

## 5 one community

### Human Equality: Theory and Practice

An “avalanche,” a “flood”—these terms were used to describe the response to public appeals for the victims of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Three months after the disaster, the total stood at \$1.3 billion. Of this amount, according to a *New York Times* survey, \$353 million has been raised exclusively for the families of about 400 police officers, firefighters, and other uniformed personnel who died trying to save others. That comes to \$880,000 for each family. The families of the firefighters killed would have been adequately provided for even if there had been no donations at all. Their spouses will receive New York state pensions equal to the lost salaries, and their children will be entitled to full scholarships to state universities. The federal government is giving an additional \$250,000 to families of police officers and firefighters killed on duty.<sup>1</sup> For families to receive close to a million dollars in cash on top of all that may well leave us thinking that something has gone awry. But that was not all. Af-

ter initially being attacked for sensibly planning to reserve some of the money for future needs, the American Red Cross went to the opposite extreme and abandoned any attempt to examine how much potential recipients needed help. It simply drew a line across lower Manhattan, and offered anyone living below that line the equivalent of three months' rent (or, if they owned their own apartment, three months' mortgage and maintenance payments) plus money for utilities and groceries, if they claimed that they had been affected by the destruction of the World Trade Center. Most of the residents of the area below the line were not displaced or evacuated, but they were offered mortgage or rent assistance nevertheless. One woman was told she could have the cost of her psychiatric treatment reimbursed, even though she said she had been seeing her psychiatrist before September 11. Red Cross volunteers set up card tables in the lobbies of expensive apartment buildings in Tribeca, where financial analysts, lawyers, and rock stars live, to inform residents of the offer. The higher the rent people paid, the more money they got. Some received as much as \$10,000. The Red Cross acknowledged that money was going to people who did not need it. According to a spokesperson: “In a program of this sort, we're not going to make judgments on people's needs.”<sup>2</sup>

As the terrorists were planning the attack, the United Nations Children's Fund was getting ready to issue its 2002 report, *The State of the World's Children*.<sup>3</sup> According to the UNICEF report, released to the media on September 13, 2001, more than 10 million children under the age of five die each year from preventable causes such as malnutrition, unsafe water, and the lack of even the most basic health care. Since September 11, 2001 was probably just another day for most of the world's desperately poor people, we can expect that close to 30,000 children under five died from these causes on that day—about ten times the number of victims

of the terrorist attacks. There was no “avalanche” of money for UNICEF following the publication of these figures.

There are more than a billion people in the world living in dire poverty. In the year 2000, Americans made private donations for foreign aid of all kinds totaling about \$4 per person in need, or roughly \$20 per family. New Yorkers, wealthy or not, living in lower Manhattan on September 11, 2001, were able to receive an average of \$5,300 a family.<sup>4</sup> The distance between these amounts symbolizes the way in which, for many people, the circle of concern for others stops at the boundaries of their own nation—if it even extends that far. “Charity begins at home,” people say, and more explicitly, “we should take care of poverty in our own country before we tackle poverty abroad.” They take it for granted that national boundaries carry moral weight, and that it is worse to leave one of our fellow citizens in need than to leave someone from another country in that state. This is another aspect of the attitudes described in Chapter 1. We put the interests of our fellow citizens far above those of citizens of other nations, whether the reason for doing so is to avoid damaging the economic interests of Americans at the cost of bringing floods to the people of Bangladesh, to avoid risking the lives of NATO troops at the cost of more innocent lives in Kosovo, or to help those in need at home rather than those in need abroad. While we do all these things, most of us unquestioningly support declarations proclaiming that all humans have certain rights, and that all human life is of equal worth. We condemn those who say the life of a person of a different race or nationality is of less account than the life of a person of our own race or nation. Can we reconcile these attitudes? If those “at home” to whom we might give charity are already able to provide for their basic needs, and seem poor only relative to our own high standard of living, is the fact that they are our compatriots sufficient to give them priority over others with

greater needs? Asking these questions leads us to consider to what extent we really can, or should, make “one world” a moral standard that transcends the nation-state.

### **A Preference for Our Own**

The popular view that we may, or even should, favor those “of our own kind” conceals a deep disagreement about who “our own kind” are. A century ago Henry Sidgwick, professor of moral philosophy at Cambridge University, described the moral outlook of his Victorian England as follows:

We should all agree that each of us is bound to show kindness to his parents and spouse and children, and to other kinsmen in a less degree: and to those who have rendered services to him, and any others whom he may have admitted to his intimacy and called friends: and to neighbors and to fellow-countrymen more than others: and perhaps we may say to those of our own race more than to black or yellow men, and generally to human beings in proportion to their affinity to ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

When I read this list to students, they nod their heads in agreement at the various circles of moral concern Sidgwick mentions, until I get to the suggestion that we should give preference to our own race more than to “black or yellow men.” At that point they sit up in shock.

Coming a little closer to our own time, we can find defenders of a much more extreme form of partiality:

we must be honest, decent, loyal and friendly to members of our blood and to no one else. What happens to the Russians, what happens to the Czechs, is a matter of utter indifference to me. Such good blood of our own kind as

there may be among the nations we shall acquire for ourselves, if necessary by taking away the children and bringing them up among us. Whether the other races live in comfort or perish of hunger interests me only in so far as we need them as slaves for our culture; apart from that it does not interest me. Whether or not 10,000 Russian women collapse from exhaustion while digging a tank ditch interests me only in so far as the tank ditch is completed for Germany.<sup>6</sup>

That quotation is from a speech by Heinrich Himmler to SS leaders in Poland in 1943. Why do I quote such dreadful sentiments? Because there are many who think it self-evident that we have special obligations to those nearer to us, including our children, our spouses, lovers and friends, and our compatriots. Reflecting on what Sidgwick and Himmler have said about preference for one's own kind should subvert the belief that this kind of "self-evidence" is a sufficient ground for accepting a view as right. What is self-evident to some is not at all self-evident to others. Instead, we need another test of whether we have special obligations to those closer to us, such as our compatriots.

### **Ethics and Impartiality**

How can we decide whether we have special obligations to "our own kind," and if so, who is "our own kind" in the relevant sense? Let us return for a moment to the countervailing ideal that there is some fundamental sense in which neither race nor nation determines the value of a human being's life and experiences. I would argue that this ideal rests on the element of impartiality that underlies the nature of the moral enterprise, as its most significant thinkers have come to understand it. The twentieth-century Oxford philosopher R. M. Hare argued that for judgments

to count as moral judgments they must be universalizable, that is, the speaker must be prepared to prescribe that they be carried out in all real and hypothetical situations, not only those in which she benefits from them but also those in which she is among those who lose.<sup>7</sup> Consistently with Hare's approach, one way of deciding whether there are special duties to "our own kind" is to ask whether accepting the idea of having these special duties can itself be justified from an impartial perspective.

In proposing that special duties need justification from an impartial perspective, I am reviving a debate that goes back two hundred years to William Godwin, whose *Political Justice* shocked British society at the time of the French Revolution. In the book's most famous passage, Godwin imagined a situation in which a palace is on fire, and two people are trapped inside. One of them is a great benefactor of humanity—Godwin chose as his example Archbishop Fénelon, "at the moment when he was conceiving the project of his immortal *Telemachus*." The other person trapped is the Archbishop's chambermaid. The choice of Fénelon seems odd today, since his "immortal" work is now unread except by scholars, but let's suppose we share Godwin's high opinion of Fénelon. Whom should we save? Godwin answers that we should save Fénelon, because by doing so, we would be helping thousands, those who have been cured of "error, vice and consequent unhappiness" by reading *Telemachus*. Then he goes on to make his most controversial claim:

Supposing I had been myself the chambermaid, I ought to have chosen to die rather than that Fénelon should have died. The life of Fénelon was really preferable to that of the chambermaid. But understanding is the faculty that perceives the truth of this and similar propositions; and justice is the principle that regulates my conduct

accordingly. It would have been just in the chambermaid to have preferred the archbishop to herself. To have done otherwise would have been a breach of justice.

Supposing the chambermaid had been my wife, my mother or my benefactor. That would not alter the truth of the proposition. The life of Fénelon would still be more valuable than that of the chambermaid; and justice—pure, unadulterated justice—would still have preferred that which was most valuable. Justice would have taught me to save the life of Fénelon at the expense of the other. What magic is there in the pronoun “my” to overturn the decisions of everlasting truth? My wife or my mother may be a fool or a prostitute, malicious, lying or dishonest. If they be, of what consequence is it that they are mine?<sup>8</sup>

In 1971, at a time when several million Bengalis were on the edge of starvation, living in refugee camps in India so that they could escape from the massacres that the Pakistani army was carrying out in what was then East Pakistan, I used a different example to argue that we have an obligation to help strangers in distant lands. I asked the reader to imagine that on my way to give a lecture, I pass a shallow pond. As I do so, I see a small child fall into it and realize that she is in danger of drowning. I could easily wade in and pull her out, but that would get my shoes and trousers wet and muddy. I would need to go home and change, I'd have to cancel the lecture, and my shoes might never recover. Nevertheless, it would be grotesque to allow such minor considerations to outweigh the good of saving a child's life. Saving the child is what I ought to do, and if I walk on to the lecture, then no matter how clean, dry, and punctual I may be, I have done something seriously wrong.

Generalizing from this situation, I then argued that we are all,

with respect to the Bengali refugees, in the same situation as the person who, at small cost, can save a child's life. For the vast majority of us living in the developed nations of the world have disposable income that we spend on frivolities and luxuries, things of no more importance to us than avoiding getting our shoes and trousers muddy. If we do this when people are in danger of dying of starvation and when there are agencies that can, with reasonable efficiency, turn our modest donations of money into life-saving food and basic medicines, how can we consider ourselves any better than the person who sees the child fall in the pond and walks on? Yet this was the situation at the time: the amount that had been given by the rich nations was less than a sixth of what was needed to sustain the refugees. Britain had given rather more than most countries, but it had still given only one-thirtieth as much as it was prepared to spend on the non-recoverable costs of building the Concorde supersonic jetliner.

I examined various possible differences that people might find between the two situations and argued that they were not sufficiently significant, in moral terms, to deflect the judgment that in failing to give to the Bengali refugees, we were doing something that was seriously wrong. In particular, I wrote:

it makes no moral difference whether the person I help is a neighbor's child ten yards from me or a Bengali whose name I shall never know, ten thousand miles away.<sup>9</sup>

As far as I am aware, no one has disputed this claim in respect of distance per se—that is, the difference between ten yards and ten thousand miles. Of course, the degree of certainty that we can have that our assistance will get to the right person, and will really help that person, may be affected by distance, and that can make a difference to what we ought to do, but that is a different matter, and it will depend on the particular circumstances in which we

find ourselves. What people *have* disputed, however, is that our obligation to help a stranger in another country is as great as the obligation to help one of our own neighbors or compatriots. Surely, they say, we have special obligations to our neighbors and fellow citizens—and to our family and friends—that we do not have to strangers in another country.<sup>10</sup>

Godwin faced similar objections. Samuel Parr, a well-known liberal clergyman of the time, preached and subsequently published a sermon that was a sustained critique of Godwin's "universal philanthropy."<sup>11</sup> As the text for his sermon, Parr takes an injunction from Paul's epistle to the Galatians, in which Paul offers yet another variant on who is "of our own kind": "As we have, therefore, opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."<sup>12</sup> In Paul's words, Parr finds a Christian text that rejects equal concern for all, instead urging greater concern for those to whom we have a special connection. Parr defends Paul by arguing that to urge us to show impartial concern for all is to demand something that human beings cannot, in general and most of the time, give. "The moral obligations of men," he writes, "cannot be stretched beyond their physical powers."<sup>13</sup> Our real desires, our lasting and strongest passions; are not for the good of our species as a whole, but, at best, for the good of those who are close to us.

Modern critics of impartialism argue that an advocate of an impartial ethic would make a poor parent, lover, spouse, or friend, because the very idea of such personal relationships involves being partial toward the other person with whom one is in the relationship. This means giving more consideration to the interests of your child, lover, spouse, or friend than you give to a stranger, and from the standpoint of an impartial ethic this seems wrong. Feminist philosophers, in particular, tend to stress the importance of personal relationships, which they accuse male moral

philosophers of neglecting. Nel Noddings, author of a book called *Caring*, limits our obligation to care to those with whom we can be in some kind of relationship. Hence, she states, we are "not obliged to care for starving children in Africa."<sup>14</sup>

Those who favor an impartial ethic have responded to these objections by denying that they are required to hold that we should be impartial in every aspect of our lives. Godwin himself wrote (in writing a memoir of Mary Wollstonecroft after her death following the birth of their first child):

A sound morality requires that *nothing human should be regarded by us as indifferent*; but it is impossible we should not feel the strongest interest for those persons whom we know most intimately, and whose welfare and sympathies are united to our own. True wisdom will recommend to us individual attachments; for with them our minds are more thoroughly maintained in activity and life than they can be under the privation of them, and it is better that man should be a living being, than a stock or a stone. True virtue will sanction this recommendation; since it is the object of virtue to produce happiness; and since the man who lives in the midst of domestic relations will have many opportunities of conferring pleasure, minute in the detail, yet not trivial in the amount, without interfering with the purposes of general benevolence. Nay, by kindling his sensibility, and harmonising his soul, they may be expected, if he is endowed with a liberal and manly spirit, to render him more prompt in the service of strangers and the public.<sup>15</sup>

In the wake of his own grieving feelings for his beloved wife from whom he had been so tragically parted, Godwin found an impartial justification for partial affections. In our own times,

Hare's two-level version of utilitarianism leads to the same conclusion. Hare argues that in everyday life it will often be too difficult to work out the consequences of every decision we make, and if we were to try to do so, we would risk getting it wrong because of our personal involvement and the pressures of the situation. To guide our everyday conduct we need a set of principles of which we are aware without a lot of reflection. These principles form the intuitive, or everyday, level of morality. In a calmer or more philosophical moment, on the other hand, we can reflect on the nature of our moral intuitions, and ask whether we have developed the right ones, that is, the ones that will lead to the greatest good, impartially considered. When we engage in this reflection, we are moving to the critical level of morality, that which informs our thinking about what principles we should follow at the everyday level. Thus the critical level serves as a testing ground for moral intuitions.<sup>16</sup> We can use it to test the list of special obligations suggested by the common moral sense of Victorian England as described by Henry Sidgwick: to parents, spouse, children, other kin, those who have rendered services to you, friends, neighbors, fellow-countrymen, to "those of our own race . . . and generally to human beings in proportion to their affinity to ourselves." Do any of these survive the demand for impartial justification, and if so, which ones?

### Assessing Partial Preferences

The first set of preferences mentioned by Sidgwick—family, friends, and those who have rendered services to us—stands up quite well. The love of parents for their children and the desire of parents to give preference to their children over the children of strangers go very deep. It may be rooted in our nature as social mammals with offspring who need our help during a long period of dependence when they are not capable of fending for them-

selves. We can speculate that the children of parents who did not care for them would have been less likely to survive, and thus uncaring parents did not pass their genes on to future generations as frequently as caring parents did. Bonds between parents and children (and especially between mothers and children, for in earlier periods a baby not breast-fed by its mother was very unlikely to survive) are therefore found in all human cultures.

To say that a certain kind of behavior is universal and has its roots in our evolutionary history does not necessarily mean that it cannot be changed, nor does it mean that it should not be changed. Nevertheless in this particular case the experience of utopian social experiments has shown that the desire of parents to care for their children is highly resistant to change. In the early days of the Israeli kibbutzim the more radical of these socialist agricultural collectives sought to equalize the upbringing of children by having all children born to members of the kibbutz brought up communally, in a special children's house. For parents to show particular love and affection for their own child was frowned upon. Nevertheless, mothers used to sneak into the communal nursery at night to kiss and hold their sleeping children. Presumably, if they shared the ideals of the kibbutz, they felt guilty for doing so.<sup>17</sup>

So even if, like the founders of these collective settlements, we were to decide that it is undesirable for parents to favor their own children, we would find such favoritism very difficult to eradicate. Any attempt to do so would have high costs and would require constant supervision or coercion. Unless we are so intent on suppressing parental bias that we are willing to engage in an all-out campaign of intense moral pressure backed up with coercive measures and draconian sanctions, we are bound to find that most parents constantly favor their children in ways that cannot be directly justified on the basis of equal consideration of inter-

ests. If we were to engage in such a campaign, we may well bring about guilt and anxiety in parents who want to do things for their children that society now regards as wrong. Such guilt will itself be a source of much unhappiness. Will the gains arising from diminished partiality for one's own children outweigh this? That seems unlikely, because for the children themselves, the care of loving and partial parents is likely to be better than the care of impartial parents or impartial community-employed carers. There is evidence, too, that children are more likely to be abused when brought up by people who are not their biological parents.<sup>18</sup> Given the unavoidable constraints of human nature and the importance of bringing children up in loving homes, there is an impartial justification for approving of social practices that presuppose that parents will show some degree of partiality towards their own children.

It is even easier to find an impartial reason for accepting love and friendship. If loving relationships, and relationships of friendship, are necessarily partial, they are also, for most people, at the core of anything that can approximate to a good life. Very few human beings can live happy and fulfilled lives without being attached to particular other human beings. To suppress these partial affections would destroy something of great value, and therefore cannot be justified from an impartial perspective.

Bernard Williams has claimed that this defense of love and friendship demands "one thought too many."<sup>19</sup> We should, he says, visit our sick friend in hospital because he is our friend and is in hospital, not because we have calculated that visiting sick friends is a more efficient way of maximizing utility than anything else we could do with our time. This objection may have some force if pressed against those who claim that we should be thinking about the impartial justification of love or friendship at the time when we are deciding whether to visit our sick friend;

but it is precisely the point of two-level utilitarianism to explain why we *should* have an extra thought when we are thinking at the critical level, but not at the level of everyday moral decision-making.

Consider the idea, supported to various degrees in the passages I have quoted from Sidgwick and Himmler, to the effect that whites should care more for, and give priority to, the interests of other whites, or that "Aryans" should give priority to the interests of others "of their blood." These ideas have had, in their time, an intuitive appeal very similar to the intuitive appeal of the idea that we have obligations to favor family and friends. But racist views have contributed to many of the worst crimes of our century, and it is not easy to see that they have done much good, certainly not good that can compensate for the misery to which they have led. Moreover, although the suppression of racism is difficult, it is not impossible, as the existence of genuinely multiracial societies, and even the history of desegregation in the American South, shows. White people in the South no longer think twice about sharing a bus seat with an African American, and even those who fought to defend segregation have, by and large, come to accept that they were wrong. Taking an impartial perspective shows that partialism along racial lines is something that we can and should oppose, because our opposition can be effective in preventing great harm to innocent people.

Thus we can turn Williams' aphorism against him: philosophers who take his view have one thought too few. To be sure, to think *always* as a philosopher would mean that, in our roles as parent, spouse, lover and friend, we would indeed have one thought too many. But if we *are* philosophers, there should be times when we reflect critically on our intuitions—indeed not only philosophers, but all thoughtful people, should do this. If we were all simply to accept our feelings without the kind of extra

reflection we have just been engaged in, we would not be able to decide which of our intuitive inclinations to endorse and support and which to oppose. As the quotations from Sidgwick and Himmler indicate, the fact that intuitive responses are widely held is not evidence that they are justified. They are not rational insights into a realm of moral truth. Some of them—roughly, those that we share with others of our species, irrespective of their cultural background—are responses that, for most of our evolutionary history, have been well suited to the survival and reproduction of beings like us. Other intuitive responses—roughly, those that we do not share with humans from different cultures—we have because of our particular cultural history. Neither the biological nor the cultural basis of our intuitive responses provides us with a sound reason for taking them as the basis of morality.

Let us return to the issue of partiality for family, lovers and friends. We have seen that there are impartial reasons for accepting some degree of partiality here. But how much? In broad terms, as much as is necessary to promote the goods mentioned above, but no more. Thus the partiality of parents for their children must extend to providing them with the necessities of life, and also their more important wants, and must allow them to feel loved and protected; but there is no requirement to satisfy every desire a child expresses, and many reasons why we should not do so. In a society like America, we should bring up our children to know that others are in much greater need, and to be aware of the possibility of helping them, if unnecessary spending is reduced. Our children should also learn to think critically about the forces that lead to high levels of consumption, and to be aware of the environmental costs of this way of living. With lovers and friends, something similar applies: the relationships require partiality, but they are stronger where there are shared values, or at least respect

for the values that each holds. Where the values shared include concern for the welfare of others, irrespective of whether they are friends or strangers, then the partiality demanded by friendship or love will not be so great as to interfere in a serious way with the capacity for helping those in great need.

What of the other categories on Sidgwick's list of those to whom we are under a special obligation to show kindness: parents, kin, "those who have rendered services," "neighbors" and "fellow-countrymen"? Can all of these categories be justified from an impartial perspective? The inclusion of "those who have rendered services" is seen by ethicists who rely on intuition to be a straightforward case of the obligation of gratitude.<sup>20</sup> From a two-level perspective, however, the intuition that we have a duty of gratitude is not an insight into some independent moral truth, but something desirable because it helps to encourage reciprocity, which makes cooperation, and all its benefits, possible. As we saw in Chapter 4, here too, evolutionary theory can help us to see why reciprocity, and with it the sense of gratitude, should have evolved and why it is, in some form or other, a universal norm in all human societies.<sup>21</sup> (To give such an evolutionary explanation, however, says nothing about the motives people have when they engage in cooperative behavior, any more than explaining sexual behavior in terms of reproduction suggests that people are motivated to have sex because they wish to have children.)

Once a duty of gratitude is recognized, it is impossible to exclude parents from the circle of those to whom a special duty of kindness is owed. Because parents have generally rendered countless services to their children, we can hardly subscribe to a general principle of gratitude without recognizing a duty of children toward their parents. The exception here would be children who have been maltreated or abandoned by their parents—and it is the exception that proves the rule, in the sense that it shows that



the obligation is one of gratitude, not one based on blood relationships.

Another of Sidgwick's categories, that of our neighbors, can be handled in the same way. Geographical proximity is not in itself of any moral significance, but it may give us more opportunities to enter into relationships of friendship and mutually beneficial reciprocity. Of course, increasing mobility and communication have, over the course of the past century, eroded the extent to which neighbors are important to us. When we run out of sugar, we don't go next door to borrow some, because the supermarket down the street has plenty. We walk past our neighbors, barely nodding at them, as we talk on our cell phones to friends in other cities. In these circumstances it becomes doubtful if we have special duties of kindness to our neighbors at all, apart from, perhaps, a duty to do the things that only neighbors can do, such as feeding the cat when your neighbor goes on vacation.

"Kin," the next on Sidgwick's list, is an expression that ranges from the sibling with whom you played as a child and with whom you may later share the task of caring for your parents, to the distant cousin you have not heard from for decades. The extent to which we have a special obligation to our kin should vary accordingly. Kin networks can be important sources of love, friendship, and mutual support, and then they will generate impartially justifiable reasons for promoting these goods. But if that distant cousin you have not heard from for decades suddenly asks for a loan because she wants to buy a new house, is there an impartially defensible ground for believing that you are under a greater obligation to help her than you would be to help an unrelated equally distant acquaintance? At first glance, no, but perhaps a better answer is that it depends on whether there is a recognized system of cooperation among relatives. In rural areas of India, for example, such relationships between relatives can play an important role in

providing assistance when needed, and thus in reducing harm when something goes awry.<sup>22</sup> Under these circumstances there is an impartial reason for recognizing and supporting this practice. In the absence of any such system, there is not. (In different cultures, the more impersonal insurance policy plays the same harm-reduction role, and thus reduces the need for a system of special obligations to kin, no doubt with both good and bad effects.)

### **The Ethical Significance of the Nation-State**

#### Compatriots as Extended Kin

Finally, then, what impartial reasons can there be for favoring one's compatriots over foreigners? On some views of nationality, to be a member of the same nation is like an extended version of being kin. Michael Walzer expresses this view when, in discussing immigration policy, he writes:

Clearly, citizens often believe themselves morally bound to open the doors of their country—not to anyone who wants to come in, perhaps, but to a particular group of outsiders, recognized as national or ethnic "relatives." In this sense, states are like families rather than clubs, for it is a feature of families that their members are morally connected to people they have not chosen, who live outside the household.<sup>23</sup>

Germany's former citizenship law embodied the sense of nationality that Walzer has in mind. Descendants of German farmers and craft workers who settled in Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century are recognized in the German Constitution as having the right to "return" to Germany and become citizens, although most of them do not speak German and come from families none of whom have set foot in the country for generations. On the other hand, before new citizenship laws came into effect

in 2000, foreign guest workers could live in Germany for decades without becoming eligible for citizenship, and the same was true of their children, even though they were born in Germany, educated in German schools, and had never lived anywhere else. Although Germany's pre-2000 laws were an extreme case of racial or ethnic preference, most other nations have, for much of their history, used racist criteria to select immigrants, and thus citizens. As late as 1970, when immigrants of European descent were being actively encouraged to become Australian citizens, the "White Australia" policy prevented non-European immigrants from settling in Australia.

If we reject the idea that we should give preference to members of one's own race, or those "of our blood," it is difficult to defend the intuition that we should favor our fellow citizens, in the sense in which citizenship is seen as a kind of extended kinship, because all citizens are of the same ethnicity or race. The two are simply too close.

#### A Community of Reciprocity

What if we empty all racist elements from the idea of who our fellow citizens are? We might hold that we have a special obligation to our fellow citizens because we are all taking part in a collective enterprise of some sort. Eammon Callan has suggested that to be a citizen in a state is to be engaged in a community of reciprocity:

So far as citizens come to think of justice as integral to a particular political community they care about, in which their own fulfillment and that of their fellow citizens are entwined in a common fate, the sacrifices and compromises that justice requires cannot be sheer loss in the pursuit of one's own good.<sup>24</sup>

Walter Feinberg takes a similar view:

The source of national identity is . . . connected to a web of mutual aid that extends back in time and creates future obligations and expectations.<sup>25</sup>

The outpouring of help from Americans for the families of the victims of September 11 was a striking instance of this web of mutual aid, based on the sense that Americans will help each other in times of crisis. In more normal times, Americans can still feel that by their taxes they are contributing to the provision of services that benefit their fellow-Americans by providing social security and medical care when they retire or become disabled, fight crime, defend the nation from attack, protect the environment, maintain national parks, educate their children, and come to the rescue in case of floods, earthquakes or other natural disasters. If they are male, and old enough, they may have served in the armed forces in wartime, and if they are younger, they might have to do so in the future.

It is therefore possible to see the obligation to assist one's fellow-citizens ahead of citizens of other countries as an obligation of reciprocity, though one that is attenuated by the size of the community and the lack of direct contact between, or even bare knowledge of, other members of the community. But is this sufficient reason for favoring one's fellow citizens ahead of citizens of other countries whose needs are far more pressing? Most citizens are born into the nation, and many of them care little for the nation's values and traditions. Some may reject them. Beyond the borders of the rich nations are millions of refugees desperate for the opportunity to become part of those national communities. There is no reason to think that, if we admitted them, they would be any less ready than native-born citizens to reciprocate whatever

benefits they receive from the community. If we deny admission to these refugees, it hardly seems fair to then turn around and discriminate against them when we make decisions about whom we will aid, on the grounds that they are not members of our community and have no reciprocal relationships with us.

### The Imagined Community

If reciprocity alone is not enough to show why we have a significantly stronger obligation to our fellow-citizens than to anyone else, one might try to supplement this idea by recourse to Benedict Anderson's account of a nation as an "imagined political community," one that lives only in the minds of those who see themselves as citizens of the same nation.<sup>26</sup> Though citizens never encounter most of the other members of the nation, they think of themselves as sharing an allegiance to common institutions and values, such as a constitution, democratic procedures, principles of toleration, the separation of church and state, and the rule of law. The imagined community makes up for the lack of a real, face-to-face community in which there would be personal ties and more concrete obligations of reciprocity. Acknowledging special obligations to other members of the nation can then be seen as part of what it takes to form and maintain this imagined community.

Anderson's conception of nationalism is an account of how the idea of belonging to a nation took hold in the modern world. Because it is a description and not a prescription, it cannot ground a moral argument for the importance of maintaining the imagined communities that he describes. It is nevertheless an illuminating account, precisely because it shows that the modern idea that we owe special loyalty to our national community is not based on a community that exists independently of the way we think about

ourselves. If Anderson is right, and the modern idea of the nation rests on a community we imagine ourselves to be part of, rather than one that we really are part of, then it is also possible for us to imagine ourselves to be part of a different community. That fits well with the suggestion that the complex set of developments we refer to as globalization should lead us to reconsider the moral significance we currently place on national boundaries. We need to ask whether it will, in the long run, be better if we continue to live in the imagined communities we know as nation-states, or if we begin to consider ourselves as members of an imagined community of the world. I have already offered several arguments for the latter view. Our problems are now too intertwined to be well resolved in a system consisting of nation-states, in which citizens give their primary, and near-exclusive, loyalty to their own nation-state rather than to the larger global community, and such a system has not led to a great enough will to meet the pressing needs of those living in extreme poverty. Imagining ourselves to be part of a national community seems fine when we think of it as broadening our concerns beyond more limited tribal loyalties, but it is less appealing when we think of it as erecting fences against the rest of the world.

### The Efficiency of Nations

Robert Goodin defends a system of special obligations to our compatriots "as an administrative device for discharging our general duties more efficiently."<sup>27</sup> If you are sick and in hospital, Goodin argues, it is best to have a particular doctor made responsible for your care, rather than leaving it up to all the hospital doctors in general; so too, he says, it is best to have one state that is clearly responsible for protecting and promoting the interests of every individual within its territory. There is no doubt some-

thing in this, but it is an argument with very limited application in the real world. In any case, efficiency in administration within units is one thing, and the distribution of resources between units is another. Goodin recognizes this, saying:

If there has been a misallocation of some sort, so that some states have been assigned care of many more people than they have been assigned resources to care for them, then a reallocation is called for.<sup>28</sup>

While it may, other things being equal, be more efficient for states to look after their own citizens, this is not the case if wealth is so unequally distributed that a typical affluent couple in one country spends more on going to the theater than many in other countries have to live on for a full year. In these circumstances the argument from efficiency, understood in terms of gaining the maximum utility for each available dollar, far from being a defense of special duties toward our compatriots, provides grounds for holding that any such duties are overwhelmed by the much greater good that we can do abroad.

#### Justice Within States and Between States

Christopher Wellman has suggested three further impartial reasons for thinking that it may be particularly important to prevent economic inequality from becoming too great *within* a society, rather than *between* societies. The first is that political equality within a society may be adversely affected by economic inequality within a society, but is not adversely affected by economic inequality between societies. The second is that inequality is not something that is bad in itself, but rather something that is bad in so far as it leads to oppressive relationships, and hence we are right to be more concerned about inequality among people living

in the same nation than we are about inequality between people living in different countries who are not in a meaningful relationship with each other. And the third is a point about the comparative nature of wealth and poverty.<sup>29</sup>

Wellman's first two points are at least partly answered by the phenomenon that underlies so much of the argument of this book: increasingly, we are facing issues that affect the entire planet. Whatever it is we value about political equality, including the opportunity to participate in the decisions that affect us, globalization means that we should value equality between societies, and at the global level, at least as much as we value political equality within one society. Globalization also means that there can be oppressive relationships at the global scale, as well as within a society.

Marx provided the classic formulation of Wellman's third point:

A house may be large or small; as long as the surrounding houses are equally small it satisfies all social demands for a dwelling. But let a palace arise beside the little house, and it shrinks from a little house to a hut . . . however high it may shoot up in the course of civilization, if the neighboring palace grows to an equal or even greater extent, the occupant of the relatively small house will feel more and more uncomfortable, dissatisfied and cramped with its four walls.<sup>30</sup>

But today it is a mistake to think that people compare themselves only with their fellow citizens (or with all their fellow citizens). Inhabitants of rural Mississippi, for example, probably do not often compare themselves with New Yorkers, or at least not in regard to income. Their lifestyle is so different that income is merely one element in a whole package. On the other hand,

many Mexicans obviously do look longingly north of the border, and think how much better off they would be financially if they could live in the United States. They reveal their thoughts by trying to get across the border. And the same can be true of people who are not in close geographical proximity, as we can see from the desperate attempts of Chinese to travel illegally to the United States, Europe, and Australia, not because they are being politically persecuted, but because they already have enough of an idea about life in those far-away countries to want to live there.

Despite the different picture that globalization gives, let us grant that there are some reasons for thinking that we should place a higher priority on avoiding marked economic inequality within a given society than across the entire range of the planet's inhabitants. Wellman's three points can be given some weight when they are brought against the strong claim that it is *no* less desirable to eliminate marked economic inequality between any of the world's inhabitants than it is to eliminate it within a single society. But the weight we should give them is limited, and subject to particular circumstances. In particular, the question of whether to seek greater equality within societies, or between societies only arises if we cannot do both. Sometimes we can. We can increase taxes on people in rich nations who have higher incomes or leave large sums to their heirs, and use the revenue to increase aid to those people in the world's poorest nations who have incomes well below average even for the nation in which they are living. That would reduce inequality both in the poor nations and between nations.

Granted, if we live in a rich nation, we could reduce inequality within our own society even further if we used the revenue generated by taxes on the wealthiest people within our own society to help the worst-off within our own society. But even if we accept Wellman's arguments, that would be the wrong choice. For then

we would be choosing to reduce inequality within our own nation rather than reducing both inequality within poor nations, and inequality between nations. Wellman has offered reasons why it may be more important to focus on inequality within a nation than on inequality between nations, but that is not the same as finding reasons for giving greater priority to overcoming inequality within one's *own* society than in any other society. If I, living in America, can do more to reduce inequality in, say, Bangladesh than I can do to reduce inequality in my own country, then Wellman has not given me any grounds for preferring to reduce equality in America—and if giving money to those near the bottom of the economic ladder in Bangladesh will both reduce inequality there and reduce inequality between nations, that seems the best thing to do. Wellman has failed to find any magic in the pronoun “my.”

In any case, in the present situation we have duties to foreigners that override duties to our fellow citizens. For even if inequality is often relative, the state of absolute poverty that has already been described is a state of poverty that is not relative to someone else's wealth. Reducing the number of human beings living in absolute poverty is surely a more urgent priority than reducing the relative poverty caused by some people living in palaces while others live in houses that are merely adequate. Here Sidgwick's account of the common moral consciousness of his time is in agreement. After giving the list of special obligations I quoted above, he continues:

And to all men with whom we may be brought into relation we are held to owe slight services, and such as may be rendered without inconvenience: but those who are in distress or urgent need have a claim on us for special kindness.

Rawls and *The Law of Peoples*

I have already referred to the remarkable fact that the most influential work on justice written in twentieth-century America, John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, does not address the issue of justice between societies. With the more recent publication of *The Law of Peoples*, however, Rawls has at last addressed himself to the issue of justice beyond the borders of our own society. Rawls believes that well-off societies have significant obligations toward struggling societies, but there is a lack of focus on obligations toward individuals who are currently destitute in other countries. The book is, after all, called *The Law of Peoples*, not, for example, *A Theory of Global Justice*.

Here is one example of how the book Rawls has written differs from the book that he might have written. Rawls asks us to consider a world in which there are two societies, each of which satisfies internally the two principles of justice in *A Theory of Justice*, and in which the worst-off representative person in the first society is worse off than the worst-off representative person in the second. He then supposes that it is possible to arrange a global redistribution that would improve the lot of the worst-off representative person in the first society, while allowing both societies to continue to satisfy his two principles of justice internally. We are, in other words, being asked to consider two societies, each of which is just if we confine our gaze to its own boundaries, but one of which has people in it who are worse off than anyone in the other society. Should we prefer a redistribution that would lessen the gap between the worst-off people in the two societies? No, Rawls says, "The Law of Peoples is indifferent between the two distributions."<sup>31</sup>

In *A Theory of Justice* Rawls argues for a system of justice in

which "no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances."<sup>32</sup> Now, however, he declares his theory *indifferent* to the consequences of something as contingent as which side of a national border one happens to live. These two positions cannot be reconciled. In *The Law of Peoples* Rawls uses an approach quite different from that of *A Theory of Justice*. Though both books refer to an "original position," in the earlier work the deliberating parties in the original position weigh up alternative principles of justice, such as classical utilitarianism and moral perfectionism, and choose between them. In the "original position" of *The Law of Peoples*, on the other hand, the deliberating parties—whose task now is to decide on a framework for international relationships—do not even consider classical utilitarianism as a possible principle by which they might regulate the way in which peoples behave toward each other. This is because, Rawls tells us:

a classical, or average, utilitarian principle would not be accepted by peoples, since no people organized by its government is prepared to count, *as a first principle*, the benefits for another people as outweighing the hardships imposed on itself.<sup>33</sup>

This claim, which looks like an odd anticipation of President Bush's "first things first are the people who live in America," is no doubt true, at the level of sociological description of peoples organized as governments in existing societies. But how does that justify Rawls in using it as a conclusive ground for ruling out of consideration any possibility that peoples *would* choose to accept this principle, if they were choosing in the original position, in which they did not know which society they would be living in?

Why should we regard what governments are *now* prepared to accept as decisive about what they *would* accept, if they were choosing impartially?

Another strange aspect of *The Law of Peoples* is Rawls's readiness to invoke, against the idea of economic redistribution between nations, arguments that could easily be brought—indeed have been brought—against economic redistribution between individuals or families *within* the same nation. Thus he invites us to consider an example of two countries that are at the same level of wealth and have the same size population. The first decides to industrialize, while the second prefers a more pastoral and leisurely society and does not. Decades later, the first is twice as wealthy as the second. Assuming that both societies freely made their own decisions, Rawls asks whether the industrializing society should be taxed to give funds to the pastoral one. That, he says, “seems unacceptable.”<sup>34</sup> But if Rawls finds this unacceptable, how does he answer the critics of his position in *A Theory of Justice* who find it unacceptable for a person who has worked hard and achieved wealth to be taxed in order to support someone who has led a more relaxed life and so is now, in terms of resources held, among the worst-off members of society? Both cases raise a problem for anyone who supports the redistribution of wealth, and if the problem can be answered in the case of redistribution within a society, I see no reason why it cannot be answered in the case of redistribution between societies.

Rawls does urge in *The Law of Peoples* that “well-ordered peoples have a *duty* to assist burdened societies,” that is, those societies that “lack the political and cultural traditions, the human capital and know-how, and, often, the material and technological resources needed to be well-ordered.”<sup>35</sup> The duty extends only to the requirement of assistance to help the societies to become “well-ordered,” by which Rawls means a society that is designed

to advance the good of its members and is effectively regulated by a public conception of justice.<sup>36</sup> In considering what can help a society to become well-ordered, Rawls places emphasis on the need for societies to develop a suitable culture, for he conjectures “that there is no society anywhere in the world—except for marginal cases—with resources so scarce that it could not, were it reasonably and rationally organized and governed, become well-ordered.”<sup>37</sup> This conjecture may or may not be correct, but the emphasis on the need for a change of culture leaves untouched the plight of individuals who are dying from starvation, malnutrition, or easily preventable diseases *right now*, in countries that presently lack the capacity to provide for the needs of all their citizens.

Rawls says, in the course of discussing contrary views of international justice advanced by Charles Beitz and Thomas Pogge, that he shares their goals “of attaining liberal or decent institutions, securing human rights and meeting basic needs,” and he believes that these goals “are covered by the duty of assistance.”<sup>38</sup> But if this means that wealthy societies have a duty of assistance to help individuals who are starving or otherwise unable to satisfy their “basic needs,” it fails to receive the emphasis that it deserves. Instead Rawls writes of the duty of assistance always as part of a much broader project of helping *peoples* to attain liberal or decent institutions. As Leif Wenar has said of *The Law of Peoples*: “Rawls in this work is concerned more with the legitimacy of global coercion than he is with the arbitrariness of the fates of citizens of different countries.”<sup>39</sup> As a result, the economic concerns of individuals play no role in Rawls's laws for regulating international relations. In the absence of mass starvation, or abuse of human rights, Rawls's principles of international justice do not extend to aiding individuals. As our world is now, however, millions will die from malnutrition and poverty-related illnesses before their

countries gain liberal or decent institutions and become "well-ordered." To many, from the Secretary-General of the United Nations down, the issue of how the rich nations and their citizens are to respond to the needs of the more than one billion desperately poor people has an urgency that overrides the longer-term goal of changing the culture of societies that are not effectively regulated by a public conception of justice. But that issue is not one to which the author of *A Theory of Justice* has ever given serious attention.

### The Reality

When subjected to the test of impartial assessment, there are few strong grounds for giving preference to the interests of one's fellow citizens, and none that can override the obligation that arises whenever we can, at little cost to ourselves, make an absolutely crucial difference to the well-being of another person in real need. Hence the issue of foreign aid is a matter with which citizens of any country of the developed world ought to be concerned. Citizens of the United States should feel particularly troubled about their country's contribution. Among the developed nations of the world, ranked according to the proportion of their Gross National Product that they give as development aid, the United States comes absolutely, indisputably, last.

Many years ago, the United Nations set a target for development aid of 0.7 percent of Gross National Product. A handful of developed nations—Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway and Sweden—meet or surpass this very modest target of giving 70 cents in every \$100 that their economy produces to the developing nations. Most of them fail to reach it. Japan, for example, gives 0.27 percent. Overall, among the affluent nations, official development assistance fell from 0.33 percent of their combined GNP in 1985 to 0.22 percent in 2000. But of all the affluent na-

tions, none fails so miserably to meet the United Nations target as the United States, which in 2000, the last year for which figures are available, gave 0.10 percent of GNP, or just 10 cents in every \$100 its economy produces, one-seventh of the United Nations target. That is less *in actual U.S. dollars* than Japan gives—about \$10 billion for the United States, as compared with \$13.5 billion for Japan—although the U.S. economy is roughly twice the size of Japan's. And even that miserly sum exaggerates the U.S. aid to the most needy, for much of it is strategically targeted for political purposes. The largest single recipient of U.S. official development assistance is Egypt. (Russia and Israel get even more aid from the United States than Egypt, but it is not classified as development assistance.) Tiny Bosnia and Herzegovina gets a larger allocation from the United States than India. Japan, on the other hand, gives to Indonesia, China, Thailand, India, the Philippines, and Vietnam, in that order. India, for instance, gets more than five times as much assistance from Japan as it gets from the United States. Only a quarter of U.S. aid, as compared to more than half of Japan's aid, goes to low-income countries.<sup>40</sup>

When I make these points to audiences in the United States, some object that to focus on official aid is misleading. The United States, they say, is a country that does not believe in leaving everything to the government, as some other nations do. If private aid sources were also included, the United States would turn out to be exceptionally generous in its aid to other nations. So I checked private aid as well.<sup>41</sup> Yes, a higher proportion of the total aid given by the United States is non-government aid than is the case for other nations. But non-government aid everywhere is dwarfed by government aid, and that is true in the United States too, where non-government aid amounts to \$4 billion, or about 40 percent of government aid.<sup>42</sup> So adding in the non-government aid takes the United States aid total only from 0.10 percent



of GNP to 0.14 percent of GNP. This is still only one-fifth of the modest United Nations target, and not enough to get the United States off the very bottom of the table. While the United States gives \$14 billion in private and official development aid each year, annual domestic U.S. spending on alcohol is \$34 billion, on tobacco \$32 billion, on non-alcoholic beverages, \$26 billion, and on entertainment admission and fees, nearly \$50 billion.<sup>43</sup> Turning to government spending, rather than general consumer expenditure, the Bush administration has proposed a military budget of \$379 billion for the fiscal year 2003, an increase of \$48 billion on the previous year's figure.<sup>44</sup> The increase alone is more than four times the amount the government gives in foreign aid. (Although President George W. Bush has also indicated that he would like to increase foreign aid by \$5 billion over three years, this increase will not come into effect until 2004 and is dwarfed by the proposed increase in military spending.<sup>45</sup>) On the other hand, in each of the twelve years that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the U.S. government reaped a "peace dividend" that saved it, in military spending, at least six times—and in some years much more—the total amount it gave in foreign aid.<sup>46</sup> Even with the proposed increase for 2003, the U.S. government will still save, as compared with the military expenditures of the later years of the Reagan administration, an amount greater than the total foreign aid budget. None of this peace dividend has been used to boost foreign aid.

These facts are consistent with the claim made at the start of this chapter: despite the lip-service most people pay to human equality, their circle of concern barely extends beyond the boundary of their country. Yet not all the facts point to this bleak verdict. In 1995 the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes, or PIPA, asked Americans what they thought about the amount that the United States was spending

on foreign aid. A strong majority of those answering thought that the United States was spending too much on foreign aid and that aid should be cut. That response will make the cynics feel justified in their low opinion of human altruism, but when asked to estimate how much of the federal budget (not of GNP) was devoted to foreign aid, the median estimate—that is, the one in the middle of all the responses—was 15 percent. The correct answer is less than 1 percent. And when asked what an appropriate percentage would be, the median response was 5 percent—an increase on the amount actually spent that is beyond the wildest hopes of any foreign aid advocates on Capitol Hill. A few months later the *Washington Post* decided to run its own survey to see if the results held up. It got an even higher median estimate, that 20 percent of the federal budget was spent on foreign aid, and a median "right amount" of 10 percent. Some skeptics thought that the figure might be explained by the fact that people were including military expenditure in defense of other countries, but further research showed that this was not the case.

In 2000, PIPA asked a different sample the same questions. The most striking difference was that the strong majority (64 percent) that had in 1995 wanted U.S. foreign aid cut had shrunk to 40 percent. But when asked how much of the federal budget goes to foreign aid, the public was no better educated than before. The median estimate was 20 percent, the same as in the 1995 *Washington Post* survey. Only one respondent in 20 gave an estimate of 1 percent or less. Even among those with post-graduate education, the median estimate was 8 percent. Asked what would be an appropriate percentage, the median answer was again the same as that found by the earlier *Washington Post* survey, 10 percent.

The U.S. public's misperceptions about foreign aid have been confirmed in other surveys. A 1997 survey by the *Washington Post*, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University listed five

programs and asked which were the largest areas of spending by the federal government. Foreign aid ranked first, followed by Defense and Social Security. In fact, Defense and Social Security between them make up more than a third of the federal budget; foreign aid is insignificant by comparison. In the same year a Pew survey showed that 63 percent of Americans thought that the federal government spends more on foreign aid than it spends on Medicare, when Medicare spending is ten times foreign aid spending.<sup>47</sup>

The 2000 PIPA survey was held shortly after the United Nations Millennium Summit, at which the nations of the world set themselves a series of goals: to halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger, or who live on less than \$1 per day; to see that all children have a primary education; to reduce by two-thirds the under-five child mortality rate; to halve the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water; and to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases. The survey showed strong support for these goals, with 83 percent saying that they supported U.S. participation in an international effort to cut world hunger in half by 2015, and 75 percent saying that they would be willing to pay an extra \$50 a year toward such a program. The World Bank has estimated that achieving the millennium development goals would cost \$40 to 60 billion a year in additional aid for the next fifteen years.<sup>48</sup> If 75 percent of Americans over 18 years old were to contribute \$50, more than \$7.5 billion a year would be raised—not quite enough for America's share of the additional sum needed, but a good start.<sup>49</sup> It would, of course, be fairer if Americans with high incomes contributed more than \$50, and those on lower incomes contributed less or nothing at all; but here I am simply noting what people have said about their willingness to help those in need, outside their country's borders.

Survey results should always be treated with caution, especially

when asking about attitudes on topics where people may like to present themselves as more generous than they really are, but it is hard to dismiss the consistent findings that Americans are woefully ignorant about their country's dismal foreign aid record. What people would really want to do, once they knew the truth, is less clear. They have not been offered an opportunity to vote on the issue. No recent American president, or presidential contender with realistic prospects of success, has even tried to make foreign aid a major policy issue. America's failure to pull its weight in the fight against poverty is, therefore, due not only to the ignorance of the American public but also to the moral deficiencies of its political leaders.

#### **An Ethical Challenge**

If America's leaders continue to give only the most trifling attention to the needs of everyone except Americans (and the leaders of other rich nations continue to do only a little better) what should the citizens of those rich countries do? We are not powerless to act on our own. We can take practical steps to expand our concern across national boundaries by supporting organizations working to aid those in need, wherever they may be. But how much should we give?

More than 700 years ago Thomas Aquinas, later canonized by the Catholic Church, faced up to this question without flinching. Material goods are, he wrote, provided for the satisfaction of human needs and should not be divided in a way that hinders that goal. From this he drew the logical conclusion: "whatever a man has in superabundance is owed, of natural right, to the poor for their sustenance." Although Thomas Aquinas has had a major influence on the thinking of the Roman Catholic Church—to such an extent that "Thomism" has been described as the official philosophy of the Church—this particular aspect of his teach-

ings is not one that the Church has chosen to emphasize. But how exactly we are to justify keeping what we have in "superabundance" when others are starving is not so easy to say.

In his book *Living High and Letting Die* New York philosopher Peter Unger presents an ingenious series of imaginary examples designed to probe our intuitions about whether it is wrong to live well without giving substantial amounts of money to help people who are hungry, malnourished, or dying from easily treatable illnesses like diarrhea. Here is my paraphrase of one of these examples.

Bob is close to retirement. He has invested most of his savings in a very rare and valuable old car, a Bugatti, which he has not been able to insure. The Bugatti is his pride and joy. In addition to the pleasure he gets from driving and caring for his car, Bob knows that its rising market value means that he will always be able to sell it and live comfortably after retirement. One day when Bob is out for a drive, he parks the Bugatti near the end of a disused railway siding and goes for a walk up the track. As he does so, he sees that a runaway train, with no one aboard, is running down the railway track. Looking further down the track he sees the small figure of a child playing in a tunnel and very likely to be killed by the runaway train. He can't stop the train and the child is too far away to warn of the danger, but he can throw a switch that will divert the train down the siding where his Bugatti is parked. Then nobody will be killed—but since the barrier at the end of the siding is in disrepair, the train will destroy his Bugatti. Thinking of his joy in owning the car, and the financial security it represents, Bob decides not to throw the switch. The child is killed. But for many years to come Bob enjoys

owning his Bugatti and the financial security it represents.<sup>50</sup>

Bob's conduct, most of us will immediately respond, was gravely wrong. Unger agrees. But then he reminds us that we too have opportunities to save the lives of children. We can give to organizations like UNICEF or Oxfam America. How much would we have to give one of these organizations to have a high probability of saving the life of a child threatened by easily preventable diseases?

In its fund-raising material, the U.S. Committee for UNICEF says that a donation of \$17 will provide immunization "to protect a child for life against the six leading child-killing and maiming diseases: measles, polio, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, and tuberculosis," while a donation of \$25 will provide "over 400 packets of oral rehydration salts to help save the lives of children suffering from diarrheal dehydration." But these figures do not tell us how many lives are saved by the immunization or rehydration salts, and they do not include the cost of raising the money, administrative expenses, and delivering aid where it is most needed. Unger called some experts to get a rough estimate of these costs and the number of lives likely to be saved and came up with a figure of around \$200 per child's life saved. Assuming that this estimate is not too far astray, if you still think that it was very wrong of Bob not to throw the switch that would have diverted the train and saved the child's life, then it is hard to see how you could deny that it is also very wrong not to send at least \$200 to one of the organizations listed above. Unless, that is, there is some morally important difference between the two situations. What might that be? Is it the practical uncertainties about whether aid will really reach the people who need it? Nobody who knows the world of overseas aid can doubt that such uncertainties exist.

But Unger's figure of \$200 to save a child's life was reached after he had made conservative assumptions about the proportion of the money donated that will actually reach its target. One genuine difference between Bob and those who can donate to overseas aid organizations but don't is that only Bob can save the child in the tunnel, whereas there are hundreds of millions of people who can give \$200 to overseas aid organizations. The problem is that most of them aren't doing it. Does this mean that it is all right not to do it?

Suppose that there were more owners of priceless vintage cars—Carol, Dave, Emma, Fred, and so on, down to Ziggy—all in exactly the same situation as Bob, with their own siding and their own switch, all sacrificing the child in order to preserve their own cherished car. Would that make it all right for Bob to do the same? To answer this question affirmatively is to endorse follow-the-crowd ethics—the kind of ethics that led many Germans to look away when the Nazi atrocities were being committed. We do not excuse them because others were behaving no better.

We seem to lack a sound basis for drawing a clear moral line between Bob's situation and that of anyone with \$200 to spare who does not donate it to an overseas aid agency. These people seem to be acting at least as badly as Bob was acting when he chose to let the runaway train hurtle toward the unsuspecting child. Indeed, they seem to be behaving far worse, because for most Americans, to part with \$200 is far less of a sacrifice than Bob would have to make to save the child. So it seems that we must be doing something seriously wrong if we are not prepared to give \$200 to UNICEF or Oxfam America to reduce the poverty that causes so many early deaths. Since there are a lot of very needy children in the world, however, this is not the end of the moral claims on us. There will always be another child whose life you

could save for another \$200. Are we therefore obliged to keep giving until we have nothing left? At what point can we stop?

Consider Bob. How far past losing the Bugatti should he go? Imagine that Bob had got his foot stuck in the track of the siding, and if he diverted the train, then it would amputate his big toe before going on to ram his car. Should he still throw the switch? What if it would amputate his foot? His entire leg? Only when the sacrifices become very significant indeed would most people be prepared to say that Bob does nothing wrong when he decides not to throw the switch. Of course, most people could be wrong; we can't decide moral issues by taking opinion polls. But consider for yourself the level of sacrifice that you would demand of Bob, and then think about how much money you would have to give away in order to make a sacrifice that is roughly equal to that. It's almost certainly much, much more than \$200. For most middle-class Americans, it could easily be more like \$200,000. When Bob first grasped the dilemma that faced him as he stood by that railway switch, he must have thought how extraordinarily unlucky he was, to be placed in a situation in which he must choose between the life of an innocent child and the sacrifice of most of his savings. But he was not unlucky at all. We are all in that situation.

Some critics have questioned the factual assumptions behind such arguments. There is, they insist, an empirical question to be answered: "How much will each additional dollar of aid, given by me or by my government, contribute to the long-term well-being of people in areas receiving that aid?" It is not enough to find out the cost of delivering a packet of oral rehydration salts to a child who, without it, will die from diarrhea. We must look beyond saving life, to how the lives that are saved will be lived, to see if we have some reason to believe that saving the child will do more than perpetuate the cycle of poverty, misery, and high infant mortality.<sup>51</sup>

A World Bank study, *Assessing Aid*, points out that foreign aid has been both a “spectacular success” and an “unmitigated failure.” On the success side:

Internationally funded and coordinated programs have dramatically reduced such diseases as river blindness and vastly expanded immunization against key childhood diseases. Hundreds of millions of people have had their lives touched, if not transformed, by access to schools, clean water, sanitation, electric power, health clinics, roads, and irrigation—all financed by foreign aid.<sup>52</sup>

Among the failures is the aid that went to Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, under the dictatorship of Mobutu. Corruption, incompetence, and misguided policies ensured that it had no impact. Extensive road building in Tanzania failed to improve the road network, because the roads were not maintained. But the World Bank study indicates that we now know more about what will work and what will not. It finds that when a poor country with good management is given aid equivalent to 1 percent of its GDP, poverty and infant mortality falls by 1 percent.<sup>53</sup> A more recent World Bank study has confirmed that the efficacy of aid is improving. Whereas in 1990 \$1 billion in aid was sufficient to lift an estimated 105,000 people out of poverty, by 1997 to 1998 the same amount was lifting approximately 284,000 people out of poverty.<sup>54</sup> The tragedy is, as Joseph Stiglitz (then Chief Economist of the World Bank) points out in his foreword to the study, that “just as aid is poised to be its most effective, the volume of aid is declining and is at its lowest level ever.”<sup>55</sup>

It is true that in the past government foreign aid has not been as effective in reducing poverty as one might hope. That is, to a significant extent, because it has not been aimed at reducing poverty. In a study titled “Who Gives Foreign Aid to Whom and

Why?” Alberto Alesina and David Dollar found that three of the biggest donors—the United States, France, and Japan—direct their aid, not to those countries where it will be most effective in fostering growth and reducing poverty, but to countries where aid will further their own strategic or cultural interests. The United States gives much of its aid to its friends in the Middle East, Israel and Egypt. Japan favors those countries that vote the way it votes in international forums like the United Nations. France gives overwhelmingly to its former colonies. The Nordic countries are the most notable exception to this pattern—they give to countries that are poor but have reasonably good governments that will not misuse the resources given.<sup>56</sup> Only when the biggest donors follow the example of the Nordic countries will we be able to tell how effective government foreign aid can be. Experienced non-government organizations, such as the various national members of the Oxfam International group, provide another model. They have had 50 years of experience in the field and have the ability to learn from their mistakes. There is always more to learn, but there is little doubt that well-intentioned, well-resourced, intelligent people, experienced in the cultural context in which they are working, can do a significant amount of good for those living in extreme poverty.<sup>57</sup>

A different objection to the argument that Unger and I have been putting forward is that it is poor policy to advocate a morality that most people will not follow. If we come to believe that, unless we make real sacrifices for strangers, we are doing wrong, then our response may be, not to give more, but to be less observant of other moral rules that we had previously followed. Making morality so demanding threatens to bring the whole of morality into disrepute. This objection effectively concedes that we ought to do a great deal more than we are now doing but denies that advocating this will really lead to the poor getting more

assistance. The question then becomes: What policy will produce the best consequences? If it is true that advocating a highly demanding morality will lead to worse consequences than advocating a less demanding morality, then indeed we ought to advocate a less demanding morality. We could do this, while still knowing that, at the level of critical thinking, impartialism is sound. Here Sidgwick's point holds good: there is a distinction between "what it may be right to do, and privately recommend," and "what it would not be right to advocate openly."<sup>58</sup> We might, among ourselves, feel that we should forgo all "superabundance" in order to help those who are unable to provide for their bare subsistence, whereas in public we might decide to advocate whatever level of giving we believe will yield the greatest amount of assistance, while not making people feel that morality is so demanding that they will disregard it. If, by advocating that people give \$50 a year—just \$1 a week—to help the world's poorest people, it really were possible to get donations from the 75 percent of Americans that the 2000 PIPA survey suggested might be willing to give this sum, then that would be a target worth campaigning for. If it were possible to get \$100 a year from, say, 60 percent of Americans, that would be better still, especially if the 15 percent willing to give \$50 but not \$100 would still give their \$50. The point is to nominate as a target the figure that will lead to the greatest amount of money being raised. For that it needs to be a target that makes sense to people.

One way of looking at how much we might suggest that people should give is to suppose that the task of eliminating poverty in the world were fairly distributed among all of the 900 million people in high-income countries. How much would each of them have to give? As we have seen, the World Bank estimates that it would cost \$40 to \$60 billion per year in additional aid to achieve the development goals set at the United Nations Millen-

nium Summit. These goals, calling for poverty and hunger to be halved by 2015, are more modest than the elimination of poverty. They could leave untouched the situation of the poorest of all, in countries where the costs of reaching poor people are higher than they are in countries with better infrastructures. But they are at least a stepping stone on the way to a more complete victory over poverty, so let us ask how much it would require, per person, to raise this sum. There are about 900 million people in the developed world, roughly 600 million of them adults. Hence a donation of about \$100 per adult per year for the next fifteen years could achieve the Millennium Summit goals, even at the high end of the World Bank estimates. For someone earning \$27,500 per annum, the average salary in the developed world, this is less than 0.4 percent of their annual income, or less than 1 cent in every \$2 they earn.

There are many complexities that such figures ignore, but they go both ways. Not all residents of rich countries have income to spare, after meeting their basic needs; but on the other hand, there are hundreds of millions of rich people who live in poor countries, and they could and should give too. We could, therefore, advocate that everyone with income to spare, after meeting their family's basic needs, should contribute a minimum of 0.4 percent of their income to organizations working to help the world's poorest people. But to do so would be to set our sights too low, for it would take fifteen years even to halve poverty and hunger. During those fifteen years, tens of thousands of children will continue to die every day from poverty-related causes. We should feel a greater sense of urgency to eliminate poverty. Moreover there is nothing especially memorable about 0.4 percent of one's income. A more useful symbolic figure would be 1 percent, and this might indeed be closer to what it would take to eliminate, rather than halve, global poverty.

We could therefore propose, as a public policy likely to produce good consequences, that anyone who has enough money to spend on the luxuries and frivolities so common in affluent societies should give at least 1 cent in every dollar of their income to those who have trouble getting enough to eat, clean water to drink, shelter from the elements, and basic health care. Those who do not meet this standard should be seen as failing to meet their fair share of a global responsibility, and therefore as doing something that is seriously morally wrong. This is the minimum, not the optimal, donation. Those who think carefully about their ethical obligations will realize that—since not everyone will be giving even 1 percent—they should do far more. But if, for the purposes of changing our society's standards in a manner that has a realistic chance of success, we focus on the idea of a bare minimum that we can expect everyone to do, there is something to be said for seeing a 1 percent donation of annual income to overcome world poverty as the minimum that one must do to lead a morally decent life. To give that amount requires no moral heroics. To fail to give it shows indifference to the indefinite continuation of dire poverty and avoidable, poverty-related deaths.

In the light of such calculations of the amount of aid needed, it is indicative of the present pessimistic climate of opinion about aid that the targets set by the world leaders at the Millennium Summit are commonly referred to as "ambitious."<sup>59</sup> Of course, those who are skeptical about achieving them may be right—certainly the money that has been given or pledged to date falls far short of what is needed. The \$5 billion increase in U.S. aid over three years pledged by President George W. Bush in March 2002, while better than no increase at all, is nothing like the doubling of foreign aid from rich countries sought by World Bank President James D. Wolfensohn. The philanthropist George Soros called it, with some justification, "a token gesture instead of something

that could successfully impact most of the poor countries."<sup>60</sup> By contrast, all it would take to put the world on track to eliminate global poverty much faster than the Millennium Summit targets would be the modest sum of 1 percent of annual income—if everyone who can afford it were to give it. That, as much as anything, tells us how far we still are from having an ethic that is based not on national boundaries, but on the idea of one world.

38. Brad Roth, *Governmental Illegitimacy in International Law*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1999, p. 324.
39. General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV), Annex, 25 UN GAOR, Supp., no. 28, UN Doc A/5217 (1970), at 121, [www.fletcher.tufts.edu/pens/2625.htm](http://www.fletcher.tufts.edu/pens/2625.htm); also cited in Roth, pp. 161–162.
40. Security Council Resolution 688, 5 April 1991, <http://srcho.un.org:80/Docs/scres/1991/688e.pdf>. I owe this and the following two examples to Gregory Fox, “The Right to Political Participation in International Law,” in Cecelia Lynch and Michael Loriaux, eds, *Law and Moral Action in World Politics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1999, p. 91.
41. Security Council Resolution 794, 3 December 1992, <http://srcho.un.org:80/documents/sc/res/1992/s92r794e.pdf>.
42. Security Council Resolution 841, 16 June 1993, <http://srcho.un.org:80/Docs/scres/1993/841e.pdf>.
43. The thesis goes back to Kant’s *Perpetual Peace*, section II, and is also associated with Joseph Schumpeter. See Michael Doyle, “Liberal Institutions and International Ethics,” in Kenneth Kipnis and Diana Meyers, eds., *Political Realism and International Morality*, Westview, Boulder, Colo., 1987, pp. 185–211; first published as “Liberalism and World Politics,” *American Political Science Review*, 80:4, 1986, pp. 1152–1169. There are many discussions of the thesis on the web; see, for example, <http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/demowar.htm>.
44. “In the Treaty’s Words: ‘International Stability,’” *New York Times*, 17 July 2001, page A8.
45. *The Responsibility to Protect*, p. xi, pp. 12–13, paragraphs 2.7–2.15, and pp. 47–50, paragraphs 6.1–6.18.
46. This objection was pressed by John Broome when I gave an earlier version of this paper as an Amnesty Lecture at the University of Oxford. My response partially reflects comments made by Nir Eyal, who was also present on that occasion.
47. The preceding paragraph owes much to Leif Wenar’s thoughtful comments.
48. Speech to SS Leaders in Posen, 4 October 1943, cited in Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship*, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1971, p. 423.
49. Michael Doyle, “Liberal Institutions and International Ethics,” in Kipnis

- and Meyers, *Political Realism and International Morality*, p. 220. See this paper generally for a discussion, with many contemporary illustrations, of some of the consequentialist aspects of humanitarian intervention.
50. Tzvetan Todorov, “Right to Intervene or Duty to Assist?” in Nicholas Owen, ed., *Human Rights, Human Wrongs—Oxford Amnesty Lectures 2001*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002.
51. For further discussion of the basis of ethics see my *Practical Ethics*, second edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, chapter 1, or R. M. Hare, *Moral Thinking*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1981.
52. See Alvin Gouldner, “The Norm of Reciprocity,” *American Sociological Review*, 25:2, 1960, p. 171.
53. For references, see Leonard Swidler, ed., *For All Life: Toward a Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic*, White Cloud Press, Ashland, Oreg., 1999, pp. 19–21.
54. Swidler, ed., *For All Life*, pp. 29–36.
55. See Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1996.
56. Quoted from Erskine Childers, “Empowering the People in Their United Nations,” a speech given at a symposium on “The United Nations at Fifty: Creating a More Democratic and Effective UN,” Hesburgh Centre for International Policy Studies, University of Notre Dame, 2 December 1994, [www.globalpolicy.org/resource/pubs/childer1.htm](http://www.globalpolicy.org/resource/pubs/childer1.htm). For a contemporary defense of the same idea, see George Monbiot, “Let the People Rule the World,” *The Guardian*, 17 July 2001, available under the heading “Globalisation” at [www.monbiot.com](http://www.monbiot.com).
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  2. Joyce Purnick, “Take the Cash. You’re Making Us Look Bad,” *New York Times*, February 11, 2002, p. B1; Nick Paumgarten, “Free Money: Trumpery Below Canal,” *The New Yorker*, 18 and 25 February 2002, p. 58; Joyce Purnick, “For Red Cross, a New Round of Complaints,” *New York Times*, February 21, 2002, p. B1.
  3. For a summary see [www.unicef.org/media/sowco2presskit/](http://www.unicef.org/media/sowco2presskit/). The full report is also accessible from this page.
  4. Purnick, “Take the Cash. You’re Making Us Look Bad,” p. B1.



5. Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, seventh edition, Macmillan, London, 1907, p. 246.
6. Heinrich Himmler, speech to SS leaders in Poznan, Poland, 4 October 1943; cited from [www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/timeline/Poznan.htm](http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/timeline/Poznan.htm).
7. R. M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1963; *Moral Thinking*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1981.
8. William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness*, first edition, first published 1793, edited and abridged by Raymond Preston, Knopf, New York, 1926, pp. 41–42.
9. “Famine, Affluence and Morality,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1:2, 1972, pp. 231–232.
10. See, for example, Raymond D. Gastil, “Beyond a Theory of Justice,” *Ethics*, 85:3, 1975, p. 185; Samuel Scheffler, “Relationships and Responsibilities,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 26:3, 1997, pp. 189–209, reprinted in Samuel Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, pp. 97–110; Samuel Scheffler, “Conceptions of Cosmopolitanism,” *Utilitas*, 11:3, 1999, pp. 255–276, reprinted in *Boundaries and Allegiances*, pp. 111–130. Note, however, that while Scheffler argues against what he calls “extreme cosmopolitanism” and insists that we have “underived special responsibilities” to those close to us in various ways, he does not take a position on whether we have special responsibilities to our compatriots, as compared to those in other countries. (See *Boundaries and Allegiances*, p. 124.) For an excellent discussion of the extensive literature on this topic, see Darrel Moellendorf, *Cosmopolitan Justice*, Westview, Boulder, Colo., 2002, chapters 3–4.
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12. Galatians vi:10.
13. Parr, *A Spital Sermon*, p. 4.
14. Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986, p. 86; for a related passage see also p. 112.
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  17. See Yonina Talmon, *Family and Community in the Kibbutz*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1972, pp. 3–34.
  18. See Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, *The Truth About Cinderella: A Darwinian View of Parental Love*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1999.
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  24. Eamonn Callan, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997, p. 96. This and the following quotation are cited from Melissa Williams, “Citizenship as Identity, Citizenship as Shared Fate, and the Functions of Multicultural Education,” forthcoming in Walter Feinberg and Kevin McDonough, eds., *Collective Identities and Cosmopolitan Values*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002.
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28. Goodin, *Utilitarianism as a Public Philosophy*, p. 286.
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31. John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., p. 120.
32. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford University Press, London, 1971, p. 12; see also p. 100.
33. Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 40.
34. Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 117.
35. Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 106.
36. For further details, see Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 4f, 453f.
37. Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 108.
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40. All figures are from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Figures on the overall fall in aid from developed countries are from the 2001 Development Co-operation Report, Statistical Annex, table 14; figures for individual nations come from charts under the heading "Aid at a Glance by Donor." These tables and charts are available at [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org).
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## 6 a better world?

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