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# EQUALITY, BENEVOLENCE, AND RESPONSIVENESS TO AGENT-RELATIVE VALUE*

By Eric Mack

## I. In Search of Arguments for Egalitarianism

Do differences in income or wealth matter, morally speaking? This essay addresses a broader issue than this question *seems* to pose. But this broader issue is, I believe, the salient philosophical issue which this question *actually* poses. Let me explain. Narrowly read, the question at hand is concerned only with inequality of income or wealth. It asks us to consider whether inequality of income or wealth *as such* is morally problematic. On this construal, the question invites us to consider whether the bare fact that Joshua has a greater income or net worth than Rebekah is a morally defective social state of affairs. Is there at least a significant moral presumption on behalf of equality of income or wealth such that, if an inequality of income or wealth obtains vis-à-vis Joshua and Rebekah, that inequality ought to be nullified unless some impressive positive justification for the inequality can be provided? On this narrow reading, the salient issue is whether there exists *in particular* an egalitarian presumption with respect to income or wealth. But I believe that the genuinely salient issue here is whether there exists *in general* an egalitarian presumption with respect to *whatever* factual condition of individuals one is supposed to attend to when assessing social states of affairs.[1] The crucial question is not whether income or wealth or utility or well-being is the condition the unequal distribution of which is as such morally problematic. Rather, the crucial question is whether it is true of *some* factual condition C—presumably the factual condition which most merits our attention in the course of our assessing social states of affairs—that its unequal distribution is as such morally problematic. Is the bare fact that

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[1] I say "factual" condition so as not to be including within the egalitarian camp anyone who holds to a doctrine of equal *rights*. The idea (no doubt too crude) is that attending to rights and to their being equally accorded to each is not a matter of identifying some factual condition (e.g., the possession of income or utility) which is supposed to be equally dispersed among individuals.

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Joshua possesses or attains or enjoys C to a greater extent than Rebekah possesses or attains or enjoys C a morally defective social state of affairs? That is, is there at least a significant moral presumption on behalf of equality such that, if there is an inequality vis-à-vis Joshua and Rebekah with regard to C, then that inequality ought to be nullified unless some impressive positive justification for that inequality can be provided? In short, does morality include a significant presumption on behalf of equality with regard to C, whatever C happens to be?[2]

The proposition that morality does include a significant presumption on behalf of equality with regard to C is the major premise of those who answer our initial question in the affirmative. This in itself, I believe, warrants my focus on this proposition. There is a further warrant for not focusing on the minor premise that income or wealth is that condition C which ought, ceteris paribus, to be equally distributed. This further reason is that many, if not most, people who are intuitively disposed to answer our initial question in the affirmative do not really subscribe to the minor premise that it is income or wealth which really matters. What many, if not most, of these people do believe is that, within the sort of social orders they are contemplating, an individual's possession of income or wealth is the crucial source of that individual's having or attaining or enjoying what really matters—utility or welfare or happiness or well-being, for example. Inequality of income or wealth is *seen* as problematic *as such* because it is perceived as the essential, constant, and unremitting ground of inequality in the distribution of what ultimately matters. The moral stain that, strictly speaking, discolors the latter inequality is perceived as spreading back to and discoloring the former inequality.[3] I believe that many, if not most, of those who are initially disposed to say that inequality of income or wealth as such is morally problematic will on reflection acknowledge that what is really morally problematic as such is some *other* inequality—the inequality of condition C—that is *generated by* an unequal division of income or wealth. So we are led back again to the conclusion that the crucial issue posed by the question "Do differences in income or wealth matter, morally speaking?" is whether morality includes a significant presumption on behalf of the equal distribution of some condition C.

This essay is directed against the major premise of those who are disposed to say that differences in income and wealth matter, that is, the

[2] Note that the mirror image of the egalitarian is the person who holds that differences in the distribution of C matter, morally speaking, because there is a moral presumption on behalf of *inequality*. For this inegalitarian, equality would be morally problematic in the way that inequality is problematic for the egalitarian. The nonegalitarian position I subscribe to rejects both this inegalitarianism and the aforementioned egalitarianism.

[3] Cf. the labored discussion, at G. A. Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 197–203, of the disposition to see as intrinsically unjust the sort of circumstances that one believes necessarily produce interactions that one takes to be intrinsically unjust.

proposition that the factual condition C—the possession or attainment or enjoyment of which really matters in the lives of individuals—ought, ceteris paribus, to be equally distributed among individuals. Of course, the plausible candidates for C are utility, welfare, happiness, and well-being. For this reason, in the course of this essay, I shall take friends of egalitarianism to be maintaining that it is inequality of utility or welfare or happiness or well-being among individuals which is as such morally problematic. Indeed, to simplify matters, I shall speak solely in terms of well-being and arguments for a moral presumption on behalf of equality of well-being.

As Robert Nozick has noted, however, it is much easier to find assertions of this sort of moral presumption on behalf of equality than it is to find arguments for it.[4] Often the most one can find are arguments that purport to move from the *absence* of any sound primordial claim or right to an *unequal* distribution of some valued condition to the *presence* of a sound claim or right to an *equal* distribution of that condition. An example that is literally at hand as I write is supplied by G. A. Cohen, who allows the inference from "no one has more right to [worldly resources] than anyone else" to "equal rights in [worldly resources] should therefore be instituted."[5]

How might friends of egalitarianism better argue for a moral presumption on behalf of the equal distribution of what ultimately matters in life? In asking myself this question, I found myself recalling a particular argument for utilitarianism that is suggested by J. J. C. Smart. This argument, in effect, starts with the intuitive idea that benevolence is a good and reasonable thing; surely we all take benevolent people to be good and sensible people. But what general normative stance stands behind and explains our positive assessment of benevolence? Smart's suggestion is that this general normative stance is utilitarianism, that is, the impartial endorsement of the overall good of others as our ultimate aim. Since utilitarianism is the general normative stance that best comports with and explains our positive assessment of benevolence, our positive assessment of benevolence should extend back from it to an endorsement of utilitarianism.[6] As I recalled this argument, it occurred to me that a better version of it would be an argument that moves from the intuitive goodness and reasonableness of benevolence to the endorsement of egalitarianism as the best explanation for the

[4] Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 233.

[5] Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality*, 110. I say that Cohen "allows" this inference because he does not offer it on his own behalf, but on behalf of a position ("the starting gate theory") that he himself does not endorse. Cohen seems to find the inference itself unobjectionable.

[6] J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 30–33. My depiction of Smart's argument gives it a much more cognitivist cast than Smart himself would recognize.

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intuitive goodness and reasonableness of benevolence. For the benevolent agent does not so much focus on the overall good of others as on the separate well-being of each possible recipient of his benevolence and, especially, on the well-being of the possible recipients who are most in need of his sympathy and care. Given this understanding of benevolence, egalitarianism seems to have a stronger claim than does utilitarianism on being the general normative stance that best comports with and explains our positive assessment of benevolence.

So the question that seems to me worth exploring in the search for some argument on behalf of egalitarianism is whether the intuitive goodness and reasonableness of benevolence can be enlisted as a premise in a best-explanation argument for the endorsement of egalitarianism. This search, which is carried on in earnest in the next two sections of this essay, turns up two arguments. The first of these is the "impersonalist argument." In its first phase, this argument maintains that if one is to best explain the intuitive goodness and reasonableness of benevolence, one must invoke the impersonal value of every individual's well-being. In its second phase, the impersonalist argument maintains that the most reasonable form of subscription to this invocation of impersonal value is egalitarianism. The second argument I will consider is the "pretheoretical argument"; it is the egalitarian analogue of Smart's argument for utilitarianism. In this essay, I reject both of these attempts to enlist benevolence on behalf of egalitarianism. I seek to rescue benevolence from the grasp of the friends of impersonal value and equality. To carry out this act of Good Samaritanism I have to spell out and point to problems within these arguments (Sections II and III) and offer a competing explanation for the goodness and reasonableness of benevolence (Sections IV and V). The gravamen of my alternative account is that the goodness and reasonableness of benevolence is a matter of the *personal* value of an agent's benevolence for the agent and the subjects of his conduct. As we shall see, the arguments that move from benevolence to egalitarianism turn on the other-regarding character of benevolence. The chief difficulty for an alternative, personalist account of benevolence is to accommodate this other-regarding character of benevolence.

## II. Benevolence, Impersonal Value, and Equality

Benevolence, we are almost all prepared to say, is a good and reasonable thing. It is such a good and reasonable thing that one can give a nice boost to key propositions within one's favorite moral theory if one can show that these propositions explain benevolence's being a good and reasonable thing. These propositions will explain the goodness and reasonableness of benevolence by explaining why people have reason to be

benevolent. If one takes the goodness and reasonableness of benevolence to be a highly salient truth about the moral realm, one will take the propositions that (one believes) explain the goodness and reasonableness of benevolence to be highly salient within sound moral theory. Friends of impersonal value and equality often seek to support their commitments within moral theory in this way. Impersonal value and the value or propriety of equality in the distribution of valuable conditions among individuals are said to explain (or otherwise be implicated in) the goodness of benevolence, and the salience of benevolence within the moral realm vindicates assigning prominent positions to impersonal value and egalitarianism within moral theorizing. As announced in Section I, my intention is to reject explanations of the reasonableness of benevolence that appeal to impersonal value and egalitarianism and provide instead an account of the reasonableness of benevolence in terms of personal (agent-relative) value.

Given this intention, a word or two is necessary to clarify my use of the terms "agent-relative," "personal," "agent-neutral," and "impersonal." The value of some condition is "personal" or "agent-relative" if and only if that value is *value for* some particular individual who stands in some special relation to that condition. For instance, the value of a particular agent's sensorial pleasure is personal or agent-relative if and only if that value is *value for* the agent whose pleasure it is. The value of some condition is "impersonal" or "agent-neutral" if and only if that value is *not simply value for* a particular individual. If the value of an agent's sensorial pleasure is impersonal or agent-neutral, that pleasure is not merely valuable in relationship to that agent—even though that pleasure obtains only in relationship to that agent. If a condition has personal or agent-relative value for agent A, that value (directly) provides only agent A with reason to promote that condition. If a condition has impersonal or agent-neutral value, that value (directly) provides all agents with reason to promote it.[7]

The recalcitrant fact about benevolence that an agent-relativist account of benevolence has to accommodate is that benevolence is essentially *other-regarding*; interest in the well-being of another is an essential element in a benevolent agent's motivation. Moreover, because benevolence is essentially other-regarding, any explanation of an agent's conduct being reasonable must indicate how the value of the (intended) outcome for the other party ("the recipient") contributes to the agent's having reason to

[7] The distinction between agent-relative and agent-neutral value is concerned with the question of *for whom* the value of a given condition has directive force. This is quite different from the question of whether the value of a given condition is subjective or objective, that is, whether the value conferred upon it is a matter of its being desired or preferred or not. Unfortunately, these two issues are often conflated. This conflation often takes the form of use of the term "personal" to refer both to the agent-relativity and the subjectivity of value and use of the term "impersonal" to refer to both the agent-neutrality and the objectivity of value. In the present essay, "personal" simply means "agent-relative" and "impersonal" simply means "agent-neutral."

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promote that outcome for the recipient.[8] This is easily enough done if the value of the well-being of the recipient is impersonal. For impersonal value, by definition, provides everyone—including the agent in question—with reason to promote it. By contrast, the explanation of the reasonableness of benevolence is not so easily accomplished if the only type of value available to justify an agent's action is personal (agent-relative) value. On the one hand, if the only value that gives an agent reason to act in a way that promotes another's well-being is personal value *for the agent*, that agent's motivation and conduct will not be other-regarding, and hence will not be genuinely benevolent. On the other hand, it is difficult to see how the personal value *for the recipient* of the conduct's outcome can provide the *agent* with agent-relative reason to act on the recipient's behalf. Eventually, I do hope to describe how the personal (agent-relative) value for the recipient of the conduct's prospective outcome contributes to there being personal (agent-relative) value for the agent in promoting the recipient's good.

One way of proceeding against the view that neither impersonal value nor egalitarian strictures can explain the reasonableness of benevolence would be to argue that neither impersonal value nor egalitarian strictures can explain anything because neither obtains as part of sound moral theory. In this essay I do not proceed in this way. I do not advance *independent* arguments against impersonal value and egalitarianism. Rather, I am concerned solely with the relative plausibility of accounts of the value of benevolence that implicate impersonal value and/or some deep egalitarian norm in morality and the sort of account that I shall sketch, which proceeds entirely in terms of personal (agent-relative) value. I hope to weaken the case for an ethic of impartial service to impersonal value and/or equality and to enhance the case for an ethic of personal value by showing that the latter better accounts for the goodness and reasonableness of benevolence.

I have a second motivation that is related to the first but not identical. I wish to avoid the common picture of a deep conflict between an individual's devotion to his own personal values and commitments—that is, to the constituents of *his* well-being—and that individual's benevolence. The explanation of benevolence offered by the friends of impersonal value and equality represents benevolence as being essentially a matter of impartial devotion to the well-being of individuals at large. Benevolence as

[8] Throughout this essay, I inquire about whether the value of outcome O explains A's having reason to promote O, and I have in mind A's having reason to promote O both in the sense that there is a reason for A to promote O (whether or not A is aware of that reason) and in the sense that A is aware of that reason (i.e., he *has* that reason). Hence, a more precise statement of the inquiry would be that it concerns whether the value of O *plus* A's awareness of this value explains A's having reason to promote O. To simplify matters, however, I assume that if O has value, A is aware of this value. Thus I speak only of the value of O and not (also) of A's awareness of this value.

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such becomes "pure impartial benevolence."[9] To be benevolent on this construal is to be equally devoted to impersonal value wherever it may be located. An agent's benevolence and his special attachment to his own values and commitments are then seen as fundamentally antithetical motivations at war within a radically divided self. As this conflict is depicted by Thomas Nagel, one important representative of those from whose grasp I hope to wrest benevolence, there is

> a division in each individual between two standpoints [that represent the two sides of our "naturally divided selves"], the personal and the impersonal. The latter represents the claims of the collectivity and gives them their force for each individual. If it did not exist, there would be no morality, only the clash, compromise, and occasional convergence of individual perspectives.
>
> It is clear that in most people, the coexistence of the personal standpoint with the values deriving from the initial judgment of the impersonal standpoint produces a division of the self. From his own point of view within the world each person . . . is extremely important to himself. . . . But from the impersonal standpoint which he can also occupy, so is everyone else: *Everyone's* life matters as much as his does, and his matters no more than anyone else's.[10]

So profound is this division within the self that we must, according to Nagel, address the question, "How can we put ourselves back together again?"[11]

The conflict that Nagel depicts *within* the self reflects a pervasive clash *among* selves. The portion of one's self that is concerned about one's own projects and commitments is in conflict with the portion of one's self that is (supposed to be) responsive to the potentially overwhelming "claims of the collectivity." The general theme here is of course the familiar one about the demandingness of impartiality. My somewhat more specific point is that when benevolence is cast as such impartiality, benevolence itself becomes the enemy of any self that has its own particular interests and allegiances. It becomes something that such a "subjective" self can only embrace grudgingly as the price of its reunion with its "objective" companion.[12] I hope to suggest a less conflictual view of intrapersonal and interpersonal relations—one in which benevolence, albeit essentially

[9] Thomas Nagel, *Equality and Partiality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 16; cf. ibid., 15, 31.
[10] Ibid., 3–4, 14.
[11] Ibid., 16.
[12] And this assumes that a reunion with the so-called "objective" self is something worth paying for.

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other-regarding, is a boon to the personal life of the benevolent agent.[13] Let us consider two lines of thought that move from the goodness and reasonableness of benevolence to the affirmation of egalitarianism, understood in somewhat Orwellian fashion as the belief that each person's well-being or happiness equally summons everyone to its service, but that the well-being or happiness of the worse off equally summons everyone more.

Since the first line of thought turns on claims about impersonal value, I refer to it as the impersonalist argument. As mentioned above, there are two phases within this argument. The first phase moves from the reasonableness of benevolence toward every individual to the impersonal value of every individual's well-being. The second phase moves from the impersonal value of everyone's well-being to the egalitarian conclusion that preferential treatment is to be accorded to the well-being of the worse off. I take the move represented by the first phase to reflect one of the arguments Nagel offers for the existence of impersonal value in *The View from Nowhere*.[14] Here is how this argument goes. Nagel imagines himself to be a patient in the burn ward of a hospital. He further envisions a fellow patient who "professes to hope that we both will be given morphine." Nagel maintains that insofar as he himself is thinking in terms of "personal values that others cannot be expected to share," he cannot understand the *reasonableness* of the profession of his fellow patient. "I understand why he has reason to want morphine for himself, but what reason does he have to want *me* to get some? Does my groaning bother him?"[15] What is the intended force of Nagel's concluding rhetorical question? Surely, if Nagel's groaning is bothering the other patient, that patient *does* have (some) reason to favor Nagel's receiving some painkiller. So why wouldn't the fact that the fellow patient is bothered by Nagel's groaning reveal to Nagel a reason that this patient has to want Nagel to get some morphine? The answer has to be that Nagel wants to understand how the fellow patient has a reason to be concerned about Nagel's pain—in contrast to being concerned about his own bothered state of mind. Nagel wants to understand the reasonableness of the fellow patient's *other-regarding* concern, not that patient's self-regarding concern. If the other patient's sole purpose is to quiet Nagel down so that he (the other patient) can better

[13] By insisting that genuinely benevolent conduct is other-regarding, I do not intend to disparage conduct by agents who benefit others *without* intending to do so. Also, it is perhaps needless to point out that much actual human conduct proceeds from a complex intertwining of significantly other-regarding motivations with predominantly self-regarding motivations.

[14] Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Subsequent to his early work, Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), Nagel has acknowledged the existence of personal value in addition to impersonal value. My focus within the text of this essay on Nagel as a representative friend of impersonal value and equality does not gainsay his acknowledgment of personal value.

[15] Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 160.

follow some game show on TV, then this patient's profession can be comprehended by Nagel as reasonable vis-à-vis that patient's personal values, but cannot be comprehended as reasonably benevolent. The fellow patient's *benevolent* desire that Nagel also receive some painkiller cannot be comprehended as reasonable if one thinks only in terms of "personal values that others cannot be expected to share." Hence, according to Nagel, the other patient's benevolent desire that Nagel receive some analgesic can only (or at least best) be understood as reasonable by representing that patient as being responsive to the *impersonal* value of a mitigation in Nagel's pain. If desires (or actions or dispositions, all of which I shall tend to refer to as "conduct") are to be understood as reasonably benevolent, impersonal value must obtain. If benevolence is central to the moral life, then the affirmation of impersonal value must be prominent within sound moral theory.

The second phase within the impersonalist argument is the claim that giving preference to the promotion of impersonal value in the lives of the worse off is a more reasonable form of responsiveness to impersonal value than is maximizing net value across individuals. In contrast to those who take impartial devotion to impersonal value as pointing to a utilitarian ethic, Nagel takes such regard for impersonal value to point to an egalitarian ethic. Why? Nagel cites "the problem for the impersonal standpoint" of determining how to combine the "enormous multitude of things that matter impersonally, values positive and negative pointing in every conceivable direction." This leads to Nagel's declaration that

> my belief is that the right form of impersonal regard for everyone is an impartiality among individuals that is egalitarian not merely in the sense that it counts them all the same as inputs to some combinatorial function, but in the sense that the function itself gives preferential weight to improvements in the lives of those who are worse off as against adding to the advantages of those better off.[16]

Nagel's overall conclusion by way of the impersonalist argument is that insofar as one lives as an agent "under the direction of an impartial benevolent spectator of the world," insofar as one is moved by "pure impartial benevolence,"[17] one will focus on and promote everyone's equally impersonally valuable well-being, and this will take the form of giving preference to improvements in the lives of the worse off.

The second line of thought, the pretheoretical argument, also begins with benevolence and ends with egalitarianism. It simply appeals to our pretheoretical sense of benevolence—specifically, to an intuitive sense of benevolence that is *not* informed by an account of benevolence as responsiveness to impersonal value. According to the pretheoretical argument, if

[16] Nagel, *Equality and Partiality*, 12.
[17] Ibid., 15, 16.

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we simply begin with an intuitive understanding of benevolence, we see that a benevolent agent will, ceteris paribus, give preference to improvements in the lives of the worse off. If a benevolent agent is faced with the choice between adding five units of happiness to the life of someone who otherwise will have zero net happiness and adding five units of happiness to the life of someone who otherwise will have ten, the benevolent agent will, ceteris paribus, add five units of happiness to the life of the first individual. Indeed, the benevolent agent will choose to add five units of happiness to the life of the first individual even if he has the alternative of adding six units of happiness to the life of the party who otherwise will enjoy ten.

Let us suppose that a benevolent patient in a burn ward will favor sharing the available analgesic with other patients rather than receiving it all himself.[18] What sharing will such a benevolent agent favor? Will he propose that the shared analgesic be redirected so as to minimize net pain among the patients at large? Or will he propose that it be redirected to the patient (or patients) who otherwise will be in the worst pain? Suppose that some portion of the painkiller could be used to move patient B from twenty units of pain to ten or to move patient C from thirty units of pain to twenty-three. Is it not plausible that our benevolent patient will favor the redirection of the painkiller to patient C rather than B? If so, it again seems that benevolence manifests the propriety of giving special weight to the condition of the worse off. It seems that those who hold that the centrality of benevolence within any sound moral perspective points to a salient egalitarian strand within sound morality occupy a more reasonable position than those who, like Smart, hold that the centrality of benevolence within any sound moral perspective points to a salient utilitarian strand within sound morality.[19]

It is worth noting that there is a tension between the impersonalist argument and the pretheoretical argument. The conclusion of the pretheoretical argument, namely, that equality has a better claim on being the underlying root of benevolence than does value-maximization, depends upon *not* construing benevolence as responsiveness to impersonal value. For suppose that we do construe benevolence as responsiveness to impersonal value. That is, suppose we accept, as the first phase of the

[18] This patient is markedly more benevolent than the fellow patient in Nagel's own example, who, while favoring Nagel's receipt of painkiller, gives no indication of being willing to supply that painkiller out of a supply he would otherwise have exclusively.

[19] It is commonly held that egalitarianism is a demand of justice while benevolence is not. This may lead to the thought that it would be odd for anyone to attempt to build arguments for egalitarianism upon an endorsement of benevolence. As a result, it might further be thought that in ascribing any such argument to an aspiring egalitarian, I am foisting an argument upon him that he himself would eschew. But this line of thought ignores Nagel's advocacy of the impersonalist argument. More generally, this line of thought cannot be pursued on behalf of any reasonably ambitious egalitarian. For such an egalitarian (like his similarly ambitious utilitarian counterpart) *does* tend to conclude that benevolence (also) is a demand of justice. The idea that benevolence is clearly not a demand of justice is readily held only if one rejects all ambitious forms of egalitarianism and utilitarianism.

impersonalist argument proposes, that benevolence is a matter of the promotion of impersonal value (and the mitigation of impersonal disvalue). It will then be hard to resist the conclusion that value-maximization among individuals is the underlying root of benevolence. If benevolence is a matter of being responsive to the equal impersonal value of each unit of well-being, a purely benevolent agent will be indifferent between adding five units of well-being to the life of the worse-off individual and adding five units of well-being to the life of the better-off individual. A purely benevolent agent, so understood, will favor adding six units of well-being to the life of the better-off individual over adding five units to the life of the worse-off individual, and will decide who should receive the reallocated painkiller on the basis of which administration of the analgesic will minimize the amount of pain among the patients.

My contention here runs contrary to the second phase within the impersonalist argument, namely, Nagel's claim that responsiveness to impersonal value appropriately takes the form of giving preference to the promotion of impersonal value in the lives of the worse off. Thus, if Nagel provides significant support for this second phase, my contention will be in trouble and the tension between the impersonalist and pretheoretical arguments will be relieved. However, it is noteworthy that Nagel provides no such support. As we have seen, what Nagel does say is that there are deep problems in combining the impersonal value and disvalue of different sorts of states of affairs. Nagel's reasonable point is that in theory and/or in practice this incommensurability of values and disvalues undermines any program for the maximization of value across individuals.[20] Yet this hardly provides positive support for the alternative egalitarian program; the undermining of the maximizing response hardly constitutes an argument on behalf of the egalitarian response.[21] Worse yet, the incommensurability to which Nagel appeals also undermines the egalitarian program. This is because such incommensurability, at the very least, vastly complicates judgments about who is worse off, who is better off, and who among the better off will remain in that category after costs are imposed upon them to make the originally worse off better off.[22]

I conclude that if one construes benevolence as Nagel does, that is, as impartial responsiveness to impersonal value, one needs to come up with some independent argument to press this responsiveness into an egali-

[20] If the incommensurability is between the value of qualitatively different states of affairs, then measuring two batches of qualitatively identical pains against one another will not be precluded by incommensurability.

[21] Perhaps the conclusion that should be drawn from this incommensurability is that any choice of a valuable alternative is reasonable—except, perhaps, choices that involve the direct destruction of impersonal value. Or perhaps the conclusion that should be drawn is that no choice among valuable alternatives is reasonable.

[22] It seems that the only form of egalitarianism that can escape this problem posed by the incommensurability of basic goods (and evils) is an egalitarianism of resources. An egalitarianism of resources escapes this problem *if and only if* such an egalitarianism is not itself advanced as the most feasible institutional realization of an equal distribution of ultimate goods.

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tarian mold.[23] Egalitarianism, it seems, will have to be introduced as an independently potent constraint against maximizing net impersonal value. I, however, shall concentrate on contesting the first phase within the impersonalist argument for egalitarianism, namely, the claim that reasonable benevolence is a matter of responsiveness to impersonal value. In the course of doing so, I shall sketch an account of benevolence that accommodates the egalitarian tilt on which the pretheoretical argument focuses, but which does not take that tilt to be indicative of any deep or robust egalitarian truth.

## III. Reasonable Benevolence and Value for the Recipient

At the outset of Section II, I asserted that because benevolence is essentially other-regarding, any explanation of its being reasonable must indicate how the value of the (intended) outcome for the recipient contributes to the agent's having reason to promote that outcome. This "responsiveness premise" is crucial to the first phase of Nagel's impersonalist argument. A more structured statement of that phase is as follows.

(a) Some conduct on the part of agent A toward recipient R that is productive of beneficial outcome O is benevolent and reasonable.
(b) A's benevolent conduct toward R will be explained as reasonable if and only if the value of O contributes to A's having reason to engage in that conduct. (This is the responsiveness premise.)
(c) The value of O will not contribute to A's having reason to engage in the benevolent conduct if the value of O is personal value for R.
(d) Hence, the value of O will contribute to A's having reason to engage in the benevolent conduct only if that value is impersonal.
(e) Therefore, A's benevolent conduct toward R will be explained as reasonable only if the value of O is impersonal value.
(f) Therefore, impersonal value should be affirmed as essential to the best explanation of conduct that is benevolent and reasonable.

One way of challenging Nagel's impersonalist argument would be to deny the responsiveness premise, that is, to maintain that one can explain the reasonableness of A's benevolent conduct without citing the value of the (intended) outcome for R. My project, however, is to show how one

[23] And it is hard to imagine what this argument for egalitarianism *as a basic moral principle* would be. See Harry Frankfurt, "The Moral Irrelevance of Equality," *Public Affairs Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (2000): 87–103.

can *accept* this premise without being driven to an impersonalist explanation of the reasonableness of benevolence. Indeed, in this section, I want to refine the responsiveness premise to make it consistent with the fact that the reasonableness of some benevolent conduct may not be a matter of the reasonableness of that conduct's benevolence.

Suppose A conducts himself in a way which in fact advances the well-being of R. Certain explanations for such conduct will undermine its classification as benevolent. For instance, if it is shown that A has acted solely for monetary payment, the beneficial action will be revealed to be nonbenevolent. Advocates of psychological egoism attempt to offer such self-regarding explanations for all actions by A that benefit R—even those actions that seem to be performed on behalf of R's well-being. Thus, Thomas Hobbes seeks to explain (apparently) compassionate action in terms of the agent's interest in minimizing his own discomfort. The agent acts so as "to deliver his mind from the pain of compassion."[24] This motivational explanation for the action in question explains *away* its benevolence. In contrast, we may take compassion or benevolence more seriously. Perhaps as the result of some evolutionary process, (many) individuals are hardwired to be moved to some degree to promote those conditions in other persons that they perceive to be beneficial to those persons. Given such a disposition in individual A, pointing to A's perception that outcome O is beneficial to R provides a motivational explanation for A's benevolent conduct; A's conduct is accounted for *as* benevolent conduct.

Of course, neither of these citations of motives shows the conduct in question to be *reasonable*. We will see the Hobbesian explanation as disclosing the reasonableness of A's action only if we implicitly rely upon the additional premise that a diminution of A's discomfort is valuable for A. Similarly, we will see the benevolent-disposition explanation as disclosing the reasonableness of A's conduct only if we implicitly rely upon the additional premise that A has reason to engage in this conduct. But on what grounds might we say that the agent who is moved by a benevolent disposition (and the perception that the action in question will have a beneficial outcome) has reason to engage in this conduct?[25]

One possibility is that it is pleasing to A to act in accord with his benevolent orientation—or displeasing to him not to act in accord with it—*and* that this pleasure (displeasure) is valuable (disvaluable) *for A*. That is, it is valuable for A to indulge the benevolent sentiments that are wired into his motivational structure. Insofar as we accept at face value

[24] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan,* ed. C. B. Macpherson (New York: Penguin, 1985), 193. The obvious question to be raised here is, *Why* does the prospect of another's pain cause pain to the agent?

[25] Within this discussion, I limit my attention to *value-based* reasons for an agent's conduct. I am setting aside all consideration of deontic reasons for an agent's acting on behalf of another, such as A's having promised R that he will perform the action that is beneficial to R. I believe that the domain of practical rationality includes such deontic considerations and that these constitute *additional* other-regarding reasons for action (or omission).

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the picture of A's being subject to an ingrained benevolent disposition the indulgence of which is pleasing to him, it is perfectly plausible to hold that the value of that pleasure provides A with reason to indulge that sentiment and thereby engage in this benevolent conduct. This justification of A's benevolent action is a matter of indicating that A has a self-regarding reason to engage in this other-regarding conduct. The fact that the indicated reason for A's action is self-regarding does not negate the action's being other-regarding; it remains other-regarding in virtue of its being the product of A's benevolent sentiment and his perception that the action in question will benefit its recipient. A is really *moved* by the prospect of promoting a certain benefit in R, but what gives him *reason* not to extirpate this orientation (if he could) is that it provides him with opportunities to attain the pleasures of satisfying this drive. So here we have one way in which genuinely benevolent action can apparently be shown to be reasonable *without* appealing to the value of the outcome engendered in the recipient.[26] Contrary to my initial formulation of the responsiveness premise, A's benevolent conduct toward R can be reasonable without that conduct being responsive to the value of the (intended) outcome for R. Conduct that is benevolent under one description, namely, being motivated by the prospect of promoting a beneficial condition in another, can be reasonable for the agent under another description: providing that agent with valuable satisfaction.

This does not so much confute the responsiveness premise as call for its more refined articulation. The fact that A's conduct can be benevolent under one description and reasonable under another reveals that friends of the responsiveness premise do not intend to make the broad claim that conduct that is benevolent can only be reasonable if the value of the outcome engendered in the recipient contributes to the agent's having reason to engage in the conduct. Rather, they intend the narrower claim that conduct can only be *reasonable in its benevolence* (i.e., reasonable in its other-regardingness) if the value of the outcome engendered in the recipient contributes to the agent's having reason to engage in the conduct. For A's benevolence to be reasonable in the intended sense, it is not enough that the conduct be triggered by the prospect of a benefit for R and that there be some adventitious reason for A's engaging in that conduct—some reason that is incidental to the conduct's being other-regarding. Rather, the conduct has to be reasonable (at least in part) in virtue of the value of the outcome for R. Just as the benefit for R of the conduct has to appear within the motivational explanation of A's conduct for that conduct to be benevolent, the value of that outcome has to appear

[26] Recall that we have gone out of our way to picture A as being hardwired to be moved by the prospect of benefiting R. The idea is to exclude from the present picture A's being disposed to benefit R on the basis of A's recognition of the *value* of benefits within the lives of others. If the explanation of A's disposition itself turns on A's recognition of the value of such occurrences, then a justifying explanation for A's benevolent action would be implicit within the citation of that disposition.

within the justificatory explanation for A's conduct if that conduct is to be shown to be reasonable qua benevolent conduct. The justificatory explanation for the benevolent conduct has to be transparent; it has to cite the value of that which, by motivating the conduct, makes the conduct benevolent.

The impersonalist argument is, therefore, a best-explanation argument that proceeds from the existence of conduct that is *reasonable in its benevolence* to the existence of impersonal value. So the refined version of the whole argument—including the more careful articulation of the responsiveness premise (b′)—is as follows.

(a′) Some conduct on the part of A toward R that is productive of beneficial outcome O is reasonably benevolent (i.e., is reasonable in its benevolence).
(b′) A's reasonably benevolent conduct toward R will be explained as reasonable if and only if the value of O contributes to A's having reason to engage in that conduct. (This is the refined responsiveness premise.)
(c) The value of O will not contribute to A's having reason to engage in the benevolent conduct if the value of O is personal value for R.
(d) Hence, the value of O will contribute to A's having reason to engage in the benevolent conduct only if that value is impersonal.
(e′) Therefore, A's reasonably benevolent conduct toward R will be explained as reasonable only if the value of O is impersonal value.
(f′) Therefore, impersonal value should be affirmed as essential to the best explanation of conduct that is reasonably benevolent.

I think it is clear that Nagel himself understands his impersonalist argument as starting with the idea that he ought to be able to understand the *reasonableness of the benevolence* of the fellow patient in the burn ward. It is this reasonableness that Nagel holds cannot be understood if one thinks in terms of personal value. Hence, the first premise of the refined argument is a bit more contentious than the first premise of the initial formulation, but not much more contentious. The refined premise (a′) is equivalent to (a) plus the proposition that the reasonableness of some benevolent conduct is not merely incidental to its being benevolent. I join Nagel in the affirmation of both (b′) and (a′). As a result, my challenge to the first phase of the impersonalist argument for egalitarianism *must* focus on (c).

Whatever plausibility (c) has, it has because of the implicit supposition that if the value of O plays any essential role in explaining A's having reason to promote O, that value *fully explains* A's having that reason. In

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other words, if the value of O contributes to A's having reason to promote O, it does so by supplying that reason all by itself. This, I believe, is Nagel's own supposition. The awfulness of Nagel's pain is supposed to explain *by itself* the reasonableness of the other patient's desire that Nagel receive the analgesic. This notion of full explanation is present in a remarkably Nagelian passage offered by Loren Lomasky.

> [I]f you asked me why I provided the suffering individual with a dose of morphine, and I told you that it was because he was in excruciating pain, it would be remarkably obtuse of you not to understand me as having provided a *full* explanation of my action. . . . [W]e recognize that the sufferer's pain is a misfortune for him, and in virtue of our correctly apprehending its badness for him we thereby understand that we have (some) reason to disvalue the occurrence of the pain, and thus (some) reason to take action to alleviate it.[27]

Lomasky seems at first to be talking about a motivational explanation for his providing the painkiller. But it becomes clear that he is actually concerned about justificatory explanation. The badness of the sufferer's pain fully explains Lomasky's having reason to promote its alleviation. It would be "obtuse" to think that any value beyond the badness of the sufferer's pain need be cited in order to understand Lomasky's having this reason.

This, I think, must also be Nagel's view; the reasonableness in benevolent conduct must entirely be a matter of the value of the (intended) outcome engendered in its recipient. Since benevolence is other-regarding, it must be *exclusively* other-regarding, and the value that explains the reasonableness of benevolence must entirely be the value of outcomes engendered in persons other than the agent. If this is so, then the badness of the sufferer's pain cannot be agent-relative. For, by definition, the agent-relative goodness or badness of some condition of another cannot *as such* provide one with reason to promote or eliminate that condition. If the badness of the sufferer's pain (or the goodness of a beneficiary's gain) fully explains the agent's having reason to alleviate that pain (or promote that gain), then that badness (or goodness) must be agent-neutral, and the explanation of reasonable benevolence requires the existence of agent-neutral value.[28]

It is, however, far from obvious that the value of the outcome sought by the benevolent agent must *fully* explain his having reason to promote that

[27] Loren Lomasky, "Response to Four Critics," *Reason Papers* 14 (1989): 118.

[28] Lomasky (in personal conversation) denies that his remarks amount to a case for the agent-neutral badness of the sufferer's pain. He would rather simply be taken as saying that as a basic datum, we should notice that if R has reason to get rid of the pain, there will be a "transmission" of a reason (the very reason that R has?) to A to get rid of R's pain. But any explanation of this transmission that cites only the disvalue of R's pain seems to require the agent-neutral disvalue of that pain. The language of "transmission" here is from Lomasky's earlier formulation of this argument in Loren Lomasky, *Persons, Rights, and the Moral Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 63–65.

outcome. In the next two sections, I will sketch an account of reasonable benevolence that accords with the insight that the value of the outcome for the recipient must contribute to the benevolent agent's having reason to promote that outcome, but sees the reasonableness of the agent's conduct as a type of joint product of the personal value of the outcome for the recipient and the personal value for the agent of being responsive to such value.

## IV. Benevolence as Responsiveness to Agent-Relative Value

From the most passing exchanges of courtesies (with a cashier in the airport parking lot), to minor moments of mutually acknowledged coordination (with other cooperative merging motorists), to amiable acquaintanceship (with neighbors over the backyard fence), to friendship (with long-term intellectual and spiritual comrades), to life-defining love (for spouse and children), there is immense personal value for us in connections of mutual apprehension, regard, and concern. Participation in relations and networks of reciprocal apprehension, regard, and concern is conspicuously among the things that make one's life worth living. Such participation has lots of extrinsic rewards, but it is also valuable in itself. Connection through mutual apprehension, regard, and concern is a fundamental human good; one might even say that it is the realization of our selves as social beings. It needs to be emphasized that what we value is not merely its *seeming to us* that we are connected to others through mutual apprehension, regard, and concern. We value and seek this connection itself. We take pleasure in our experience of such connection with others precisely because we take that experience to mark our achievement of that connection.

Moreover, this mode of connection with other persons seems to be an objective good in the sense that it is not one's desire for participation in relations and networks of reciprocal apprehension, regard, and concern that confers value upon such participation. Rather, such a desire is rational for an agent because of the value to which it makes that agent receptive. Persons who are bereft of a desire for participation in the relevant sorts of relations and networks are defective. They lack the capacity to realize an important dimension of the human good. All of this, of course, is consistent with the value of connectedness being agent-relative, that is, with the connectedness that is ultimately valuable for agent A being *A's connectedness* to others. The connectedness with others that A, in the first instance, has reason to promote is *his* connectedness—although, by its very nature, this must involve the promotion of others' connectedness as well.[29]

[29] Hence, although I maintain that the value of A's connectedness to others is agent-relative (the connectedness is *valuable for* A), I also maintain that the value of that connectedness is objective in two senses. First, the value attaches primarily to A's connectedness to others, not to A's experience of that connectedness. Second, the value for A of that connectedness is not conferred upon it by A's having a desire for that connectedness.

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The value of participation in interpersonal relations and networks is available only to those who are responsive to the good of others, that is, only to those who are disposed to apprehend, manifest their apprehension of, welcome, and even promote others' particular and separate goods. Hence, this responsiveness *to the good of others* is itself of immense value to each individual who has it; this responsiveness is something that each agent has reason to welcome in herself, to foster, and to indulge. It is crucial here to see the several facets of this valuable responsiveness. Such responsiveness is valuable for A because it is crucial to A's achieving a connectedness with others that is partially constitutive of his objective well-being. The value of this responsiveness and of the connectedness for which it is essential is its agent-relative value for A. But this responsiveness consists in a disposition to apprehend, manifest apprehension of, welcome, and even promote *others*' particular and personal goods. The connectedness that an agent's responsiveness facilitates is that agent's connectedness *to others*. The responsive agent is, therefore, disposed to respond to the good of others; the good of others is an essential part of his motivational structure. And yet, this responsiveness and the connectedness it yields is *personally* valuable for the agent.

A further crucial fact is that an agent's valuable responsiveness is not uniform responsiveness to all and sundry. Uniform responsiveness to all would *not* be valuable for the responsive individual. Rather, valuable responsiveness is limited, complexly discriminating, and highly individualized—indeed, highly individualizing. It is substantially through the selectivity of our responsiveness to the good of others that we become the particular individuals who we are. Indeed, part of the value of valuable responsiveness is this individualizing function. Arguably, the agent who is uniformly responsive to all is as defective in his affective nature as the agent who is simply unresponsive.

Each agent's personal responsiveness is a matter of which specific types of human good she apprehends, the particular sorts of instantiations in which she apprehends them, whose lives she apprehends them in, when she apprehends them, and how she associates them with other apprehended types of human good. The responsiveness that is valuable for any particular agent will depend heavily upon the given particularities of that agent and her circumstances. Agents are more likely to apprehend and be responsive to instantiations of ends that are similar to ends they themselves pursue, that they can readily imagine themselves pursuing, or that are pursued by other individuals they already are highly responsive to. A responsive agent may become more focused on the good of other particular individuals because she is more responsive to the types of instantiations of human goods that are actually or potentially present in their lives. Or she may become more responsive to those types of instantiations because she is more focused upon those particular individuals on the basis of physical proximity, cultural or ethnic identification or other forms of shared self-understanding, or even on the basis of a perceived need to

develop responsiveness for the sake of interaction that could potentially be intrinsically valuable or extrinsically rewarding.

Since we vary from one another in which particular ends we treasure and apprehend well, in which neighborhoods we live, and in what dimensions of responsiveness promise us valuable connectedness or extrinsic rewards, the content and shape of valuable responsiveness will vary greatly among us. Over time, specific dimensions of responsiveness will make their appearance within or depart from one's responsive personality, or become more or less prominent within it. And different individuals will come within range or pass out of range of the stratified ken of one's responsive personality as it is constituted at this or that phase of one's life. Each agent's valuable responsiveness will range from being highly intense and energizing with regard to those persons (and causes and institutions) closest to her along one or more of the dimensions that comprise her responsive personality to being highly diffuse and motivationally negligible with regard to persons (and causes and institutions) who are furthest from her along all those dimensions. Presumably for all or almost all of us who possess valuable responsiveness, there is some (defeasible) goodwill that extends to those at the edge of the range of our responsiveness and that would dispose us to move a finger rather than have others die. Or perhaps it is not that even this level of goodwill extends to all, but rather that one's happening to become aware that specific others could be saved by one's moving one's finger *brings* those others within the range of one's responsiveness.

In addition to the complexly discriminating structure of valuable responsiveness, at least for almost all of us, there is an upper limit on how much personal responsiveness is valuable. There is a point—or set of points along various responsiveness dimensions—beyond which the costs of further connectedness and responsiveness, in terms of distraction from the realization of other human goods in our lives and even in terms of threats to integrity, exceed the benefits of additional connectedness and responsiveness (and of the other benefits for the agent, discussed below, in promoting others' attainment of their good).

Among all the different forms and concatenations any given person's responsiveness could take, reason is relatively silent. Reason commends to the individual a structure of responsiveness that will facilitate her achieving an array of relations of mutual apprehension, regard, and concern that is cohesive with and supplementary to her attainment of the other goods of human life. But reason will not adjudicate among different structures of responsiveness that would comparably satisfy this condition. This is partially because we cannot describe in advance what it would be like to have each of these different comparably satisfying structures, and, as a result, we cannot lay the alternatives out before us and make a rational deliberate choice among them. It may also be that the quality of some modes of valuable responsiveness are simply not commensurable with the quality of other modes of valuable responsiveness.

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There may, for example, be no way of weighing the units of connectedness available to members of a traditional religious community against the units of connectedness available to a crusader for free thought. So even if we can lay alternative structures of responsiveness before us, there may be no rational way to rank them. For these reasons, we should recognize that to affirm the value to an individual of possession of such a structure of responsiveness is not to recommend to her the project of identifying in advance a desirable structure and setting out to construct it. One may do best by relying upon processes through which highly individualized structures of responsiveness emerge unplanned. This could happen, for instance, in reaction to particular individuals' diverse capacities for responsiveness across its many possible dimensions, or in response to the particular opportunities for responsiveness and role models for responsiveness that these diverse individuals encounter.

Relations of mutual apprehension, regard, and concern are extremely valuable for individuals. As a condition of partaking in such relations, being responsive (within reason) to the good of others is extremely valuable for A. A therefore has reason to be responsive to the particular goods of others that fall within the range of the responsiveness that is valuable to him. If the value for recipient R of outcome O falls within this range, then it is valuable for A to be disposed to welcome or promote O. Being so disposed makes A capable of entering into valuable relations of mutual apprehension, regard, and concern. By acting in accord with such a disposition, A realizes this connectedness and affirms and reinforces his valuable responsive disposition. Because A has reason to be responsive and his being responsive is a matter of taking another's personal good as a reason for welcoming or even promoting that good, the personal good of another triggers or activates A's having reason to welcome or even promote the good of that other. However, the value of the outcome engendered in R does not *fully explain* A's having reason to promote O. Rather, the explanation requires both the value of O for R and the occurrence of this value within the range of responsiveness to values that is valuable for A. The valuableness for A of participation in relations of mutual apprehension, regard, and concern and of being (within reason) responsive to the good of others provides a medium through which the personal value of O for R gives rise to A's having personal reason to promote O. That the value of O enters into A's rational motivation by triggering or activating A's having personal reason to welcome or promote O does not, of course, prove that the value of O *cannot* be impersonal value. It only shows that one *need not* take the value of O to be impersonal value in order to account for the reasonableness of A's benevolence. That is, it only rebuts premise (c) of the impersonalist argument. Something else counts more directly against construing as impersonal the value of the benefits, for recipients, that prompt benevolent conduct. This is the radical variation that exists with respect to how much reason—from very strong reason to no reason at all—the value of diverse out-

comes for possible recipients activates in one benevolent agent versus another.

Since A's rational responsiveness is not directed uniformly at all and sundry, there can readily be outcomes that are of equally extensive agent-relative value to the individuals they directly affect, but which differ from each other in their capacity to give rise to A's having reason to promote them. Consider, for instance, an outcome $O_1$ that is as personally valuable for recipient $R_1$ as outcome $O_2$ is for recipient $R_2$. A may have reason to welcome or even promote $O_1$, but not have reason to promote or even welcome equally valuable $O_2$. This may be because the range of A's rational responsiveness extends to $R_1$, but not to $R_2$. Or it may be because that range extends more intensely to the former individual than to the latter. For example, A may welcome the relief from (undeserved) pain of anybody in the world but only have reason to risk ending up with insufficient analgesics for himself if taking this risk will relieve the (undeserved) pain of someone relatively near to him on some dimension that defines the structure of A's responsiveness.

A's response may also be discriminating because his rational responsiveness extends (with the necessary degree of intensity) to the type of end instantiated by $O_1$, but not to the type of end instantiated by $O_2$. If A is a soccer player, for instance, his rational responsiveness might extend to donating money to send an impoverished child to a soccer tournament, but might not extend to helping send him to a basketball tournament—even though the value for the child of each tournament is the same. At the same time, the structure and content of agent $A_1$'s rational responsiveness may give rise to her having reason to promote $O_2$ but not $O_1$. This differentiation of the normative effects on A and $A_1$ of the value of others' ends obtains only because the value of those ends does not fully explain the agents' reasons for promoting those ends. Rather, the personal value of those ends for the recipients gives rise to reasons for the agents through the medium of their rational responsiveness. Different reasons arise for different agents because they differ with respect to the structure and shape of their rational responsiveness. If the value of the recipients' ends were the full explanation for the reasons possessed by A and $A_1$, the reasons of those agents would not be differentiated as they are.

I take this differentiation from one agent to another in what is reasonable benevolent conduct to be important evidence against any impersonalist account of the reasonableness of benevolence. I should note, therefore, one way in which a friend of the impersonalist full-explanation account of the reasonableness of benevolence might seek to accommodate the fact that in the face of the same prospective positive outcomes for others, different conduct will be reasonable for different agents. What may be proposed is that benevolence is an imperfect duty. According to this proposal, whatever the details of the foundation of this duty, it is not plausible to hold that each agent has a duty to act benevolently to each

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and every other individual toward whom he could be benevolent.[30] Each agent's duty of benevolence merely requires that he act beneficently toward *some* of those who might be the object of his good offices. Since no agent's imperfect duty of benevolence requires that he choose any particular one of his prospective recipients, each agent has discretion within this choice. In the exercise of this discretion, each agent may break the tie between prospective recipients of his beneficence by giving some weight to his own preferences among these prospective beneficiaries. In effect, one may fulfill one's quota of benevolence in many different ways, and one has discretion between any two courses of benevolent conduct that would equally fulfill one's quota.

I do not think that this imperfect-duty account of benevolence captures the way in which reasonable benevolence is individuated across agents. On the imperfect-duty account, whenever there are two courses of action available to A such that the benefit for $R_1$ of one action is as extensive as the benefit for $R_2$ of the other action, rational benevolence will equally recommend the two actions to A. A will be like Buridan's ass between two equally large piles of hay. Any special resonance between A and one or another of the particular ends at stake or between A and one or another of the particular recipients whose ends are at stake is taken to be irrelevant to the primary judgment about what reasonable benevolence commends to A. Any special resonance, any differential concern by A for one of the particular ends at stake or one of the particular prospective recipients, is allowed in only as a method of arbitrarily breaking ties between different courses of action that would equally extensively and disinterestedly promote valuable outcomes in others. And, it seems, whenever one course of action by A would more extensively benefit one of the possible recipients—that is, whenever one course of action would better fulfill A's benevolence quota—A's differential appreciation or concern for a particular sort of outcome or for a particular recipient will not even play a tiebreaking role. In effect, the imperfect-duty understanding of the directive force of benevolence still construes genuine benevolence as "pure impartial benevolence."[31]

Against this impersonalist reading of benevolence, I submit that the course of conduct commended to a particular agent by rational benevolence more centrally depends upon the particularities of the structure and content of that agent's rational responsiveness. Even if the aforementioned soccer and basketball tournaments are equally valuable for the child and the cost to A of sending the child is the same for each tourna-

[30] Cf. the nice discussion in Thomas Hill, "Beneficence and Self-Love: A Kantian Perspective," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 10, no. 1 (1993): 1–23.

[31] I admit to being uncertain as to whether I have produced an argument here that specifically strikes against the imperfect-duty account, as opposed to merely producing a restatement of my opposition to impersonalism.

The quoted phrase is from Nagel, *Equality and Partiality*, 16.

ment, the fact that soccer is within the range of *A's* rational responsiveness explains why, in this case, reasonable benevolence takes the form of A's sending the child to the soccer tournament. It is *not* that sending the child to the soccer tournament and sending him to the basketball tournament tie with respect to reasonable benevolence, and then A's preference for soccer breaks the tie. If concern and appreciation for basketball plays the role within $A_1$'s rational responsiveness that soccer plays within A's, then in $A_1$'s case, reasonable benevolence takes the form of $A_1$'s sending the child to the basketball tournament. The values that attach to the child's going to the tournaments do not fully explain the reasons that benevolence provides for A and $A_1$, because those values give rise to reasons for A and $A_1$ through the media of the different and differently intense modalities of responsiveness that are respectively valuable for them.

A has personal reason to be responsive to the good of others *to the extent* that the connectedness attained through his responsiveness to the good of others and through the maintenance of this degree and type of responsiveness is valuable for him. (Here it must be recalled that connectedness *with others* is itself among the constituents of A's well-being, as is A's experience of this connectedness. An appropriate degree of responsiveness to others is personally valuable for A primarily because it is essential to this valuable connectedness.) Although this valuable responsiveness may be quite considerable, it is nevertheless highly discriminating and limited. It operates only upon a certain range of valuable ends and only (or only with gusto) upon those prospective instantiations of these encompassed ends that are close enough to A. A's valuable responsiveness is not equally susceptible to the value of each *successive* instantiation of some human good—even if they are instantiations of goods responsiveness to which is encompassed within the structure of A's valuable responsiveness. Although the value for R of O may give rise to its being of considerable value for A to promote O, the equal value, for $R_N$ (the nth and last member of a series of possible recipients), of the realization of the qualitatively identical and comparably extensive outcome $O_N$ may give rise to no value at all (or no significant value) for A in the promotion of $O_N$. A's need for connectedness and his value-promoting capacity for responsiveness can become sated and, hence, less capable of channeling reasons from others to A. For this reason, the prospect of successive instantiations of such goods in the lives of others does not impart to A an accumulation of reasons that overrides or even threatens to override A's devotion to his own (other) life-defining projects and commitments. Reasonable benevolence does not call upon one to sacrifice these core ends and allegiances.

I take this limitation upon what reasonable benevolence demands of any agent to be further evidence against any impersonalist account of the reasonableness of benevolence. I should note, therefore, one way in which a friend of the impersonalist full-explanation view of the reasonableness

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of benevolence might seek to account for the fact that successive opportunities to promote the good of others will have decreasing directive force for a reasonably benevolent agent. On the impersonalist full-explanation view, each successive opportunity to promote an equally valuable outcome $O_N$ for a recipient $R_N$ provides A with *as much* reason to promote *that* outcome as is provided to A by the first opportunity to promote an outcome of that value for another. Each successive reason that is beamed at A is received with the same reason-generating power as previously transmitted reasons—because there is no medium that selects and filters those transmissions. The cumulative weight of those reasons, it seems, will readily overbalance agent-relative reasons that are reflective of A's own core projects and commitments. Against this tide of demands from impersonalist benevolence, the advocate of a full-explanation account has every right to point to two facts. The first is that the costs to A of acting upon reasons that are transmitted to him are to be included in any determination of whether, all things considered, A has reason to promote the ends of others. The second is that the cost to A of the promotion of each successive unit of other agents' good will typically be greater than the cost to him of promoting the previous unit.[32] It is possible, then, that even though A has all-things-considered reason to promote $O–O_{N-1}$ *and* the reason he has to promote $O_N$ is as full powered as the reason beamed to him by each of the outcomes $O–O_{N-1}$, A will not have all-things-considered reason to promote $O_N$. The increased marginal cost to A of promoting $O_N$ may defeat the reason beamed to A by the value of $O_N$. Hence, the friend of impersonalist benevolence can point out, there *may* be some point at which it is no longer rational for A to promote valuable outcomes in others. But of course, there may *not* be any such point. The (alleged) impersonal value of $O_N$ may continue to overbalance the impersonal (and personal) costs of A's promoting $O_N$. To note this is, of course, merely to point again to the extremely demanding character of any impersonalist ethic, even ones that try to provide some sort of cushion for personal projects and commitments by (somehow) allowing agents to double- or triple-count the value of their own ends and allegiances. A more targeted point is that even if the impersonalist can maintain that the cost to A limits the extent to which, all things considered, A should sacrificially devote himself to valuable outcomes in others, the impersonalist view of benevolence must depict this limitation as an instance of the general clash between an agent's concern for value in his own life and his being reasonably benevolent. On this depiction, reasonable benevolence usually wins out against an agent's concern for value in his own life, but in the

[32] For instance, even if the financial costs to A of promoting each successive unit of benefit for others remains the same, the utility cost to A of doing so will increase with each successive unit. The utility cost to A of funding each successive unit of benefit for others will not increase if (because of the efficiencies of larger-scale production?) the financial costs of promoting successive units of benefit drop low enough.

case of $O_N$, the agent's concern for value in his own life wins out over the call of reasonable benevolence.

Against this conflictual view of the relationship between an agent's concern for value in his own life and his reasonable benevolence, I maintain that although reasonable benevolence must proceed from an appreciation of the good of others, its reasonableness also depends upon the value for the agent of being responsive (in the relevant way) to the good of others. Admittedly, it is an implication of this position that if it were not for the fact that relations of mutual apprehension, regard, and concern are valuable for A, the (personal) valuableness for others of their various ends would be "motivationally inert" with respect to A.[33] This is because the (personal) valuableness of various outcomes for others would not have any medium through which to generate reasons for A to promote them. This will sound worrisome if, but only if, one forgets how deep a fact it is that relations of mutual apprehension, regard, and concern *are* (objectively) valuable for us, and therefore forgets how different a world would be in which this deep fact did not obtain. Imagine such a world—that is, a world in which there is no value for one in participating in such relations, a world in which connectedness with others is not a component of human well-being. To recall a previous example, is it at all clear that in such a distant world A would have reason, at some discernible cost to himself, to give R some of his analgesics?[34]

## V. The Agent-Relative Value of Responsiveness

I want to continue my venture into speculative moral psychology in ways that may further explain why responsiveness to others' agent-relative values is valuable for the respondent. Part of the value for A of participation in relations of mutual apprehension, regard, and concern is the value for him of having the value of his projects and commitments appreciated by others. Or, more precisely, it is the value for A of seeing his values being apprehended by others. $A_1$'s apprehension of the components of A's own good provides an external mark of—a mirroring of—A's good as well as a type of confirmation for A of his assessment of these states as valuable for himself. Were we unable to elicit this apprehension from others, our confidence in the worth of our accomplishments and goals would be diminished. We do not at all like others' failing to apprehend the value for us of what we treasure—at least if those others are the

[33] Lomasky, "Response to Four Critics," 117. Lomasky means inert with respect to *rational* motivation.

[34] Recall Lomasky's claim that it would be obtuse to think that any value beyond the badness of the sufferer's pain need be cited in order to understand Lomasky's having reason to relieve the sufferer's condition. Actually, what would be obtuse is failing to realize that any agent who points to the disvalue of the sufferer's pain to explain his (the agent's) alleviating it is also indicating that the alleviation of this pain (at the costs actually involved) falls within the ambit of his (the agent's) rational responsiveness.

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people from whom we expect such apprehension. In cyclical fashion, A's appreciation of $A_1$'s apprehension of his (A's) good will be valuable for $A_1$ because it will confirm in $A_1$'s eyes that she is attuned to the good things of life and on target in her assessment of her own accomplishments and goals.

What emerges is a type of intersubjective validation of the value of realizing the ends that are being promoted. We each recognize one another as agents who have reasons to attain certain ends that "can be understood and affirmed from outside the viewpoint of the individual who has them."[35] The key factor underlying this validation is that it is valuable for an agent to see his values apprehended by others.[36] This valuable (for A) visibility to others of A and his values is not so much the product of A's declarations; it is to a considerable degree the product of A's responsiveness to the values of those to whom A wishes to be visible. For it is through A's responsiveness to their values that these other persons attain insight into A and his values.

It is likewise valuable for A that the types of conditions he values as being instantiated in his life (or which he would have valued as being instantiated in his life had he composed his life somewhat differently) also obtain as valuable instantiations in the lives of others. Not only are there circumstances in which $A_1$'s apprehension and concern for A's good offers A valuable confirmation of that good, there are also circumstances in which A sees the good of $A_1$ as mirroring or reflecting his own actual (or possible) valued ends. In these instances, realizations of $A_1$'s good offer A examples of the attainment of the values he seeks or might seek.

The value for $A_1$ of the realization of some fundamental human good in her life reaffirms A's sense of the value for him of its realization (or the realization of kindred human goods) in his life. The realization of these goods in the life of $A_1$ testifies to the fact that these and kindred realizations, and the virtues required for them, can be achieved. Furthermore, the instantiation of these goods *as goods for others* marks A's membership with others in a community of beings for whom realizations of these goods are valuable. It shows that A is not alone in his reasonable pursuit of value; these realizations of value for others show that A inhabits a "world of reasons, including [A's] reasons, [that] does not exist only from [A's] own point of view."[37] All this helps explain how the value of connectedness is possible.

[35] Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 153.

[36] See Nathaniel Branden, *The Psychology of Self-Esteem* (New York: Bantam, 1969), chap. 11. In David Kelley, *Rugged Individualism: The Selfish Basis of Benevolence* (Poughkeepsie, NY: Institute for Objectivist Studies, 1996), Kelley uses the value to one of one's "visibility" to others and related phenomena to develop an account of benevolence. Kelley is continually tempted by the idea that sometimes it is rational to promote another's good (in part) because it is her good. However, he always manages to resist this temptation, and therefore attempts to provide an entirely self-regarding justification for other-regarding behavior.

[37] Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, 140.

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Others' successes at achieving their own good are, then, of value to A as external presentations of what is valuable for himself, as evidence that the world is hospitable to A's achievement of value, and as companions to the realizations of value within A's own life. Just as it is valuable to A that *value for A* be apprehended, it is valuable for A to see *value for others* attained. Consider, for example, the value for any of us of seeing a dedicated athlete overcome adversities to win an Olympic medal or of hearing of a kidnapped child being rescued and returned to her parents. Note that a limited number of exemplary realizations of agent-relative value in the lives of others will provide A with most, if not all, of the good that can accrue to him through others' attainment of their good. Additional realizations will have decreasing marginal value for A, so promoting these further realizations will not, all things considered, be valuable for A if promoting them involves increasing (or even constant) opportunity costs to A.

Still, everything else being equal, a responsive agent will favor the realization of larger numbers of valuable outcomes for strangers over the realization of smaller numbers. She will favor five drowning strangers being saved rather than one, and if she were steering a lifeboat, she would steer toward the five rather than toward the one. Each of the strangers is (equally) within the range of her rational responsiveness, so she acts more in accord with that motivational structure if she saves the five rather than the one. This endorsement of the rationality of saving the five is entirely consistent with denying that the survival of the five is impersonally better than the survival of the one. That is, it is entirely consistent with denying that there is some agent-neutral metric of value according to which there is more overall value in the survival of the five than in the survival of the one. On the other hand, if the one—as a friend or loved one of the agent, or as an exemplar of some trait the agent prizes—occupies a salient position on the map of the agent's rational responsiveness, she will have strong reason to save the one rather than the five.[38]

What about the choice between distributing analgesic to alleviate the condition of the most-pained stranger and distributing it to alleviate the most net pain among strangers? I have argued that a reasonable benevolence will (at least sometimes) opt for alleviating the most-pained stranger rather than alleviating the most pain among strangers. I indicated that it does not look as though an impersonalist ethic can accommodate this feature within its account of reasonable benevolence.[39] Why might a reasonably benevolent patient P with some analgesic to spare (at some cost or risk to himself) favor its allocation to the fellow patient in the most pain, even if another patient's pain would be reduced more were she to

[38] Cf. John Taurek, "Should the Numbers Count?" *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 6, no. 4 (1977): 293–316. Taurek only goes wrong in maintaining that if the *numbers* do not explain why the rescuer has reason to save five strangers rather than one stranger, then in no way is it more reasonable to do so.

[39] This was the difficulty noted in the second phase of Nagel's impersonalist argument.

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receive the drug? My intuition is that the benevolent P surveys his fellow patients with an eye toward taking a stand against the suffering that he disvalues in others. The fellow patient in the most pain is or becomes the natural focal point of this stand. P is most responsive to disvalued suffering in others when he acts to diminish *this* patient's suffering, even though this response does not most reduce disvalued suffering. It is because P's responsiveness is valuable for P, and because his responsiveness may readily focus upon the patient in the most pain, that the reasonably benevolent P may act to help the most-pained fellow patient rather than to alleviate the most net pain among all of his fellow patients.

## VI. Conclusion

It remains true, however, that the amount of painkiller that reasonably benevolent P will convey to *any* other patient will depend upon the degree and shape of responsiveness that is personally valuable for P. Since personally valuable responsiveness does not involve an open-ended disposition to assist all and sundry (at least when this is personally costly), and since it does involve a disposition to assist most those who are closest to one, reasonable benevolence will not be generally egalitarian. So, contrary to the pretheoretical argument, the reasonableness of benevolence is not indicative of a strong egalitarian strand within rational ethics. And, as we have seen, contrary to the first phase of the impersonalist argument for egalitarianism, one can account for the reasonableness of benevolence without positing the impersonal value of the objects of benevolent conduct. As against the impersonalist understanding of benevolence, the reasonableness of an agent's benevolence is best explained in terms of the personal value, for the agent, of his being responsive to the agent-relative good of others.

Both the pretheoretical argument and the impersonalist argument maintain that providing the best explanation for the goodness and reasonableness of benevolence requires that we endorse at least a strong presumption on behalf of equality of well-being as a component of sound morality. But both of these arguments fail. Neither provides a basis for thinking that differences in utility or well-being as such are morally problematic. And unless we believe that differences in utility or well-being as such are morally problematic, it is hard to see how one can reasonably believe that differences in income or wealth are morally problematic. It seems, then, that in the relevant sense, differences in income and wealth do not matter.

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