionalized charity are small or occasional.

B. Beneficence

What *is* essential to being fully beneficent—that is, to having the virtue of beneficence—is being the kind of person who habitually wishes others well for their sake, is pleased to see them do well, and thus gladly but wisely uses her (own) resources to help them in a variety of situations for their sake. This definition of beneficence presupposes a basically Aristotelian conception of virtue, which I have defended elsewhere and will explain briefly here with reference to beneficence.[20]

Like any morally worthy act, a beneficent act must be done *voluntarily* and for the *right reasons,* that is, for the other's benefit rather than, say, out of guilt or fear of God, or as a mere means to a further end. It must be done *wisely,* because giving without due thought to the possible harmful consequences to one's intended beneficiaries, to oneself, or to third parties, falls short of the rational self-concern and other-concern required of a morally worthy act. Hence, a beneficent person will try to learn the

[19] Someone who liked to help the needy but cared little about harming the better-off would be lacking in the concern that is the common root of both justice and beneficence. Whatever her configuration of motives, then, they could not count as beneficent on my conception of beneficence.

[20] See Neera Badhwar, "The Limited Unity of Virtue," *Noûs* 30, no. 3 (1996): 306–29.

relevant facts before lending her support to programs or policies that claim to "help the poor" or bring "social justice" to the poor.[21] Beneficence requires giving *of one's own resources* and not those of others, because if one is merely distributing what others have given for the purpose, then the beneficence is theirs, not one's own.[22] Worse, if one is merely distributing what has been taken forcibly from others, then one's act partakes of injustice, and no act that requires an act of injustice or some other vice can count as morally worthy.

An act that meets these conditions counts as a beneficent act, and a person whose giving typically meets these conditions counts as a beneficent person. To exemplify the excellence of a full-fledged (Aristotelian) virtue, however, a further condition must be met: the act must be wholehearted, and the person must typically give wholeheartedly.

On this conception of beneficence, any beneficent person must be disposed to do what I shall call small-scale acts of beneficence. Examples of such acts include giving money or time to organizations in times of emergency if the costs to oneself are small, as well as directly helping people in emergencies when the risk to oneself is small. Someone who cared naught about letting a child drown in front of his eyes, or not enough to get his pants muddy, would be seriously deficient in, if not altogether devoid of, the empathy that is necessary not only for beneficence, but for moral agency itself.[23] Such a person, we would be justified in suspecting, would merrily drive over an errant pedestrian if there were no laws waiting to get him.

Other examples of small-scale beneficence include the myriad small acts that make everyday coexistence pleasant rather than burdensome, such as holding a door open for someone who is loaded down with books, giving directions to someone who is lost, helping someone who has just fallen down, going beyond the requirements of the job to respond to a colleague's or student's occasional need for help, and so on. Someone who *never* found reason to do any of these things would also be seriously deficient in empathy.

[21] Such as, for example, the Soviet-inspired socialist policies adopted by India under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, policies that persisted despite strong evidence of their poverty-creating power.

[22] A government's foreign aid or domestic welfare programs, then, cannot count as a measure of that country's—much less that government's—beneficence, politicians' claims and the popular view notwithstanding. With respect to those who do not consent to the taxation that funds one or another of these programs, the money taken from them is taken forcibly. With respect to those who do consent to the taxation, their consent may be an instance of their beneficence if they are motivated primarily by genuine good will rather than, say, guilt or fear of God, and if they have rational (even if mistaken) reasons for believing that these programs help their intended beneficiaries without unjustly harming anyone else.

[23] For empirical evidence that empathy is necessary for moral agency, see Hervey Cleckley, *The Mask of Sanity* (St. Louis, MO: C. V. Mosby, 1964). I have argued for this in "Self-Interest and Virtue," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 14, no. 1 (1997): 226–63, and in "The Rejection of Ethical Rationalism," *Logos* 10 (1989): 99–131.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

On my conception of beneficence, however, a beneficent person need never have engaged in large-scale beneficence—"munificence"—such as devoting a major part of her free time or money to the cause of the poor or to some other philanthropic purpose. For, as I will argue, she might have other (nonbeneficent) worthwhile uses for her time or money. I will say more about beneficence and other worthwhile uses of time or money in Section IV below.

C. The life-saving analogy

Singer and Unger, however, would reject the distinction I have drawn between small-scale and large-scale beneficence. They would do so because, according to their argument, giving all one's surplus wealth to help the global poor is strictly analogous to saving a drowning child from a shallow pond. They argue that just as it is wrong not to save a drowning child if you can do so without serious risk to your own life or health, so it is wrong not to save as many people from absolute poverty and its systemic consequences as you can without serious risk to your own life or basic welfare. The general principle at work in both cases, according to Singer, is that it is wrong not to prevent something very bad from happening if we can do so "without sacrificing anything of comparable significance."[24] Serious risk, then, is risk to something that has comparable or greater significance. Singer thinks that this principle (henceforth "Singer's Principle") should be acceptable to both consequentialists and nonconsequentialists, because it does not call for the unconstrained maximization of the good, and hence does not require the violation of rights or other principles that nonconsequentialists regard as having comparable moral significance.[25]

Nevertheless, despite this principle's innocuous appearance, Singer observes correctly that, if it were taken seriously, it would change our lives "fundamentally."[26] For it requires giving up far more than clean pants or a passing enjoyment. Among the things that do not compare in significance to the prevention or relief of absolute poverty—and that, therefore, we ought to be willing to sacrifice—are "stylish clothes, expensive dinners, a sophisticated stereo system, overseas holidays, a (second?)

[24] Singer, "Famine," 2; Singer, *Practical Ethics,* 230.

[25] Singer, *Practical Ethics,* 230.

[26] See ibid.; and Singer, "Famine," 2. Sometimes Singer says that it is wrong not to prevent something very bad from happening if we can do so without sacrificing anything "morally significant" ("Famine," 2). This has been interpreted by some as a weaker principle than the "comparable significance" thesis. But Singer himself thinks it makes no practical difference. In his own words, if the principle "were acted upon, even in its qualified form, our lives, our society, and our world would be fundamentally changed" (2). And indeed, it is hard to see how the "morally significant" formulation will allow us to hang on to movies, art, music, etc.—anything that is not needed to satisfy our basic needs and earn a living. For these things have little moral significance compared to saving the lives of the destitute—if saving their lives is like saving a child drowning in front of our eyes.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

car, a larger house, private schools for our children, and so on."[27] Indeed, it is hard to see how *anything* over and above the minimum needed for living a normal lifespan (presumably, by Western standards) and earning a living could be seen as having significance comparable to the relief of absolute poverty, or how the loss of anything above this minimum could be seen as constituting a serious risk to our lives or welfare. As Singer states, to save "every life we could," we would have to give till we had reached the "minimum level compatible with earning the income which, after providing for our needs, left us most to give away."[28] Although he does not say so explicitly, his principle entails that all "unnecessary" things—"unnecessary" movies, books, art, music, toys, gardens, sports, air-conditioning—must go.

Onora O'Neill supports Singer's Principle from a Kantian perspective, arguing that even if we assume that we have acquired all our wealth justly (a point she disputes), not saving the world's poor by sharing our surplus with them is akin to killing them.[29] O'Neill's argument asks us to imagine that we are in a lifeboat to which we have a special claim, and which we have stocked with food that is more than enough for our own needs. Then we discover stowaways on our lifeboat. If we withhold our surplus food from them and they die, we have killed them, even though it is not our fault that they did not have their own lifeboat or their own supplies. So, even if the poor of "lifeboat Earth" are in the same position as these stowaways, if we withhold our surplus from them and they die, we are guilty of killing them (although not, as O'Neill is careful to point out, of murdering them).

Those who have rejected these life-saving analogies between the drowning child or the starving stowaway, on the one hand, and the world's poor, on the other, have done so on two main grounds. One is that we can identify relevant differences between emergencies and ongoing evils, such as the fact that in the former but not the latter the individual to be rescued is close to us, or he is identifiable, or the need is urgent and immediate, or we can save him directly, or there is a particular individual we save.[30] The other ground for rejecting the analogy is methodological: if we must take seriously the intuitive response that failing to rescue a child drowning in front of our eyes is wrong, then we must also take seriously the intuitive response that failing to save people from chronic hunger or disease is *not* wrong, even if we cannot identify relevant differences between the two cases. There is no justification for privileging one intuition over another.

[27] Singer, *Practical Ethics,* 232.

[28] Ibid., 223 n. 1.

[29] Onora O'Neill, "Life-Boat Earth," in Charles R. Beitz, Marshall Cohen, Thomas Scanlon, and A. John Simmons, eds., *A "Philosophy and Public Affairs" Reader* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 262–81.

[30] See Garrett Cullity, *The Moral Demands of Affluence,* for a useful summary of the differences usually adduced in rejecting the analogy (20–27). The term "methodological" for the second kind of objection addressed in the next sentence is also from Cullity.

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In his book *Living High and Letting Die,* Unger seeks to meet both sorts of objections by arguing that the second intuitive response is based on "*distortional* dispositions," dispositions that lead us to think that there are relevant differences between emergencies and ongoing evils when, in fact, there are not.[31] His strategy is to create a dazzling array of imaginary cases and examine a variety of common responses to them for these distortions. He claims that in the case of "The Shallow Pond," when we say that it would be wrong not to save the drowning child, we are reflecting our "primary values" and "the true nature of morality." By contrast, in "The Envelope," when we say that it is not wrong to refuse the appeal from UNICEF to make a $100 contribution, even though thirty more children will die as a result, we are reasoning badly as a result of these distortional dispositions and reflecting only our "secondary values." Indeed, even if we think that we may throw away the envelope because we have already sent $100 to UNICEF, we are reasoning badly. We do wrong not only in not helping these distant children, but also in not giving everything over and above what is necessary for our basic needs (where this includes the trappings needed for earning our living). To support this, Unger produces another example.[32] Suppose that you spend the morning saving trespassers with wounded legs from bleeding to death, and then in the afternoon come upon another such trespasser. Would you be entitled to say, "[H]oly moly, enough is enough!"? Surely not. Similarly, it is not enough to give only a small percentage of your income to an aid agency. You must give everything not necessary for your basic needs.

Unger is right that some of our intuitive responses to "The Envelope" and the trespasser case are based on fallacious reasoning.[33] There is, for instance, the "futility thinking" that leads us to say, "What's the point of doing anything about the poor? There are *so many* of them."[34] As Unger rightly reminds us, however, the child drowning in front of our eyes (in "The Shallow Pond") is also one of many such children in the world. Just as that is no reason to let this one drown, so the fact that the world is full of starving children is no reason to save none of them. Nor is it some shapeless, identity-less multitude that we will be spending our money to save if, for example, we send money to UNICEF; we will be spending it to save some particular child or children.

However, there is a fundamental, relevant disanalogy between "The Shallow Pond" and "The Envelope" that can explain and justify our conviction that throwing away the envelope is not (necessarily) wrong. To

[31] Unger, *Living High and Letting Die,* 13.

[32] Ibid., 60–61.

[33] But see Frances Kamm for a dissenting view in her review of Unger's *Living High and Letting Die* in *The Philosophical Review* 108, no. 2 (April 1999): 300–305.

[34] Unger, *Living High and Letting Die,* 75–76. The words in quotation marks are a paraphrase of what Unger says there.

paraphrase Bernard Williams's well-known words, those who use the life-saving analogy (Singer, Unger, and O'Neill) rely on one thought-experiment too few.[35] Had they come up with an emergency situation that was genuinely analogous to the problem of chronic global poverty, they would have seen that the intuitive response was no different in the two cases.

D. The life-saving (dis)analogy

The crucial disanalogy between an emergency and the chronic problem of absolute poverty is that emergencies, by definition, are short-lived events that come to an end, whereas chronic poverty (or other chronic horrors), by definition, are enduring. To save a life in an emergency, we may be willing to give up quite a lot—we may even have a duty to give up quite a lot—because when the emergency comes to an end, so does the giving. However, if we accept the claim that the moral requirements in the two cases are the same, then our duty to give must be endless. Most of us intuitively reject this claim because we do not believe in an endless duty to give.[36]

Nevertheless, it is precisely this response that Unger's counterexample of the wounded trespasser is designed to undermine.[37] Most of us would agree that the fact that we saved someone in the morning does not mean it's hunky-dory to let someone else bleed to death in the afternoon. But Unger's counterexample is not truly analogous to chronic evils and hence not truly a counterexample. A truly analogous situation would exist only if what we think of as emergencies became everyday phenomena.[38] But if we came across someone drowning or bleeding to death every time we stepped out, how long would we continue to be good samaritans? Could anyone plausibly argue that a requirement of living a morally decent life was sacrificing all one's aspirations and projects to the task of saving people? And if it was, how many of us would have reason to live a morally decent life? I will have more to say about plausible requirements for a morally decent life later (in Section IV). My point here is that Singer and Unger are not entitled to draw an analogy between emergencies and ongoing evils to reach their conclusion. If emergencies were truly like chronic evils in being an ongoing feature of life, who would not say that

[35] In "Persons, Character, and Morality," reprinted in his collection, *Moral Luck* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), Bernard Williams criticizes the rule utilitarian for having "one thought too many" when he tries to give an impartial justification for saving his drowning wife over a drowning stranger: "*This* [rule utilitarian] *construction provides the agent with one thought too many: it might have been hoped by some (for instance, by his wife) that his motivating thought, fully spelled out, would be the thought that it was his wife, not that it was his wife AND in situations like this it is permissible to save one's wife*" (18, italics in the original).

[36] Others who take this position are cited in note 7 above.

[37] Unger, *Living High and Letting Die*, 60–61.

[38] Cf. the works by Schmidtz and Hooker cited in note 7 above.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

although drowning children were tragic, there was nothing wrong in not spending one's life saving them? And even if some people did not *say* that, who would not *live* like that, other than those whose job or vocation it was to save drowning children? Just as children die every day from absolute poverty in distant lands, we might say, so children die every day from drowning in front of our eyes. A terrible thing, yes, but what can one do? We all have our own lives to lead: we can at best save a few from drowning every year; it's the system that leads to drowning children that needs to be fixed.

It might be thought that this recurring-emergency situation is not analogous to chronic poverty, because what recurring emergencies demand is one's time, whereas chronic poverty merely demands giving money to international agencies. Spending every day saving people's lives requires giving up one's entire life; spending money on aid agencies leaves a major part of one's life—one's work life—intact (although even this may be in danger if we adopt Unger's moral vision, as I explain in Section III below). Let us therefore suppose that every time we stepped out we found an emergency aid agency attending to an emergency, so that we were required to do no more than hand over all the money we could spare to save the victims. Or suppose that emergency aid agencies solicited donations on a monthly or yearly basis so that we didn't even have to stop to make a donation every time we stepped out; all we were required to do for these ubiquitous emergencies was donate everything not necessary for our basic needs. Would we not have the same reaction as we did in rejecting the inference from emergencies to chronic poverty: "Just as children die every day from absolute poverty, so children die every day from drowning. It's terrible, yes, but we all have our own lives to lead"? Our attitudes may shift from a mixture of compassion, pity, guilt, and despair to indifference and then to irritation at "those people" who can't keep their children from drowning. More reflectively, we might feel anger at the system that allows children to drown every day and attempt to fix it. But we would not think we had a duty to spend all our "surplus" wealth on emergency aid agencies.

Similar considerations apply to O'Neill's contention that not giving our surplus to the poor of the world is akin to killing them, even if their poverty is no fault of ours. If so-called lifeboat Earth were like a real lifeboat, with solid ground in sight, most of us would happily share some of our surplus with the destitute—as, indeed, we do in times of famines or natural disasters. The most recent example of this is the more than $990 million raised in private aid in the United States alone (on top of $350 million in government aid) for the victims of the December 2004 tsunami.[39] Indeed, if we were convinced that giving *all* our surplus money

[39] See *The Chronicle of Philanthropy Update* (March 10, 2005), http://philanthropy.com/temp/email.php?id=cdg9ot6g1sfirlqewkyu7df2aid62x1v.

would magically end global poverty once and for all, the vast majority of us might happily give it.[40] Conversely, if we had to spend our entire lives on a lifeboat, with no end in sight, and the ocean was full of people in dire straits (as in the real world), we would come to regard it as an ongoing tragedy about which we could, unfortunately, do little, other than not contributing to it directly or indirectly.

My hypothesis about how our attitudes toward emergencies would change if emergencies became a daily feature of life is supported in part by its intuitive plausibility. But it is also supported by first-hand knowledge of the actual attitudes of people in poor countries, such as India, toward the poor. These attitudes are shared both by people who, though not destitute themselves, live cheek-by-jowl with the destitute, and by people who, being relatively well-off or rich, live physically removed from the destitute but within daily sight of them. Indeed, I expect these attitudes are shared even by the destitute, who do not think (at least until they are taught to do otherwise) that the better-off do wrong not to share their surplus with them. If recurring emergencies became part of everyday life, we should expect the same processes of habituation and the same sense of entitlement to a life of one's own to give rise to the same attitudes.

To summarize the discussion so far: We cannot extrapolate what we ought to do in the face of global poverty from what we ought to do in the face of an emergency because there is a crucial disanalogy between the two. Emergencies are short-lived and rare events, global poverty is chronic. If emergencies became recurring phenomena, common attitudes toward them and our judgments of right and wrong behavior would be no different from common attitudes toward chronic poverty. Of course, these attitudes might still be *wrong,* but if they are, we have so far been given no good reason to think so, since the only game in town—the argument from the so-called life-saving analogy—fails to do the job.

Let us suppose, however, that Singer and Unger are right that chronic poverty is analogous to a life-threatening emergency. Then, I will argue, their strategy proves too much and cannot be used to show that we ought to make eradication of global poverty the primary object of our beneficence. For extreme poverty and its systemic consequences are not the only tragic, chronic life-threatening situations analogous to a life-threatening emergency. Nor do life-threatening situations occupy a special moral status: some non-life-threatening situations, emergency situations as well as chronic ones, may be far more tragic and equally or more worthy of intervention. Let us consider some examples of both life-threatening and non-life-threatening situations that are not examples of extreme poverty.

[40] Thanks to David Blumenfeld for suggesting this idea.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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E. If the life-saving analogy proves anything, it proves too much

Imagine that you see a young woman in a parked car having a heart attack. You are a heart patient too and you could save her from certain death by administering cardiopulmonary resuscitation on her. Wouldn't it be monstrous of you to just shrug your shoulders and keep going? Of course it would. But according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in the decade ending in 2001, death from cardiac arrest in young American women—women in the prime of youth—went up by 32 percent, and in young men by 10 percent.[41] If you think about it seriously, you have to acknowledge that the waste of lives is shocking—lives so full of promise, so worth living from the point of view of both the victims and society. If anything is very bad, surely this is. In addition, about 1 percent of infants are born with heart disease.[42] So if you throw away the envelope the American Heart Association (AHA) has sent you for a donation, you are no better morally than someone who just walks by the woman having a heart attack in her car. You ought to give everything you don't require to meet your basic needs to the AHA.

This argument can be repeated for other life-threatening emergencies. Think of the children all over the world who attempt suicide because of abuse by their caretakers. Think, too, of the tens of thousands of people, most of them between fifteen and forty-four, who commit suicide every year owing to mental illness or depression.[43] If you saw a child being abused whom you could rescue at small cost to yourself, wouldn't it be wrong to turn away? If you saw someone about to commit suicide and you could prevent it, wouldn't it be wrong not to do so?[44] If you could lessen someone's pain by extending a hand of friendship, wouldn't it be wrong to refuse? Thus, if you fail to donate everything above your basic needs to the Samaritans or the "befriending centers"[45] around the world whose mission it is to help potential suicides, you are no better morally than someone who just walks by a distraught individual about to throw himself off the Golden Gate Bridge.

Untimely threats to life, however, are not the only great evils in the world. Consider this scenario. You are passing an alley where you see

[41] See "Sudden Death Becoming More Common in the Young," http://heartdisease.about.com/library/news/blnws01044.htm (March 5, 2001).

[42] See "Reducing Heart Failure in Infants," http://www.heartinfo.org/ms/news/8008856/main.html (last updated June 23, 2004). There was no information about which countries, other than the United States, formed the basis of these figures.

[43] The World Health Organization estimates that about 873,000 people commit suicide every year and that mental illness is a source of great suffering (http://www.who.int/mental_health/en).

[44] The act of trying to prevent someone from committing suicide cannot be criticized as paternalism if you do so on the well-founded assumption that most attempted suicides are cries for help, and that even if you are wrong about this particular one and the potential suicide truly wanted to die, he can still kill himself later.

[45] See the Befrienders International website, http://www.befrienders.org/aboutus/about.htm.

someone torturing a handcuffed man. You overhear the torturer muttering threats that reveal that the torture has been going on for quite some time and will continue indefinitely. The torturer is a sadist. You have a gun; the torturer has only a knife. All you need do is threaten him with your gun to scare him off. Of course, you might then have to take responsibility for seeing the victim to a hospital and giving a report at a police station, thus losing valuable time; but this is small potatoes compared to saving a man from torture. However, if leaving this man to his fate is wrong, then so is doing nothing for the tens of thousands of people in the torture chambers of despots all over the world. Their lives are living hells, hells that make the prospect of death seem like a blessing to many of them—except that the lack of freedom to kill themselves is part of their hell. To suppose that it is all right to leave them to their fate is to succumb to what Unger calls our "distortional dispositions." We ought to give as much of our thought, time, and money to saving them as we can spare after meeting our basic needs.

If the single-minded focus on saving a person from death, torture, or some other form of abuse in an emergency situation is the proper model for right behavior in a non-emergency, then we ought to distribute everything over and above what is required for our basic needs among all or some of these causes and many others to boot. Thus, Singer, Unger, and like-minded theorists have to admit that their life-saving analogy does not single out relief of absolute poverty and its systemic consequences as the only cause worth supporting.

This broadened conception of the causes that are worth supporting makes the Singer-Unger thesis less demanding in one respect, since a decent person now has a choice about which cause or causes she may give all her "surplus" to, and hence has a higher chance of reconciling her charitable giving with her interests and, thus, her happiness. In another respect, however, the thesis becomes more demanding. For even if all the currently existing rapacious regimes and poverty-producing economic and political policies were to be reformed overnight—and it is now widely admitted that most or much of absolute poverty is due to such regimes and policies[46]—and even if judiciously targeted aid followed by trade enabled the people of those countries to lift themselves out of absolute poverty in the near future, it would not mean an end to continuing immense self-sacrifice. So long as human beings are human beings, there will be new tyrants who reduce their people to poverty, new politically

[46] See, for example, the essays in James A. Dorn, Steve H. Hanke, and Alan A. Walters, eds., *The Revolution in Development Economics* (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 1998); P. T. Bauer, *Rhetoric and Reality: Studies in Economic Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); World Bank, *Doing Business in 2005: Obstacles to Growth;* Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights;* and Hernando de Soto, *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

induced famines and civil wars, and maybe even new forms of democratically elected poverty if democratic countries gradually destroy their wealth-creating capacity through hostility to economic freedom. Moreover, there will always be accidents and relative poverty (which can also kill), sadists and abusers, depression and mental illness, earthquakes and hurricanes, and diseases both old and new. And as long as people are unequal in their capacities, achievements, and misfortunes, there will be many who need help from others. (As if to prove the point, even as I was writing this paragraph, I received an email appeal from the American Red Cross for help with the August 2004 hurricane victims in Florida. Over the course of writing this essay, I received dozens of appeals from various organizations, by email, mail, and telephone.) Moreover, if we redescribe the torture scenario in more general terms as a case of severe abuse and injustice, we must add all forms of serious abuse and injustice to the list of evils for which we must sacrifice.

Whatever support the Singer-Unger thesis might derive from the suggestion that the self-sacrifice it calls for is temporary, considered in historical terms, is undermined by these considerations.[47] If the Singer-Unger thesis is justified, every generation—or rather, the morally conscientious of every generation—will have to bear an immense burden of sacrifice, since only the morally conscientious will act on their obligations and the morally conscientious are relatively few. Thus, whatever sense of meaning and fulfillment they may derive from the thought that their sacrifice has a definite, reachable goal must also be undermined. For most people who accept the Singer-Unger thesis, then, doing the right thing means giving up the prospect of happiness.

Singer and Unger might say that if we have the right values and focus, the right commitments, we can find meaning and enjoyment in a life of extreme self-sacrifice for the prevention or alleviation of poverty (or whatever serious ills we choose to address). But even if they are right that such a life of self-sacrifice is what moral rectitude requires of us—and in this section I have assumed for the sake of argument that the life-saving analogy provides a reason for thinking that it is—it does not follow that if we commit ourselves to living morally, we will be happy. Happiness

[47] Singer and others who believe in massive infusions of aid, both private and governmental, sometimes talk as though properly targeted aid could end global poverty once and for all. The Millennium Challenge Account proposed by U.S. president George W. Bush in 2002 (speech at the Inter-American Development Bank, March 14, 2002, http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/03/20020314-7.html) and the call by James Wolfensohn, former president of the World Bank, to double the total amount of development aid are motivated by this belief (James Wolfensohn, "A Partnership for Development and Peace," speech delivered at the Woodrow Wilson International Center, Washington, DC, March 6, 2002). Ian Vasquez points out, however, that the claims for the effectiveness of selective aid made by the World Bank are based on research that is "difficult or impossible to reproduce by outside researchers," and that "the few attempts to reproduce the Bank's findings using its own data and methodology have contravened the Bank's findings" (Vasquez, "The New Approach to Foreign Aid," http://www.cato.org/pubs/fpbriefs/fpb79.pdf).

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requires not only that an individual's pursuits be objectively meaningful and capable of being enjoyed, but also that they be meaningful and enjoyable *to the individual in question;* and what is meaningful and enjoyable to an individual depends on her personality and interests. It is a rare individual who will find enjoyment and meaning in living by the Singer-Unger ideal; most people who try to live by it will have to sacrifice not only their money but also their happiness. In shrugging off this fact, the ideal shows itself to be misanthropic. This provides a reason for thinking that the Singer-Unger ideal is immoral, whether or not the life-saving analogy provides a reason for thinking otherwise. Indeed, if emergencies really are analogous to chronic poverty and other ills, then the Singer-Unger view of what morality requires is even more misanthropic than it first seemed, because the sacrifices it calls for are not temporary even in historical terms.

As I have already argued, however, emergencies are not analogous to chronic ills, and thus proper behavior in response to an emergency does not provide the right model for proper behavior in response to chronic ills.

III. A Misanthropic Ideal

I have tried to imagine how Singer and Unger might try to reconcile their thesis about what morality requires with the possibility of happiness. In fact, however, they do not seek to show that their view is compatible with people's happiness. Singer does remark that the philosopher who starts trying to live by his ideal can at least "find compensation in the satisfaction of a way of life in which theory and practice, if not yet in harmony, are at least coming together."[48] But satisfaction in the coming together of theory and practice may not make up for the loss of other sources of meaning and enjoyment, at least when the philosopher comes anywhere close to meeting the requirements of Singer's theory. In any case, for the most part Singer seems unconcerned about happiness, and proceeds as though he thinks that our happiness is unimportant so long as there are desperately poor people in the world.

Unger goes further: he explicitly calls for the sacrifice of both enjoyment and sense of meaning. Recognizing that most of us academics are in the academy because we enjoy our work rather than for the money, he argues that those of us who are capable of earning higher salaries in occupations outside the academy ought to give up our university posts for these more remunerative occupations, so that we will have more to give away.[49] Since we will still be better off than the many millions who need our help, it is "seriously wrong" for us not to do so. But what about

[48] Singer, "Famine," 8.
[49] Unger, *Living High and Letting Die,* 151.

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those who are too old to learn new skills? Unger assures his readers with some relish that they too will suffer: the "old philosopher" will "have to change the focus of his work so enormously that, in short order, he'll enjoy little intellectual satisfaction."[50] Thus, for example, the "old philosopher" must give up metaphysics for applied ethics, and even here, he must aim for writing that is "socially beneficial" rather than "philosophically revealing."[51]

Let us leave aside for now the assumption that even if there were a rush on high-paying jobs, they would continue to pay the same high salaries. Let us also leave aside the assumption that high-paying jobs would remain plentiful even if we followed Singer's and Unger's advice and gave up all luxuries (that is, everything that doesn't count as a basic need). The question I want to raise for them is this: If our pursuit of happiness is unimportant in the face of others' misery, then how important can the happiness of those we save from poverty be? After all, there will still be plenty of others needing to be rescued from poverty and misery. But if the happiness of those we save from poverty is unimportant, how important can it be to save them?

Singer and Unger might say that escape from dire poverty means escape from utter misery, and thus those we rescue are at least better off than before. But if the rescued had to accept that pursuing their own happiness with honesty and justice but only small-scale beneficence was morally wrong because the "surplus" of their time and money belonged to the poor (or, more generally, to the needy or oppressed), why suppose that they would not be miserable? Misery does not visit only those living in absolute poverty, as the prevalence of antidepressants and depression counseling in the developed world shows. Indeed, the feeling that it is wrong to seek happiness, even if this happiness comes from humanly worthy activities, is a common source of depression and unhappiness. This, however, is precisely what adopting the Singer-Unger ideal would imply for most of us—explicitly in Unger's theory, and implicitly in Singer's.

Perhaps Singer and Unger would say that so long as those we rescue from absolute poverty do not become affluent (and the empirical literature gives no reason to think that they will), they don't have to worry about the very poor and are free to live their own lives. Like George Orwell's proles in *1984,* the relatively poor are free of the strict moral discipline imposed on the relatively well-off and the rich. But this is arbitrary. If the life-saving analogy works, it applies to the relatively poor as much as to anyone else. The relatively poor are not morally permitted to let a child drown because, for example, the delay might lead to the loss of their day's wage or, for that matter, the loss of their job. Besides, even

[50] Ibid., 152–53.
[51] Ibid., 152.

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the relatively poor may have more than they require to meet their basic needs, partly, no doubt, because their basic needs, on their own conception of the matter, are far fewer and far cheaper to meet than those of the affluent.[52] Even the relatively poor occasionally spend money on trinkets and baubles of various kinds, the sorts of things Singer regards as trivia (which is not to say that there is no such thing as trivia; I say something about this below, in Section IV). Thus, even the relatively poor must be required to see whatever they have left after meeting their basic needs as rightfully belonging to the destitute who surround them, and their own happiness as unimportant in the face of others' unhappiness. Indeed, in "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," Singer goes so far as to say that the principle which requires us "to prevent bad things from happening unless in doing so we would be sacrificing something of comparable moral significance" requires that "we ought to give until we reach the level of marginal utility—that is, the level at which, by giving more, I would cause as much suffering to myself or my dependents as I would relieve by my gift," and that this means reducing "oneself to very near the material circumstances of a Bengali refugee."[53]

This makes the task of saving people from dire poverty far less important than it would otherwise be. The thought that you ought to make a great sacrifice for the sake of saving people who, in turn, ought to make a great sacrifice for the sake of saving people who, in turn, ought to make a great sacrifice . . . is both pragmatically self-defeating and rationally unpersuasive. Replacing the misery of absolute poverty with the misery of sacrificing all prospects of happiness is hardly an improvement. Whatever rational force the Singer-Unger thesis derived from the supposition that the sacrifice of a few would enable many to achieve happiness is now lost. In its casual disregard of the importance of happiness in people's lives, the Singer-Unger thesis is not only misanthropic but also pragmatically self-defeating and lacking in rationality. It is also, I will argue, incompatible with integrity.

IV. Integrity, Human Nature, and Happiness

A. Integrity

Regardless of what our theories tell us, most of us feel entitled to pursue our happiness, seeing the prospect of happiness as the thing that

[52] For example, what most of us would count as a basic necessity, namely, privacy, is regarded as less important (no doubt out of economic necessity) than many other things by many poor people in India. Thus, it is not uncommon for a poor but far from destitute family of four to live in one or two rooms that serve as bedroom, kitchen, and living room, and to use the savings to buy stylish clothes, cosmetics, a TV, a radio, arts and crafts, a scooter, and a couple of bikes. I don't know if a radio or TV counts as a basic necessity, but clearly stylish clothes and cosmetics cannot on the Singer-Unger austerity program. Yet equally clearly, they play an important role in their consumers' enjoyment of life.

[53] Singer, "Famine," 7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

makes life worth living. At the very least, we regard a sense of meaning, which is an important component of happiness as I have been using the word, as being crucial to making life worth living. A sense of meaning can, to some extent, make up for the misfortunes or failures that undercut enjoyment of life. However, since most of us can find neither a sense of meaning nor enjoyment in living by the Singer-Unger ideal, endorsing it is incompatible with integrity. For it divides us against ourselves by creating a dichotomy between what we think we *ought* to cherish and what we *do* cherish. In the absence of any independent, overriding reason to accept this ideal (and even if, contrary to my argument, the life-saving analogy does provide a reason, it does not provide an overriding reason, since it is countered by the misanthropy objection), the fact that the ideal is incompatible with integrity for most of us constitutes another moral objection to advocating it as a universal requirement of moral decency.

My claim that the Singer-Unger ideal divides us against ourselves is supported by the fact that even its most passionate defenders—Singer and Unger themselves—evidently cannot live up to it. Singer's actions make it obvious that he is sincere in his advocacy and tries to live up to his ideals. He gives away far more of his income than almost anyone—between 20 percent and 25 percent, according to various sources.[54] But this is a far cry from what he thinks people *should* give: everything they don't require for their own or their family's basic needs. Singer suggests that he would give more if others did, but this is a feeble excuse. It is precisely when others are giving too little that his giving more is more needed, as he himself urges in response to those who object that they should not have to do more than their "fair" share just because others are doing less.[55]

Unger, for his part, cheerfully admits that he does not "even come close to satisfying" his theory's requirements in terms of how much he gives to aid organizations. His website reveals that he also does not satisfy the requirement that the "old philosopher" give up "philosophically revealing" philosophy for "socially beneficial" philosophy, for it tells us that Oxford University Press is publishing his "most substantial book, by far,

[54] See the interview with Singer conducted by Ronald Bailey, "The Pursuit of Happiness," in *reasononline,* http://reason.com/0012/rb.the.shtml (December 2000). Bailey comments that Singer stated that he gives 20 percent of his income for famine relief and "hinted" that he would give more if others gave more. A *New York Times* article reports him as saying that he gives 25 percent. See "The Singer Solution to World Poverty," *The New York Times on the Web* (September 5, 1999), posted on http://people.brandeis.edu/~teuber/singermag.html (accessed September 26, 2004). Reportedly, Singer also lives in the very style he condemns by maintaining two residences: a house in Princeton and an apartment in New York City (Bailey, "The Pursuit of Happiness"). Of course, his family's "basic needs" might require two residences, but if so, Singer should at least acknowledge that basic needs can vary and make it permissible for *others* to have "a (second?) car, a larger house, [or] private schools for . . . [their] children" (Singer, *Practical Ethics,* 232).

[55] Singer, "The Bread Which You Withhold Belongs to the Hungry," 3.

All the Power in the World"—a book not on, say, the power of international aid, but rather on central problems in metaphysics.[56]

Ad hominems are usually both poor in taste and poor as arguments, but these are relevant to seeing how deeply the Singer-Unger ideal cuts against the grain. Moreover, the ideal is contrary to integrity not only in the sense that it divides those who adopt it against themselves, but also in the sense that it creates in them a tendency to doublethink and doublespeak. The trouble starts with the very effort of its chief advocates to sell their ideal to the masses. Both Singer and Unger write that although they believe that we ought to give everything not required for our basic needs for the relief of poverty, it is expedient to publicly advocate the giving of a much smaller sum. (Of course, this cannot apply to people who are reading their work or sources that discuss their work.) Singer and Unger justify this violation of the "publicity condition," as John Rawls calls it,[57] on the grounds that telling people the truth about what they really ought to give might discourage them and prevent them from giving even a little. As a sop to flawed human nature, in *Practical Ethics* Singer is willing to tell people that giving 10 percent is the minimum necessary for moral decency, even though he clearly thinks that the minimum is much higher.[58] Later, in *One World,* he makes a bigger compromise by revising this figure down to 1 percent, while clearly disapproving of people for failing to give more.[59]

Singer's claim that these figures are compromises suggests that at least some people are "good" or "strong" enough (as he sees it) to accept the truth about what they ought to do and live up to it. It is natural to think that those who advocate this demanding ideal would be among them, but as we have seen, they are not. Moreover, nowhere in his many admonishments to those who fail to meet his standards does Singer once admit that he himself fails to meet them. If his silence on the topic in the course

[56] Unger, *Living High and Letting Die,* 156. Unger's website can be found at http://philosophy.fas.nyu.edu/object/peterunger (accessed May 8, 2005).

[57] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

[58] Singer, *Practical Ethics,* 246. In "The Bread Which You Withhold Belongs to the Hungry," Singer says, "In most communities, rich people who give, say, 10 percent of their income to help the poor are so far ahead of virtually all their equally rich counterparts that I wouldn't go out of my way to blame them for not doing more . . . [even though] in some sense, they really should be doing more" (4).

[59] His criticism is especially directed at the United States. Ironically, according to *Giving USA 2004* (AAFRC Trust for Philanthropy, Center on Philanthropy, Indiana University, 2004), Americans voluntarily gave 2.2 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) to private philanthropy in 2003 (a staggering $241 billion), and have been giving 2 percent or more every year since 1998, after over two decades of giving somewhat less than 2 percent. Clearly, then, Americans could allocate or permit 50 percent of their total giving (1.1 percent of GDP) to go toward international aid if they saw good reason to do so, instead of the 12.2 percent (0.26 percent of GDP) they currently do (although another 10 percent is left unallocated and could, in principle, be used for international aid). The figures I cite are available at http://www.aafrc.org/press_releases/trustreleases/americansgive.html (accessed May 8, 2005).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of advocating his ideal is to be seen as justified on his own terms, we must suppose that it is due to his desire to serve the goal of getting people to accept his ideal as realizable and worth striving for: admitting his own failure would stand in the way of achieving that goal. It is in the interest of his own ideal, then, that he violates the requirements of integrity, both in misleading people about what morality requires and in allowing people to believe, falsely, that he himself lives up to his ideal. In other words, it is his ideal that leads him to this double violation of integrity. And this is a third strike against his ideal.

Whereas Singer's compromises with reality are at least understandable, both theoretically and psychologically, this cannot be said for Unger's. His compromises in the last chapter of *Living High and Letting Die* baffllingly take back everything he advocates in the first six chapters in a breathtaking display of doublespeak and doublethink. In chapter six of his book, Unger formulates what he calls "*A Pretty Demanding Dictate*," which states:

> On pain of living a life that's seriously immoral, a typical well-off person, like you and me, must give away most of her financially valuable assets, and much of her income.[60]

This is a good summary statement of where his argument has been heading in the first six chapters of the book. In the last chapter of the book, however, he gives what he calls a "multi-dimensional context-sensitive semantics" to show that this dictate holds only in very demanding, unusual contexts—ideal contexts, for short.[61] The ideal context is the context defined by our primary values, whereas the nonideal or everyday context is the context defined by our secondary values.[62] In the latter context, we do nothing wrong when we fail to conform to this dictate (even though it is only *pretty,* and not *very,* demanding—presumably, in the ideal context). But when are we in each of these contexts? Unger thinks that we can set the context ourselves for our discussions. Apparently, then, when we do moral philosophy (or, at least, ideal moral philosophy), we are in an ideal context, whereas when we cease to philosophize, we enter the ordinary context. The upshot seems to be that as moral philosophers we ought to argue (sincerely?) that our readers (mostly other moral philosophers) should give away most of their income and assets; but when we shut down our computers and close our books, we

[60] Unger, *Living High and Letting Die,* 134.

[61] Ibid., 162ff. For a thorough analysis of what Unger is doing in this chapter in the light of an earlier paper on contextual ethics, see Fred Feldman's review of the book in *Noûs* (cited in note 7 above). Feldman makes a detailed attempt to reconcile this last chapter with the rest of Unger's book, but ultimately gives up.

[62] Unger, *Living High and Letting Die,* 160.

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can enjoy that beer or go on that cruise without giving the argument another thought.

Presumably, then, we also needn't worry about giving up the philosophy we love for better-paying jobs in, say, Hollywood or Bollywood, or about making that move from "philosophically revealing" to "socially beneficial" philosophy. It is only in the philosophical context that we are obligated to advocate leaving philosophy for Hollywood/Bollywood; indeed, it is only those who do "socially beneficial" philosophy who are obligated to advocate leaving, say, philosophy of film for work in the film industry or, at least, for "socially beneficial" philosophy. When "socially beneficial" philosophers shut down their computers and close their books, they enter a different context, and so they can get together with colleagues in philosophy of film without preaching at them. Likewise, since the latter are also in a different context, they need pay no attention to the arguments for leaving their fields in favor of "socially beneficial" moral philosophy, much less actually acting on those arguments. Indeed, even those who currently do "socially beneficial" philosophy can stop doing it and start doing, say, metaphysics instead, since by that act they will have entered a different context. A look at Unger's website shows that he is following his contextual semantics (David Schmidtz aptly calls it "Orwellian semantics"),[63] having gone back, as I noted earlier, to writing about central problems in metaphysics.

B. The "problem" of human nature

The Singer-Unger ideal manifests the same flaw that all ideals of universal, unconditional love and concern, whether in their religious or their secular (Marxist) form, have manifested: it refuses to accept the constraints of human nature, instead seeing human nature as the fault in human existence that must somehow be corrected. In a *New York Times* article, Singer states:

> Now, evolutionary psychologists tell us that human nature just isn't sufficiently altruistic to make it plausible that many people will sacrifice so much for strangers. On the facts of human nature, they might be right, but they would be wrong to draw a moral conclusion from those facts. If it is the case that we ought to do things that, predictably, most of us won't do, then let's face that fact head-on.[64]

But if our "oughts" ought not to take into account the basic facts of human nature, then in what sense is our ethics *practical* and in what sense is it concerned with the *human good*? The human good has to be the good

[63] Schmidtz, "Islands in a Sea of Obligations."
[64] Singer, "Singer Solution to World Poverty."

for humans as they are, defined in terms of their most fundamental needs and capacities, not as some philosopher might prefer that they be.[65] To be sure, human nature is highly variable and plastic, allowing for a great variety in humanly good lives, but it is not infinitely variable or plastic. For the requirements of survival impose certain limits on the ways we can be, as does the fact that we are finite beings with limited resources. One of the limits imposed by these facts is a limit on our capacity for love and effective other-concern. Unlike God's love and concern, human love and concern are strongly preferential. Hence, in allocating our time, attention, or money, we give strong preference to the needs and happiness of those we love, including ourselves. Given the importance of such preferential love and concern, and of happiness, in survival and in making us the individuals we are, it is not surprising that preferential love and happiness are fundamental goods in human life. Hence, any naturalistic or this-worldly ethics must give an important place to preferential love and concern and to happiness in its conception of the intrinsic good—as Singer's and Unger's ethics do not. Of course, they allow that we should meet our own and our families' basic needs before we try to help the poor, but no more than that, and even this limited partiality seems to be allowed only as a means to optimizing our ability to help. But if Singer and Unger think that the fundamental needs and tendencies of human nature can be dispensed with in constructing and justifying our ideals, what grounds do they have for thinking that we should accept *their* ideal rather than, say, the erstwhile Taliban's theological ideal, or another Pol Pot's collectivist ideal?[66]

Singer does sometimes take biological facts into account—at least, provisionally. In *A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution, and Cooperation*,[67] Singer argues that the Left ought to replace Marx with Darwin and realize that, given the hierarchical nature of human beings, we cannot have both perfect equality and perfect liberty. In an interview in an online magazine,

[65] My point is not that there is *no* human feature that we would be better off without; clearly, if power-lust or blind hatred or blind obedience or cold-heartedness could be done away with, we would be much better off in terms of survival and happiness. It is not clear, however, that these features could be done away with without also doing away with capacities necessary for survival, for they may be developments—or perversions—of underlying capacities we need for survival. My complaint against Singer and Unger is that their "oughts" ignore capacities, needs, and tendencies fundamental to human survival and happiness.

[66] Thanks to Clifford Orwin for pointing out this problem with Singer's and Unger's disregard of the facts of human nature. In the last section of his act-consequentialist defense of the Singer Principle in "Moral Limits?" (cited in note 7 above), Arneson also assumes that we can ignore human nature in constructing our standards of right and wrong—although we must take it into account in praising or blaming people, as it would be "priggish" to think that, given human nature, it is a "great sin" to fail to live by the Singer ideal. Arneson does not explain why it is not priggish—or irrational—to not take human nature into account in constructing our standards of right and wrong.

[67] Peter Singer, *A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution, and Cooperation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), cited in Bailey, "The Pursuit of Happiness" (*reasononline* interview).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

he goes so far as to say that the pursuit of equality "has undoubtedly been the source of significant amounts of suffering."[68] Nevertheless, like many a utopian before him, he still seems to harbor the hope that since his ideals are not based on human nature, it will someday become possible to base human nature on his ideals. After conceding that the Left is wrong in thinking that human nature as it exists is malleable, he states that genetics offers the hope that it can *become* malleable (and he is not averse to government subsidies for those who cannot afford to change their offsprings' nature).[69]

The solution to our troublesome human nature, then, is not the old Left's social engineering, but genetics. Singer seems not to realize that state-subsidized eugenics might be in the hands of the same sorts of governments that carried out the old Left's social engineering programs in European and Asian countries, governments that sought to kill not only the capacity for preferential love, but also the capacity for independent thought and creativity. But the importance of our creative or productive capacity in survival and in the creation of our individual identities (and, thus, in happiness) is also not something that Singer or Unger seem to recognize. Their ideal devalues creativity by seeing moral decency entirely in terms of helping the needy, thus making impermissible all investments of time, energy, or money in creative activities that cannot be justified in terms of their poverty-relieving potential. Singer's and Unger's devaluation of creativity is, of course, of a piece with their devaluation of the individual's integrity and happiness, since creative engagement, like love, is a major source of both our identity and our happiness.

In the next subsection, I will argue that a morality that takes the human good seriously must recognize the moral importance of creativity, and that only if it does so can it have a sound view of the importance of beneficence in human life.

C. Creativity and beneficence

In Section II, I argued that although a good person must be beneficent in her attitudes and habitual actions, large-scale beneficence is morally optional. Moreover, if we choose to exercise large-scale beneficence, it is optional which cause we choose to support—and it is far from obvious that the cause Singer and Unger support is the most worthwhile. For example, saving children from certain death in poor African villages simply to enable them to live a few more years, regardless of the quality of those years, is not obviously better than giving hope to a prisoner of conscience in an African despot's jail. Indeed, on grounds of quality of life, as well as of admiration for courage and justice, the latter is a far

[68] Singer, quoted in Bailey, "The Pursuit of Happiness."
[69] Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

worthier object of our beneficence than the former. Again, giving time or money to bring hope to a prisoner of conscience in an African despot's jail is not obviously better than giving it to defend the victims of unjust takings here in the United States.[70] Indeed, on grounds of results and special responsibilities to fellow citizens, the latter is better. However, giving our time or money to defend victims of unjust takings in the United States is not obviously better than giving it to support organizations that spread ideas of economic, political, and civil freedom in the U.S. and abroad, thereby helping to protect or promote the conditions for prosperity.[71] Finally, giving our time or money to support organizations that spread ideas of freedom is not obviously better than investing it to create worthwhile enterprises that employ people in our own country or abroad, thereby bringing about the self-reliance that is the ultimate goal of beneficence.

This last example is of a profit-making project whose motive and aim is mutual benefit, not charity. It is, however, at least as worthy as any project of beneficence, for like the latter, a worthwhile business project protects, promotes, or expresses something important in human life, something that plays an enabling or constitutive role in human happiness. Moreover, for a variety of reasons, genuine beneficence must recognize the importance of wealth-creation in human life.

To begin with the last point: Consider, first, that beneficence not only depends upon the creation of wealth, it aims at creating or restoring the conditions that enable its beneficiaries to become, so far as they are able, self-sufficient creators themselves—creators of wealth and of meaningful and enjoyable lives. Hence, genuine beneficence implies an appreciation of the role in human happiness of the ability to create wealth in all its forms, material, intellectual, and artistic, as well as to enjoy the wealth one creates. Someone who gives vast quantities of cash to aid organizations, or spends hours doing volunteer work for them, but cares little about the role of creating and enjoying wealth in human happiness, may well be self-sacrificial, but he is not beneficent, not even if he is filled with compassion for the poor.

By contrast, a highly creative person who lives justly and honestly, plays no role in the perpetuation of poverty or suffering, invests all his

[70] The not-for-profit Institute of Justice in Washington, DC, defends victims of eminent domain abuse as well as victims of regulations that benefit established businesses at the expense of new entrants or would-be entrants into the field.

[71] In the absence of these conditions, no amount of humanitarian or development aid can do much good and, indeed, has often done much harm. See, in particular, *World Development Report 2005* and other sources cited in note 9 above.

The organizations I have in mind include the Cato Institute, which has held several conferences on limited government, free trade, and the rule of law in China; the Institute for Humane Studies, which offers scholarships and educational seminars in ideas of liberty and the rule of law for students; and Atlas Economic Research Foundation, which provides seed money and technical and intellectual assistance for setting up think-tanks devoted to spreading these ideas in countries from India to Kenya.

resources in the creation of worthwhile enterprises, and engages only in small-scale beneficence, is sufficiently beneficent. Moreover, the life he leads is at least as worthy as, say, the life of someone equally just and honest whose talents or interests lead him to invest some of his resources in (well-administered) large-scale beneficence. For given his talents and interests, the highly creative person is doing the best he can in terms of his own happiness and that of others. What we admire in people like Marie Curie or Burt Rutan is their love of their work as scientists or inventors and businessmen, and the value they seek to create for generations to come. We do not even think to ask if they spent some of their surplus resources on large-scale beneficence, and rightly so. Indeed, it would be a perverse morality that held that Burt Rutan should have given up his vision and invested his time and money not in designing and developing SpaceShipOne (whose utility for poverty relief is dubious) but on charity.[72] Whereas our capacity for beneficence bids us to stretch out a hand to those in need, our capacity for creation bids us to reach for the stars. Both capacities are central to our humanity.

D. Lack of beneficence

What if our resources exceed our ability to use them profitably for our work, needs, and enjoyment, yet we refuse to use them for large-scale beneficence because the thought of giving something for nothing is painful, or at least insufficiently motivating? Clearly, then, we lack the spirit of charity. We look for ways to spend our money on meaningless activities or trifling pleasures. We buy too much and leave it unused or let it go to waste because we already have more than we can enjoy. What we cannot spend we invest in risky, profitless endeavors. Or perhaps we have a lot of time to spare, and are aware of the need for volunteers in some worthwhile endeavor. Nevertheless, ignoring calls for volunteers, we spend our time on gossip or other amusements that mean little or nothing to us in terms of worth or enjoyment. In these cases, our lack of beneficence is coupled with—and may be the result of—greed, an inordinate attachment to our time or possessions which takes the form of wanting to have more than we can really enjoy. A lack of beneficence may also come from miserliness, which leads us to hoard our money, neither investing it nor spending it on anyone, either ourselves or others. Or it may come from an unjustified contempt for or indifference to the needy, a contempt or indifference that fails to recognize the role of luck in human life.

[72] SpaceShipOne, the first privately-funded manned spacecraft to reach space, was the winner of the Ansari X-prize in 2004 for twice reaching an altitude of more than 100 kilometers within a week. Burt Rutan's dream is to make space-tourism possible by finding cheaper ways of launching into space. Much of the funding comes from billionaire Paul Allen, the former Microsoft cofounder.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Whatever the explanation for the lack of beneficence, the uncharitable person violates what I will call a neo-Lockean proviso: that we acquire or keep for ourselves and those we love as much, but only as much, as we can use or invest meaningfully or enjoyably, now or in the long run.[73] The uncharitable person wastes her possessions by neither enjoying them nor investing them in any productive way, and shows a lack of regard for others by refusing to give her possessions to those who *could* use them in profitable ways.[74]

In the final analysis, both the creation and proper enjoyment of material, intellectual, and artistic wealth, and the beneficent sharing of this wealth with others, come from love of the world and love of life. Indeed, on a humanistic, naturalistic ethics, as well as on many religious ones, it is hard to conceive of any virtue, either self- or other-regarding, for which such love is not a necessary condition. If this is right, then the uncharitable person, as much as the profligate one, leads a life that is less meaningful, and often less enjoyable, than the beneficent person.

The Singer-Unger thesis, unfortunately, shows little appreciation, if any, for the role of either the creation of wealth or its enjoyment in a good human life; the thesis views wealth-creation entirely as a means to the end of poverty-relief. If we started living as the thesis says we should, it would be bad not only for the givers, but also, as I argue in the next section, for the recipients and for third parties.[75]

V. Disastrous Effects

Let us suppose that we have identified efficacious aid agencies and, in our new commitment to personal austerity, we (that is, most affluent people) decide to forgo that new sophisticated stereo or DVD system with surround sound. Neither counts as a basic need, especially if we already have a radio, TV set, and VCR (and surely even the TV set and VCR are luxuries that we are not justified in replacing after they quit working—all the news that's fit to hear or see is available on radio or online). But those DVD systems (and TV sets and VCRs) are manufactured in Chinese and South Korean factories, employing people who would be thrown out of

[73] This neo-Lockean proviso is derived from John Locke's non-waste condition on the acquisition of property: Locke argues that it is wrong to acquire more than one can use before it is destroyed. See John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1698), in *Two Treatises of Government*, 3d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), chap. 5, para. 33.

[74] Of course, wasting or hoarding instead of giving are not the only expressions of a lack of due regard for others. Another is systematically failing to notice occasions for beneficence. It is probably impossible to give a list of necessary and sufficient conditions for lacking beneficence, but it is safe to say that someone who spends money easily for his own pleasures but almost never for beneficent causes is lacking in beneficence.

[75] In "Islands in a Sea of Obligations," Schmidtz imagines the disastrous effects for Western economies if we started following the Singer-Unger thesis; I imagine these effects for the global market and the global poor.

work if we stopped buying DVD systems for the sake of saving the money for prolonging the lives of some poor children in Ethiopia.

We decide to stop going out for expensive dinners. But expensive dinners are often served up by restaurants owned by refugees fleeing from political repression and poverty, including the very Ethiopians whose relatives back in Ethiopia we want to help with our savings (and who are currently repatriating some of their profits to help their relatives at home).

We decide to stop buying expensive, stylish clothes so we can prolong the lives of some children in India or teach Nepalese villagers to become entrepreneurs. But these clothes are tailored by the parents of children in India and China who will join the ranks of those we will then need to help if we stop buying these clothes.[76]

We decide to forgo those beautiful Afghan rugs in order to send the savings to UNICEF for saving the lives of some poor children in Afghanistan. But by doing so we reduce to destitution and dependence a whole village of self-sufficient Afghan families.

Needless to say, my point is not that we should increase our spending on imported goods for the sake of preventing the relatively poor from joining the ranks of the absolutely poor. As my example of the greedy person shows, trying to consume more than we can enjoy or use meaningfully is as much a waste as depriving ourselves of enjoyment or meaning because we think our lives belong to the poor. My point is simply that the alleviation of absolute poverty should not be the single or primary determinant of how to dispose of our resources one way or the other, even if the alleviation of poverty is one of our goals. If we have good reason to spend money on a meal or a rug—if, that is, it is worthwhile in terms of our overall goals and resources—we should not refrain from doing so simply for the sake of sending the money we would thereby save to a charitable organization. Not only is trying to live by this single rule morally arbitrary and bad for us, it would also be bad for the poor and for everyone in between if most people tried to live by it. For doing so would destroy the reciprocal relations of trade and productive cooperation that constitute the global market, and would push into absolute poverty many who are currently self-sufficient thanks to this network of productive relations.

Unger's recommendation that we give away most of our "financially valuable assets" is even more drastic.[77] What this recommendation amounts to is that we give away our very seed corn—the source of our economy's future productivity and, thus, of continued aid for the poor. In "Famine,

[76] Many stylish, expensive clothes are manufactured in China or India and, thanks to a 1995 World Trade Organization (WTO) agreement to strike down trade barriers, from 2005 on such clothes are expected to come largely from these two countries. For information on the WTO agreement, see http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/texti_e/texintro_e.htm (accessed May 8, 2005).

[77] Unger, *Living High and Letting Die,* 134.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Affluence, and Morality," Singer does consider the possibility that "if we gave away, say, 40 percent of our Gross National Product, we would slow down the economy so much that in absolute terms we would be giving less than if we gave 25 percent of the much larger GNP that we would have if we limited our contribution to this smaller percentage."[78] However, he does not consider the possibility that slowing down our economy might also slow down the global economy that produces much of the wealth in poor countries. Nor does his hesitation here prevent him from stating again in a later article that those earning annual incomes of $50,000 to $100,000 ought to give away 40 to 70 percent of their income, respectively, because their basic needs can be met with $30,000.[79] This recommendation to consume—or have the poor consume—our seed corn is the unsurprising result of an ethics that advocates the profligate giving away of wealth to prolong lives, while failing to appreciate what makes life worth living.

VI. Conclusion

I have argued that the so-called analogy that Singer and Unger invoke to support their thesis does not really support it, because it is not really an analogy. If, however, we accept the analogy, it proves too much, so that the alleviation of poverty becomes only one of many worthy causes an individual may choose to support with her time or money. I also make four moral objections to the Singer-Unger thesis. First, it is monomaniacal. A good person must be beneficent, but beneficence need not take the form of large contributions of time or money to aid agencies for the prevention or relief of absolute poverty—or, for that matter, of *any* great evil. The world offers a rich variety of values that can make a life morally worthy. Second, if taken seriously, the self-sacrificial ideal that Singer and Unger advocate is deeply misanthropic, because (with rare exceptions) it is incompatible with that which makes life worth living: the pursuit of happiness. Third, because trying to live by this ideal is incompatible with the pursuit of happiness, yet most of us feel entitled to our happiness, the endorsement of this ideal is incompatible with integrity. The Singer-Unger ideal manifests the same flaw that all ideals of universal love have manifested: it refuses to accept that our moral ideals must be based on certain fundamental facts of human nature. Accordingly, the Singer-Unger ideal also devalues the importance of creativity in human life. Fourth, even if the activities of aid agencies for poverty relief or prevention were in themselves beneficial overall—and this premise is disputable—if most of us did start living by the Singer-Unger ideal, the effects of giving away all our "spare" money instead of investing it or

[78] Singer, "Famine," 7.
[79] Singer, "Singer Solution to World Poverty."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

spending it in ways that make our lives meaningful and enjoyable would be disastrous for the global economy, pushing into poverty many who are currently self-sufficient thanks to this productive economy.

The Singer-Unger ideal advocates not the virtue of beneficence, but the vice of profligacy. A proper understanding of beneficence implies an understanding of the role of wealth-creation in human life and happiness, and the role of happiness in making life worth living; for beneficence itself aims, as far as possible, to create or restore the conditions that will enable its recipients to lead meaningful and enjoyable lives as creators of wealth.

Philosophy, University of Oklahoma

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052506060031 Published online by Cambridge University Press