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# *The Fallacy Of Philanthropy*

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## I Introduction

Should we stop spending money on things we do not really need and send the money instead to groups that aid victims of absolute poverty? Garrett Cullity and Peter Unger have given renewed vigor to the well known argument by Peter Singer that we should do this.[1] Like Singer, Cullity and Unger compare our duties to the poor to our duties when we encounter a victim of calamity, such as a child in danger of drowning. (Unger argues that our duties to the poor are even more pressing.) Singer and Unger tell us what to do and why we must do it; most starkly, Unger gives us the names, addresses, and toll-free phone numbers of four organizations to which we can donate, and the book cover tells us that the author's royalties are going equally to Oxfam America and the U.S. Committee for UNICEF. Unger dissolves the divide between theory and practice.

Hunger is a social problem affecting over 800 million people. It shortens lives; parents watch their children waste and die. In our culture we share a social norm creating a duty to rescue victims of unforeseen calamity. Singer, Cullity, and Unger believe that we have the same duty to aid the hungry that we have to rescue the victims of calamity.

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1 Garrett Cullity, 'International Aid and the Scope of Kindness,' *Ethics* **105** (1994) 99-127; Peter Unger, *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence* (New York: Oxford University Press 1996); Peter Singer, 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* **1** (1972) 229-43 and, as restated with differences, *Practical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993), ch. 8. Page references in text are to *Practical Ethics.*

By 'philanthropy' I will mean primarily this assimilation of the practical issues raised by hunger and poverty to our duty to rescue victims of calamity, secondarily the substantive proposal to give money to hunger relief organizations such as CARE, UNICEF, or Oxfam (a use closer to its ordinary meaning).[2] Here I will argue that the assimilation is wrong; it is the fallacy of philanthropy. Moreover, I believe, the practical proposal that derives from the philanthropist assimilation is not a good one.

These two uses of 'philanthropy,' referring to the assimilation and the proposal, are connected. When we think we have a duty to aid victims of absolute poverty like our duty to rescue a child in danger of drowning, we think in the following way: because of their misfortune, we must devote our resources to their rescue. So the proposal advocating philanthropic action grows naturally from the assimilation.

I begin (in Section II) by describing the logic of arguments making the assimilation and (in Section III) the debate between the philanthropists and some of their critics. The central argument of the paper (Sections IV through VI) is this: intuitively, we treat duties of rescue in a non-utilitarian fashion that prohibits us from importing consequentialist considerations to qualify those duties. Why? Our intuitions about rescue derive from a learned norm requiring rescue of strangers who experience calamity; chronic social problems such as poverty are not addressed by parallel norms and raise different issues. The philanthropist assimilation is a fallacy.

The assimilation is harmful to addressing the problems that the philanthropists so eloquently put before us. Hunger raises issues of causation and remedy that are not present in our duty to rescue. The fallacy of philanthropy says 'feed the hungry,' presenting liberal politics (do-gooding) as an ethical duty. It short-circuits political discussions of large scale causes of poverty. I argue (Section VII) that much poverty is *created* by institutions that could be other than as they are. Philanthropic responses *detract* from a revolutionary political response that might end poverty. The purpose of this criticism is not to diminish the problems raised by absolute poverty but to widen the discussion of possible solutions.[3]

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2 In its ordinary use 'philanthropy' refers to the practice of giving resources for worthy causes; I have extended this use to refer to a proposal advocating a particular philanthropic practice and an assimilation that grounds that proposal. I hope the reader will forgive that extension. Elsewhere ('Consequentialism and History,' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* **19** [1989] 383-403), I used 'philanthropism' for this same proposal, but I prefer to avoid that ugly coinage.

3 But why the emphasis on the philanthropists, particularly Singer and his direct

The literature discussed here is mostly rooted in moral philosophy. But the present essay is not moral philosophy. The central philosophical argument is part of the social philosophy of ethical thought and practice, a philosophical enterprise that may be useful for criticizing arguments in moral philosophy. Section VII concerns the effects of the fallacy of philanthropy, the causes of hunger, and the strategic issue of what might end or alleviate hunger and poverty.

## II Philanthropic Logic

The philanthropists argue that we have an obligation to address the plight of very poor people and that this obligation is implicit in examples such as the one where we encounter a child in need of rescue. We may, then, call this method 'philanthropic logic': a general moral principle is inferred from a particular imagined situation (or situations) where we agree about the right thing to do; then conclusions are drawn from that principle that imply a change in how we live. Thus, it is argued, a new moral obligation is implicit in the morality we already accept.

The famous instance of this style of reasoning is Peter Singer's example of encountering a child in danger of drowning. He imagines that as he is on his way to teach a class he comes upon a child who has fallen into a shallow ornamental pond. 'Would anyone deny that I ought to wade in and pull the child out?' he asks. Of course not. From this he infers a general principle: 'if it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance, we ought to do it' (230). This principle seems to articulate what makes it wrong for a professor to walk past a child, allowing her to drown, in order not to be late for class or in order not to spoil his clothes.[4] But this principle has implications that go far beyond

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defenders? The literature addressing absolute poverty has grown huge over the past thirty years. I focus on the philanthropists because they address what each of *us* must do to address poverty and they purport to do so *a-theoretically*; that is, they are not drawing out the consequences of a particular moral theory but addressing each of us and arguing that *our own moral beliefs* require a change in our behavior.

4 What Singer *writes* is that the *principle* supports the particular judgment that I should save the child. This may be true in the sense that the general principle articulates the moral ground of the particular judgment. But surely it is more obvious that I should save the child than that the principle is true. So in a different, epistemological, sense the particular judgment is intended as an argument that we should accept the general principle as the best explanation of *why* it is wrong to ignore the plight of the child.

that example. If we apply it to our ability to aid victims of hunger, we can conclude that we should spend less on consumer items and donate the money to hunger relief.

The *logic* of this way of proceeding is shared by others who may criticize the particulars of Singer's arguments but share his philanthropic approach to hunger. In *Living High and Letting Die* Peter Unger writes that Singer's example to support his first premise is inadequate, since in *other* situations — he asks us to imagine a solicitation letter from UNICEF asking for $100 to save the lives of thirty children — we do not think it wrong to allow others to die when we could prevent it. But Unger too argues for the philanthropist proposal, and his argument, though more elaborate, is not very different.

From another imagined situation — where one can rescue a man in danger of losing his leg as a result of a wound but only at the cost of doing five thousand dollars damage to the upholstery of one's fine car — supplemented by a host of other imagined situations Unger infers that we hold as a primary value that 'as much as [we] possibly can manage, [we] *lessen the number of (the world's) innocent others who suffer seriously*' (31). He then argues extensively and ingeniously that while we *accept* this as a primary value, we do not *apply* this value consistently. Specifically, we do not apply it to the situation where UNICEF solicits us for $100 because of a variety of morally irrelevant psychological peculiarities (the boringness of dying from hunger versus the excitingness of encountering someone in danger of drowning or losing a leg) and logical or factual errors (such as thinking that helping people now will lead to disaster in the future). He believes that cases of rescue *reveal* our primary values while our response to chronic suffering *obscures* the values we hold. So Unger accepts the inference from specific examples such as the child we encounter in danger of drowning or the stranger in danger of losing his leg to a general value (lessening the suffering of the innocent) which logically implies further, albeit hitherto unrecognized, duties to aid others. This, then, is another example of philanthropic logic.[5]

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5 A referee for *CJP* believes that this interpretation of Unger is wrong, that Unger takes for granted without argument that we hold a primary value of lessening suffering rather than inferring that we hold that value from examples; Unger is often distrustful of our intuitions in different cases. In contrast, I interpret Unger as arguing that because *some* of our intuitions display and reflect our basic moral values, we can infer that we hold these values from those intuitions; other intuitions mislead us as to our values because in those cases we are insufficiently attentive to suffering or we are influenced by irrelevant features. In many cases of rescue, suffering is vivid for us; from these cases, I believe, Unger infers that we hold lessening suffering as a primary value.

This logic is also central to Garrett Cullity's 'International Aid and the Scope of Kindness.' From the example of the child in danger of drowning he infers that it is a perfectly adequate reason to pull the child from the pond 'that his life is threatened, together with the fact that by pulling him out [we] can avert the threat to his life' (112). 'If this simple consideration is, in some circumstances, regarded as a justification, then it must be so regarded in the others in which it is present' (123). While countervailing considerations might negate what would otherwise be an adequate reason, none of the differences between the situations of the endangered child and the victims of hunger and dysentery countervails against our reason to act. So we have a reason to aid the victims of absolute poverty which is the same as our overwhelmingly adequate reason to rescue the child endangered in the shallow pond. Like Singer and Unger, Cullity exemplifies philanthropic logic. For the philanthropists the reasons to rescue the drowning child and to aid the hungry are the same; these are parallel duties with parallel justifications.

## III Ethical Life: The Impasse with Philanthropy

In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Bernard Williams suggests that ethical obligation is best understood in terms of Hegel's 'notion of *Sittlichkeit*, a concretely determined ethical existence that was expressed in the local folkways, a form of life that made particular sense to the people living in it' (104).[6] The Hegelian insists on the authority of our actual ethical practice and stresses the differences between the situations where we recognize a duty to help and the situation of pervasive poverty and misery, leading to millions of premature deaths annually from malnutrition, disease, and dysentery (the last often the result of lacking access to uncontaminated water).[7]

Replies are available to the philanthropists and have been made by them. We seek moral *consistency*, and we cannot take for granted that our ordinary ethical practices are morally consistent. In the past, people have espoused ideals such as equality before the law while denying equality to some on account of race. These moral inconsistencies were corrected

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6 *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1985)

7 With Williams's authority I use the term 'Hegelian' for this insistence on the authority of ordinary ethical thought and practice. Williams's writing is in a Hegelian spirit in resisting universalist revisions of our *Sittlichkeit*. I ignore here Hegel's theory of history, which gave special import to the *Sittleichkeit* of liberal capitalism.

through more rigorous moral thought. Ordinary morality may be like a naive scientific theory, in need of theoretical articulation and rigorous development to make it coherent and consistent.[8] Changes in ordinary morality, like developments in science, make for a better theory, which is what moral philosophers strive for. Moreover, and related to this, in developing a better theory, we make moral progress.[9]

The Hegelian may reply that if a reason such as the one Cullity suggests — that someone's life is threatened and we can easily avert that threat — were truly part of our current ethical thought, then we would apply it to appeals from relief organizations. Since we don't, there are differences between the two cases which are ethically relevant to us. Specifically, Williams mentions how, in situations where we recognize a duty to rescue, there is an emergency, and the need for help is immediately present to us (185-6).[10]

The philanthropists reply to these points. Cullity addresses the ethical relevance of immediacy, Unger the relevance of emergency. Cullity argues that non-immediacy in no way countervails any reason we may have to act to avert a threat to someone's life. So non-immediacy is irrelevant, ethically, to our obligation to aid others, just as race is.

Unger addresses emergency — the fact that the duty to rescue arises in *extraordinary* situations while the victims of malnutrition and dysentery are subject to a *chronic* horror. If anything, he proposes, we have greater reason to aid victims of chronic horrors, who have had every disadvantage, than we do to rescue people caught in a terrible emergency, which is an exceptional occurrence in what has been an easier life. But we find chronic horrors boring while we find emergencies stimulat-

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8 See Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989), 11-15.

9 The disagreement between the more cognitivist view of morality held by the philanthropists and the Hegelian view of ethical life as social practice is beyond the scope of this essay. But the reader should keep in mind that such profound disagreements are in the background.

10 Williams is not the only one to note that we recognize special duties of rescue. Shelly Kagan, *Normative Morality* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1998) 133-5 writes that common sense morality recognizes a special duty to rescue. Kagan seems skeptical that we can identify a relevant difference that would justify a special duty here. In Sections V and VI, I will explain why we treat rescue differently, but it is not the sort of account that Kagan would count as a justification. F.M. Kamm is more sympathetic than Kagan to the special character of duties of rescue (but she says little to explicate or justify them); see 'Faminine Ethics: the Problem of Distance in Morality and Singer's Ethical Theory' in *Singer and His Critics*, Dale Jamieson, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell 1999), 178-80 where she suggests a contrast between duties of rescue and issues of justice.

ing and exciting. This last difference only says something about our moral deficiencies.

The Hegelian replies that the philanthropist misunderstands his point. The philanthropist argues that a general principle is implicit in cases (like that of the drowning child) where we believe we are obligated to help; our failure to apply this principle consistently is a theoretical and a moral flaw. 'But,' says the Hegelian, 'I am objecting not to the *application* of a general principle that I recognize but to the *inference* to a general principle. Our duty to help the child is *contextual and specific*; it does not establish our acceptance of a general reason or principle divorced from the context of being confronted by people in need of rescue.' If the inference to a universal principle can be blocked, then the Hegelian has rendered moot arguments that there are no relevant differences that favor aiding the drowning child over aiding the victims of poverty.

I think that the philanthropists may talk past the Hegelians because they do not see how their reasoning works. Let me give a fairly obvious Hegelian reply to Cullity to illustrate this. Cullity asks us to consider the situation where we come upon a child in danger of drowning in a shallow pond. Of course, we would pull the child from the water. Why? For most of us the conclusive reason to pull the child out is 'the fact that his life is threatened, together with the fact that by pulling him out [we] will avert the threat to his life' (112). That seems right. But a page later what is supposed to be *the same reason* to pull the child out is *restated* as 'The fact that a life is threatened and that by acting in a certain way one will avert the threat' (113). What is the difference? As first stated the reason is related to a *particular practical context*. The context is one where I *encounter a particular child* in danger of drowning. The context selects an individual (or individuals) for our attention. We see that there is a threat to that individual's life. We can easily avert it. In this context these are reasons to pull him out. But when the reason is restated it has become divorced from that particular context.

That more general reason may be a reason to pull out the child, but it is not the same reason. The general reason, if we accept it, may apply in other contexts and have implications that we may not find it easy to accept (!). The power of Cullity's argument that non-immediacy is not morally relevant comes from the supposition that there is a general reason to avert threats to the lives of others. If so, whatever differences exist between the situation of a child we encounter in danger of drowning and the plight of the victims of absolute poverty are not morally relevant; they do not justify ignoring the plight of the very poor. The differences may not be morally relevant, once we accept the general, non-contextual reason to help, but they may be relevant to blocking the inference to the general reason from the particular and contextual rea-

son.[11] In Section V below we will see how this Hegelian reply can be developed.

While Singer and Cullity can justly be charged with inferring a general principle from a single example, Unger cannot. He argues from many examples that we accept the general value of reducing suffering. He considers alleged relevant differences, present in the case where we feel obligated to save someone but absent in cases where we do not (as in the solicitation from UNICEF). He then constructs examples where those features are absent yet we still feel morally obligated or where they are present and we don't. So the alleged morally relevant features fail to explain the ground of our sense of obligation.

However, Unger's most compelling examples where we feel obligated are emergencies. Here he says simply that we respond to emergencies because they are exciting, and that the absence of this response in cases of chronic suffering only says something about our moral deficiencies. He never considers the possibility that our sense that we have a stringent duty to help may come not from a general value but from a social norm; he is quite disparaging of conventional social norms and does not consider that *they* may lie behind our intuitions in cases of rescue.

Nevertheless, until we have a better account, his careful, detailed accounts of why we acknowledge the relevance of the value of reducing suffering in some cases but not others must be regarded as a possible explanation of the ethical and ethically irrelevant subjective factors that affect our intuitions. Still, his view, and those of the other philanthropists who assimilate absolute poverty to the plight of a child in danger of drowning, leads to an oddity.

## IV The Non-Utilitarian Logic of Duties of Rescue

Philanthropists assimilate the issues we face living in a world of massive poverty to those we face when we come upon a child in danger of drowning. But a difference emerges: speculations about causes of pov-

11 In correspondence Cullity acknowledges that an argument is needed for a more general reason but believes that it can be supplied. He points out that, in the context of encountering the child in need of rescue, there is nothing particular about that child that requires me to rescue him; we would have the same obligation to anyone whom we so encountered. This reply slights the role of context: we encounter a particular person in need of rescue. Granted, there is nothing special about that person beyond his being the person one encounters. Still, the reason to help is specific and contextual. Without the context of encountering a person in need of rescue the obligation to help disappears.

erty and consequences of alternative responses are relevant to whether we should aid the victims of absolute poverty, but in our ethical culture parallel speculations about how the child came to be in need of rescue or of the consequences of rescue are irrelevant to whether we must rescue.[12] The philanthropists should see this disanalogy as a problem for their assimilation, but they do not.

The logic of the example of the drowning child is non-utilitarian. Duties of rescue are not qualified by consequentialist considerations. Confronted with a child in danger of drowning in a shallow pond, we believe that we must help if we can. Speculations about *possible or even probable* long-term effects of rescue (except for a certainty that saving her will lead to disaster) — about whether pulling her out will do more harm than good — are ruled out by the ethical culture we share. We have a duty to rescue; it is irrelevant how the child came to be in the pond and what will happen to her (or others) after her rescue. This irrelevance makes for a disanalogy with our beliefs about how to approach issues of absolute poverty and its consequences. Here, we believe, causes of poverty and consequences of our actions are relevant to what to do.

Our philanthropists are implicitly aware of the failure of their assimilation. They respond appropriately to practical objections to their proposals to address poverty by aiding its victims. But there is a contradiction between the *logic* of the philanthropists' assimilation and what their awareness of the relevant issues leads them to say.

If we have duties to aid the victims of absolute poverty like those we have to a child in danger of drowning, then further issues, such as the Malthusian objection that helping the poor contributes to overpopulation, are irrelevant. The Malthusian argues that giving to the poor now is counter-productive: it leads more people to live and reproduce, and hence contributes to future food crises, making a bad situation worse. Consistently with the spirit of the drowning child analogy, one could reply to the Malthusian, 'Aiding one family contributes negligibly, if at all, to future food crises, but enables others to live. To object to aiding a family victimized by absolute poverty by saying that this might contribute to future food crises is like objecting to my pulling the child from the pond by saying that *that* act will contribute to future food crises or that it will do no good because it is likely that the parental neglect that put her in that situation will continue — so she will probably die anyway or have a miserable life.' Of course, in our ethical culture these objections

12 This is the observation of a social philosopher using his own intuitions as data in order to understand his ethical culture, noting a distinction implicit in our ethical life. I make no practical assertions here about what I think we should do.

to saving the child are absurd.[13] If addressing absolute poverty really is — as Singer and the others claim — a parallel act with a similar justification, then these objections should be absurdly irrelevant to addressing poverty by aiding its victims.

But these objections certainly seem to be relevant. So Singer contradicts the logic of the philanthropist assimilation; he replies to the Malthusian by projecting an optimistic view that philanthropy, combined with population control and measures to change the status of women, can create a future in which philanthropic help is no longer needed (239-40). Thus, consistent with his utilitarianism, he defends optimism about the consequences of philanthropic aid. Moreover, he writes that if feeding the hungry makes absolute poverty worse in the future, then 'there is nothing we can do to prevent absolute starvation and poverty, in the long run, and so we have no obligation to assist' (238). Here he follows utilitarian logic, which is his official position in *Practical Ethics*, not the logic of the drowning child example. But the argument that we have a duty to aid the victims of hunger comes not from utilitarianism but from the story of the drowning child. So his argument is philanthropist, in the sense in which I have defined it, even if he does not consistently adhere to the logic of the philanthropist assimilation.

Unger too accepts the parallel between our duty to aid a child in danger of drowning and supposed duties toward the victims of poverty. He stipulates that, in discussing examples, we are not to introduce any further considerations of possible negative or positive consequences beyond those explicitly stated in the presentation of the examples (he calls this stipulation 'be boring') (25-6). Unger gives a justification for this stipulation. Replying to the Malthusian, he points out that it is absurd to justify ignoring the plight of someone needing emergency medical attention by arguing that he would just parent more children and hence contribute to the world's population problem. Assimilating the ethical issues created by poverty to those arising when we confront someone needing rescue, Unger says that the consequences of aiding the

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13 Singer applies utilitarian thinking to cases of rescue in his essay 'Reconsidering the Famine Relief Argument' in Peter G. Brown and Henry Shue, eds., *Food Policy: The Responsibility of the United States in the Life and Death Choices* (New York: Free Press 1977) 36-53; he proposes that, for utilitarian reasons, we might not aid an adult who repeatedly puts himself in danger by skating on thin ice (45). I suggest we would rescue him but might restrain him in some way or prosecute him for endangering his rescuers (as is sometimes done); we would not just let him drown. Here Singer's utilitarianism gives answers about our duty to rescue that are at variance with our shared ethical culture, a culture he is appealing to when he gives the argument to assist. For more on this problem for Singer, see note 20 below.

poor are also irrelevant to our duties to help them. Up to this point Unger is consistently following the logic of the assimilation between duties of rescue and our response to absolute poverty.

Then Unger cites evidence that reducing childhood mortality slows population growth and leads to population stability, thus answering the Malthusian point that he said is absurdly irrelevant (he calls this a rejection of 'futility thinking'). Of course, the Malthusian objection to aiding the victims of malnutrition and dysentery does not seem absurd, and Unger's reply seems relevant. Considerations of the effects of aid programs on the world's poor are not absurd in the way that parallel considerations are absurd when we are confronted by someone needing rescue.

Cullity is 'the exception that proves the rule.' He does not defend the long-term utility of philanthropic aid to the poor. For precisely that reason he withholds full endorsement from the philanthropist conclusion that we have a moral obligation to contribute to the relief of hunger. He writes that this conclusion depends on showing that the good done by aiding victims of hunger will not be outweighed by long-term harm or will not be futile, everything considered. But he fails to note that just such considerations of overall consequences are *irrelevant* to our duty to aid the child in danger of drowning. So, like Unger, he implicitly recognizes a difference between the two cases but fails to investigate the significance of this difference.

*All* of our philanthropists implicitly reject the assimilation that I have called the fallacy of philanthropy even though this assimilation is central to their own arguments that we must do something to relieve absolute poverty. This is powerful evidence, not that they are not philanthropists, but that the philanthropist assimilation is indeed a fallacy.

Speculations about causes and remedies for the suffering from poverty are central to deliberations about whether or how to aid the victims of hunger and dysentery. Let me add an argument for this point. Unger points out that there is not a rigid connection between poverty and premature death: Kerala, a very poor state in southern India, has high life expectancy and literacy, and low infant mortality and birth-rate. Why? Since 1957 Kerala has been governed by a succession of leftist governments. Their ascendancy is associated with political mobilization of rural poor and urban workers. Now suppose someone were to say, 'Given the apparent effectiveness of these movements and the questionable effectiveness of the international aid organizations that the philanthropists support, I will donate my money to communist organizations rather than to famine relief.' Surely, this objection to giving to aid organizations is *relevant*.

Speculations about the consequences of aid to the chronically poor are relevant. (We must reject Unger's 'be boring' stipulation.) There is nothing parallel to this that is relevant to our obligation to aid the child in

danger of drowning. There is a difference between the ethical obligations imposed on us when we are confronted with an individual in need of emergency rescue and the social problems that arise from pervasive poverty.

Philanthropic logic asserts a duty to aid the world's poor like our duty to rescue a child in danger of drowning, proceeding from the latter situation to a general principle and then applying that general principle to the problem of pervasive poverty and its effects. It argues that alleged differences between the two cases are morally irrelevant and that the duties to aid are similar. However, considerations of possible or probable long term consequences of aiding a particular person seem wildly irrelevant to our duty to rescue a child in danger of drowning while parallel speculations about the causes of poverty and the consequences of a particular response are relevant to the issue of whether and how to address poverty. Why is there this difference?

## V Ethical Life and Social Problems

Why does our ethical culture treat duties of rescue in a non-consequentialist way? In this section I offer an explanation: our ethical intuitions about rescue are derived from learned and shared ethical norms; these norms prohibit our using consequentialist speculations and argument to justify the violation of normative duties.

Many moral philosophers are contemptuous of 'conventional morality.' (See, for example, Unger, 170-1.) This contempt may cause them to overlook the possibility that their own ethical judgments are derived from learned norms they have internalized. This is the hypothesis I explore in this section. I will offer an account of how our ethical life grounds powerful ethical judgments. Our judgments about duties of rescue are derived from the norms that constitute our ethical life.

Ethical life, as I conceive it here, is the shared normative expectations sanctioned by approval and esteem for conformity, by disesteem for failure to conform. This web of shared understandings enables us to live together.[14] To violate these norms is a *betrayal*, a failure to live up to the

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14 This conception is developed further in my 'How Morality Works and Why It Fails: On Political Philosophy and Moral Consensus,' *Journal of Social Philosophy* **28** (1997) 43-70. (What I here call 'ethical life' or 'ethical culture' I there call 'morality.') Does this conception of ethical life capture all of what moral philosophy is properly interested in? I am inclined to think it does and have suggested that conclusion in 'How Morality Works,' but I do not assume that conclusion here.

decency we expect of one another. That is why duties imposed by norms ordinarily cannot be qualified by consequentialist reasoning. The example of encountering the endangered child invokes a norm requiring us to rescue strangers who are victims of unforeseen calamity. The example's ethical punch comes from this norm.

Ethical life is extremely important, but its importance is *limited*. Pervasive and chronic distress raises issues that are not addressed by our shared norms; to address the pervasiveness of distress we must seek its causes and assess whether the distress can be ended and, if so, how. Here we reason about the most desirable ethical practices or other social institutions. It is a fallacy to assimilate the issues raised by pervasive and chronic poverty to those raised by unforeseen emergency.

We share norms of property, prohibiting theft and protecting exchange; societies that have a much looser conception of property heap disapproval on those who do not share, comparable to the disapproval we feel for thieves. We have norms prohibiting killing and assault, norms shared, in some form, by all societies. We have many other norms where kin and other social distance is acknowledged and is relevant to our duties, not just norms requiring care of children, aged parents, or disabled siblings, but other norms requiring emotional support and aid to family and friends and mundane acts acknowledging important life milestones such as birthdays, weddings, and deaths.

Ethical duties arise from our *shared* expectations of conduct. Our ethical life consists in our agreement about how we will live together, the expectations we share about our responsibilities toward one another in intimate and in more distant relationships. These expectations *bind* us to others in an ethical community.

Some moral philosophers distinguish the social expectations generated by norms from a deeper commitment coming from general moral principle. For these philosophers morality may be identified with the general philosophical morality that has been so influential in academia, especially the traditions derived from Kant and Mill, or, at a lower level of generality, the proposals of Singer, Unger, and Cullity that morality entails general principles about helping others when we can do so without unreasonable cost.

But the ethical conceptions that move us are the internalized conceptions of how to act that we learn from others. Far from being superficial and external, these norms define, for those who hold them and internalize them, what it means to be the ethical persons we understand ourselves to be; they are bound up with our conceptions of who we are, often expressed as our ideas of what it means to be a decent person. We *share* these expectations with others as a basis for social co-operation. Someone who would allow a child to drown so as not to be late to class *utterly fails our expectations of ethical decency*. To violate these norms is to break our

shared understanding of the basis on which we live together. Thus such breaches are betrayals, and these duties are very strict and cannot be compromised by consequentialist considerations.

Our lives are embedded in a network of social interactions and expectations which define a socially shared ethical life (as well as areas where there is dispute). Often we share norms that disallow consequentialist considerations that would disrupt the simple social expectations that form the context of our daily lives: that spouses will not betray their marriage vows when they calculate that the total benefit of betrayal is greater than that of fidelity; that when someone gives us something in expectation of payment in return, we will not decline to pay if we estimate that our money will do more good elsewhere; and that we must not hang an innocent man to prevent a crime wave.[15] We do not allow consequentialist reasoning to interfere with conduct required or prohibited under a shared norm.[16]

From our response to the story about encountering a child in danger of drowning the philanthropists infer a general principle, value, or reason. But if our ethical response to this story is the product of a specific, learned social norm requiring rescue in particular circumstances, then their inference to a general reason or value may be unjustified.[17]

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15 This is E.F. Carritt's example, as quoted in John Rawls, 'Two Concepts of Rules,' *Philosophical Review* **64** (1955) 3-32.

16 We think strategically about *how* to fulfill an ethical duty. If my brother has a drinking problem and comes to me for money, I may decide not to give it to him because he will use it on drink and thus harm himself, a form of consequentialist reasoning (this is an example suggested by a referee for *CJP*). But this reasoning does not qualify my familial duties; it clarifies them and guides me in fulfilling them. Consequentialist reasoning also may decide among conflicting duties; if, while driving five injured people to a hospital, I must ignore a drowning child, then I may do so. This pits rescue against rescue.

17 The view of ethical life developed in the next few pages is broadly Darwinian and only minimally functionalist. That is, our norms arise in the natural history of human society. They vary from society to society; yet some are nearly universal. I say 'minimally functionalist' because, from a Darwinian view, whatever norms have survived in the natural history of society must have enabled some people to survive in those social groups. This is far from suggesting any 'maximizing' conception of our norms such as rule utilitarianism, which would imply that the norms are (or should be) maximally beneficial. But we can expect them to make some sort of sense in enabling people to cooperate socially, thus 'minimally functionalist.' The relevance of these observations to moral philosophy is this: because ethical intuitions derive from social norms that arise in the history of a particular society, we should not expect that our ethical beliefs signify that we accept general values or principles.

Our response to examples of rescue is the result of a social norm. Compare norms of rescue with norms for care of children. All human societies have norms governing responsibility for the day-to-day care of children. Without some such norm, a society could hardly be viable. But different societies assign that responsibility in different ways. We share a norm that the biological parents are responsible for their children, absent arrangements to transfer that responsibility to someone else. We internalize that norm, and that internalization gives rise to strong ethical emotions about child neglect. In some societies, some responsibilities we assign to the male parent are assigned to a maternal uncle. Many societies spread these responsibilities more broadly than among the two parents. Thus from the ethical universal (assuming it is one) that children should be cared for we cannot derive any specific norm regarding *who* should care for them. And from our indignation (assuming we share it) at the neglect of children by their biological fathers, we cannot infer a universal norm that fathers should care for their children.

Parallel points can be made about duties to aid those affected by calamity. Human life will always contain a residue of unpredictability. Calamities will happen; emergencies will arise. So we will likely have norms about who must come to the aid of the victims. In many societies these duties are confined to kin and group members. Strangers who experience calamity may be 'fair game,' people to take advantage of.[18] These ethical norms work well enough in small societies where almost all of one's contacts are with group members bound to oneself by specific responsibilities.

But, as Clyde Kluckhohn has noted, 'In a large, complex society ... where people come and go and business and other dealings must be carried on by people who never see each other, it is functionally necessary to have abstract standards.'[19] Well, perhaps not 'necessary,' but it

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In calling my views 'Darwinian' the reader should not infer that I am sympathetic with the recent biodeterminist speculations variously called 'sociobiology' or more recently 'evolutionary psychology.' I find most of those speculations unwarranted. A Darwinian natural history of culture was articulated thirty years ago in Alexander Alland, Jr., *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 2nd ed. (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books 1973). This approach has been developed more rigorously by Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson, *Culture and the Evolutionary Process* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1985) and in other publications of these two authors. These theories are far from the more fashionable biodeterminism about culture.

18 Marshall Sahlins called this 'negative reciprocity.' See *Stone Age Economics* (New York: Aldine 1972), 195-6.

19 Quoted in Sahlins, 200.

should not surprise us that in societies where we spend much time in the presence of 'strangers' we should have norms that require aid to strangers who suffer unexpected calamity. Such norms should enhance the personal security of *each* member of those societies by assuring each person she will be helped in case of need (a need that could arise for anyone), and this enhanced security should facilitate social cooperation. The exact content of this norm may be in dispute: its application is clearest to cases where calamity is limited to one or a few who confront us immediately and are not responsible for their plight. All these characteristics are present in the story of the drowning child.

Our ethical training includes inculcation of this norm. The parable of the Good Samaritan (in the gospel of Luke) presents this norm as Christian duty. In that parable aid to strangers is presented as an ethical *reform*; it seems that, in the society in which Jesus lived, ignoring the plight of strangers in need was not contrary to the norm 'love your neighbor as yourself,' for strangers were not 'neighbors.' After all, a priest and a Levite passed by the victim.

Most important, if we suppose that the requirement to rescue strangers in emergencies is part of our shared ethical culture, we can explain the strictness of that duty and the absurdity of using speculations about the possible consequences to justify violations of that duty. As we saw, this is characteristic of obligations arising within an ethical practice: we are not allowed to kill another or scapegoat an innocent person because of possible good consequences; we are not absolved of responsibility for caring for our children because doing so may contribute to overuse of the earth's resources. We are required to rescue the child in danger of drowning; speculations about the consequences of this rescue are wildly irrelevant to this requirement. The issue here is a particular child in need, not the problem of child neglect or any other social problem.

While this point is clear, it can be underlined with a story. Libby has been so impressed with the discussion of Singer in her Ethics class, that she has decided to sell her one valuable prized possession, a pair of boots made by a famous artisan, to a collector who will pay her $5,000 for them. Having also read Unger, Libby believes that, by the very most conservative estimates, the $5,000, given to UNICEF, will give twenty infants who would otherwise die the overwhelming probability of living to adulthood in good health and having productive lives (148). Libby puts on the boots for a last time (it takes several minutes to put them on and take them off), and, carrying a spare pair of shoes over her shoulder, walks to the collector's house to sell them. But on the way she encounters a child in imminent danger of drowning in a shallow ornamental pond. If Libby wades in to rescue her, the boots will be spoiled and valueless.

The story highlights the prohibition on consequentialist arguments to justify violating our duties under a norm. Libby must wade in and pull the child out. To let the child drown is ethically grotesque.[20]

In Section IV we noted the non-utilitarian character of duties of rescue, that these duties preclude consequentialist arguments that would qualify them. In this section I have explained why these duties have that character. I have argued that, in general, duties derived from our shared ethical norms cannot be violated on consequentialist grounds. Our current ethical culture requires rescue of strangers in emergency. It does not require relief of the poor. We respond to the story of the endangered child because we feel bound by a relevant norm. It is wrong to infer, as the philanthropists do, a general value or principle from this norm; it is wrong to infer that we *must* accept a norm requiring relief of the poor. But we may wonder why relief of the poor raises different issues from rescue.

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20 I am eliciting the intuitions that are part of our shared ethical culture, not making a practical judgment of my own about what to do. In *Normative Ethics* Kagan points out that common sense morality will require us to spend money on rescue even if that money would do more good spent otherwise (134).

Singer (in correspondence) bites the consequentialist bullet and says that while we would shudder at the sort of person who would walk past the child, she does the right thing. Here again (see note 13) he gives an answer that is wildly at variance with our ethical culture, but since he regards himself as an ethical reformer, that does not bother him. But should it? I think it should because his a-theoretical argument for an obligation to assist appeals to our current ethical culture for its force, not to utilitarianism.

This is Singer's quandary: he is a utilitarian who wishes to use an a-theoretical argument for an obligation to aid victims of absolute poverty; he assumes that this a-theoretical argument is compatible with his commitment to utilitarianism as the fundamental practical imperative. I have argued that it is not, that the logic of the drowning child example at the center of his argument is non-utilitarian. If he embraces his utilitarianism, he undercuts his argument for an obligation to assist.

Cullity (again in correspondence) agrees that Libby should save the child, but writes that his view as developed on 121 of the *Ethics* article acknowledges this. (The reader may judge for herself whether what Cullity says there is sufficient to justify rescuing the child, given the rest of his argument — I doubt it.) Cullity wishes to preserve more of our current ethical culture than Singer does. Still, the argument of this and the previous section rebuts his argument to a general reason to aid others.

## VI More About Rescue and Poverty

### *1. Why Pervasive And Chronic Poverty Raises Issues Of Causation*

Why would there be an important distinction between emergencies and pervasive and chronic social ills? Henry Sidgwick, while acknowledging that governments in 'modern civilized communities' may have a duty to relieve the destitute, argued that private individuals had a clear duty only to aid the victims of unforeseeable events, not a general duty to aid the poor. His reasons are instructive. He says that if someone is victimized by a 'sudden calamity that could not have been foreseen,' then I have a duty to aid him. But if 'the calamity might have been foreseen and averted by proper care, my duty becomes more doubtful: for then by relieving him I seem to be in danger of encouraging improvidence in others.' More generally, he writes, 'the happiness of all is on the whole most promoted by maintaining in adults generally (except married women[!]) the expectation that each will be thrown on his own resources for the supply of his own wants.' So, he concludes, 'it is not right for every rich man to distribute his superfluous wealth among the poor.'[21]

Sidgwick proposes that for the most part adult males can, by foresight and effort, insure an adequate existence to themselves and their families and hence are responsible for their own fate; poverty is primarily the result of the failings of the poor adult males, a view that is still common.[22] If so, then it may well be that even aiding the *children* of such men will

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21 *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett 1981), 436. The passages quoted do not occur in this order, but I have not distorted Sidgwick's intent. Sidgwick does *not* conclude that the state should not help the poor whose plight might have been prevented by foresight; rather he says that the utilitarian problem is to balance the direct good of relieving suffering against the indirect evil of encouraging improvidence.

22 I impute to Sidgwick the view that the plight of the poor is primarily a result of their own failings for the following reason. He gives us two alternative reasons that people might be poor: that their plight is the result of unforeseeable calamity; and that it is the result of events that 'might have been foreseen and averted by proper care.' He says that in the former case, our utilitarian duty to aid is clear but in the latter it is doubtful. He concludes that it is not right for each rich man to distribute his superfluous wealth to the poor. So, it seems, he believes that most poverty is preventable by proper foresight.

As to the utilitarian duties of the more affluent, at the end of *The Methods of Ethics* Sidgwick reverses himself implying that there is pervasive suffering that is not best neglected (thus creating a huge philanthropist duty for the utilitarian). See 502-3 and for discussion my 'Self and Others in Bentham and Sidgwick,' *History of Philosophy Quarterly* **3** (1986) 437-48.

do more harm than good, leading them to conclude that they do not have to exercise foresight and effort, for their children will be cared for. Hence the best response may be benign neglect from which poor men may draw the proper moral lessons and take appropriate correction. (Sidgwick does not draw these conclusions, but they represent a strand in the reasoning he gives.)

There is much here that is debatable, to say the least. Faced with widespread and chronic poverty and attendant suffering, we seek a cause. Sidgwick locates the cause in the failings of the poor; based on that estimate of the cause, he rejects a norm that would require the rich to give their superfluous wealth for the relief of the poor. There are other views of the causes of and responses to pervasive poverty. Perhaps capitalist society inevitably causes poverty; in response, we might propose private philanthropy and social welfare to provide for the victims. Perhaps short term aid might put people in a position, long term, to prosper independently, as Singer believes. Perhaps, as in Kerala, radical reform governments can provide agricultural services, educational opportunities, food support, and contraceptive assistance that would vastly reduce suffering from poverty. Or, perhaps, if such systems of social support prove so costly that they undermine the competitiveness on world markets of societies that adopt them, the best response might be a wider struggle to end capitalism and replace it with a society that is based on planning for need rather than competition.[23] *Chronic* and *pervasive* problems — because they are chronic and pervasive — cannot be intelligently addressed without discovering their causes and assessing which practical approaches best address them. These inquiries involve issues in economics, social philosophy, sociology, and practical politics.[24]

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23 Unemployment in Kerala is 25%, the highest of any state in India. While unemployment there has historically always been higher, it is possible that the radical reforms in Kerala have raised wage rates and taxes to the point where there is a disincentive for capital investment there, despite the educated workforce. See Richard W. Franke and Barbara H. Chasin, *Kerala: Radical Reform as Development in an Indian State*, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: Food First 1994), 67-70 for a discussion of the problem of unemployment. The suggestion that radical reform has led to capital flight or avoidance of Kerala is mine, not theirs. But in a recent article about Kerala in *The Chicago Tribune* Uli Schmetzer writes, 'Despite its educated working class and functional infrastructure, foreign investors shun the communist stronghold, afraid of its militant unions and Marxist ideology. Investors prefer cheap labor markets elsewhere' (*Tribune* for 16 January 2000, Section 1, p. 6: '''The Other India'' Harvests Fruits of a Communist Rule').

24 We must be prepared as well to answer arguments that our knowledge is so limited

Our ethical culture deals differently with *exceptional* calamity. Generally, when untoward events may affect any of us, we seek their causes in order to prevent them. But, practically speaking, we cannot prevent them all. So all societies contain a *residue* of exceptional events that, for practical purposes, we treat as unforeseeable, perhaps because the costs of foreseeing and preventing them are too great. *Any* of us may sometimes need help from others. So, unsurprisingly, our ethical life contains a norm to deal with this residue of the 'unforeseeable': exceptional events produce limited calamity which can often be effectively remedied by norms requiring individuals to help. In societies where we spend much of our time among 'strangers' it makes sense that strangers who encounter the victims of calamity would be required to help. A norm of rescue to cover the exceptional event, the residue of calamities, does not imply a further norm to deal with pervasive poverty and its effects.

### *2. Why We Have A Norm To Deal With Exceptional Calamity But Not To Deal With Poverty*

Our ethical culture contains a norm requiring us, when confronted by a victim of calamity, to come to that person's assistance; it does not contain a comparable norm requiring assistance to the poor, particularly the poor far away. Why the difference?

The answer is this: the norm of rescue addresses a risk that exists for all of us; in contrast, poverty and the risk of it threaten some much more than others. Marx and Engels argued that in societies divided by class the dominant ethical norms are the norms of the dominant class.[25] Poverty is interwoven into our ethical life, particularly norms defining rights to property. (But this statement can be misleading, as if our ethical life harbors no contradictions.) I will argue in Section VII that poverty makes food production more profitable. That is why we have no norm for eliminating poverty or its effects.

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that any response we attempt may make the problem worse. And if we cannot answer that point of view, we may have to acknowledge that, on grounds yet different from Sidgwick's or the Malthusian's, we need not concern ourselves with trying to help. Really, there are *many* responses that could seem reasonable, given how one understands the world and what acts would lead to what consequences.

25 'But surely *this* comment grounds a criticism of our ethical life! So your views *are* akin to the philanthropists'.' Yes and no. Like them, I am critical of our ethical culture, but for the Marxist the criticism is grounded in (class) interest, not logic or 'morality.' This idea of Marx and Engels is expressed especially in the first hundred pages of *The German Ideology* in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* volume 5 (New York: International Publishers 1976).

We draw lines in other ways as well. While we share a norm of rescue requiring us to aid those we confront directly or requiring the government to aid when the numbers affected are very large (victims of a flood, hurricane, or earthquake), we may draw a line, marked by nationality, about rescuing those who are more distant. The explanation I have suggested for why we have a norm requiring rescue of strangers we confront directly (any of us could need rescue) does not apply to norms relieving poverty or requiring rescue of those more distant.

While all of this may be true, as a sociological explanation, the question may still arise of whether *logically* norms of rescue imply aid to the victims of poverty. Does the logic of morality require the extension of norms of rescue for the exceptional event to chronic and pervasive poverty? It does not; there is nothing in the 'logic' of our ethical culture that requires its extension in any particular way.

In *The Expanding Circle* Singer argued that it is part of the logic of morality to extend the protection of norms from a small group to a larger one (thus undermining national and ethno-centric limitations of our norms);[26] In 'Universalism and Optimism' I pointed out that these arguments of Singer's fail, that from the point of view of the morality of a small group there may be no reason to acknowledge the needs of outsiders.[27]

### *3. It's Not Always 'Either/Or'*

I have, I admit, overdrawn the contrast between foreseeable negative events whose causes we seek in order to prevent them and unforeseeable calamities. We respond to many untoward events by *both* rescuing their victims *and* seeking causes so as to prevent them in the future: as we aid the victims of a flood, we seek the causes of flooding so as to prevent distress. And our understanding of what is an 'unforeseeable residue' shifts over time so that a generation who simply treated auto-related deaths as an unforeseeable residue may be succeeded by a generation who responds with air bags, seat belts, impact-absorbing frames, anti-lock brakes, and tires that resist hydroplaning. Nevertheless the core of the argument remains: there will always be a residue of exceptional unfortunate events that our foresight has failed to prevent, and the exceptionality of emergencies makes it relatively painless to respond to them with a norm of rescue.

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26 *The Expanding Circle* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux 1981)

27 *Ethics* **104** (1994) 536-57, at 546-9

How to address poverty raises complex issues of causation and remedy. Poverty is an issue because our ethical culture fails to prevent it; there is immense misery even if everyone acts decently. The misery that arises from poverty may suggest to some that we need new social norms, new understandings of how we should live together. But which ones? This cannot be decided entirely based on the norms we accept, but requires us to adopt a different form of practical reasoning, estimating the causes of poverty and the most likely means of alleviating or remedying it.

## *4.* Should *We Rescue Victims Of Poverty?*

One may object, 'Must we reason instrumentally about poverty? In addressing suffering from poverty shouldn't we treat its victims as we would someone needing rescue? Instrumental reasoning about how to address poverty diminishes the humanity of its victims. We should help them because they need help, leaving aside issues of whether this is the most effective means of remedying a social problem.'

In reply: duties of rescue arise in a context where we *encounter* (perhaps indirectly) an individual or a limited number of individuals who need rescue; this context *selects* an individual or limited number of individuals for our attention and response. The *exceptionality* of calamity plays an important role in our ethical life. Because we address only the exceptional need, it is possible to treat emergency with a norm that requires us to aid someone we encounter in need of rescue.

In contrast, our awareness of suffering and death from poverty does not select any particular individual for our attention. What vexes writers on this issue is the massive suffering from poverty. If we come to the problem by way of the story of a particular person, we are aware that this story is emblematic of a much larger issue. These observations articulate what it *means* to address absolute poverty and attendant misery.

Granted, we might *select* from the one-third of humanity who are at or below subsistence a family to help, but that would not be addressing poverty. We would be selecting people to help and helping them. I pointed out in Section IV that it is possible to respond to victims of poverty in this way, but that is not responding to poverty.[28]

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28 See above, where I point out that one could respond to the Malthusian that his point about the effects of aid is irrelevant: 'I am not trying to address poverty; the issue is not whether assistance makes poverty worse in the long run. I am only trying to help people who need help.' The philanthropists and others do not respond in this way because they are vexed by the suffering and premature death from poverty.

We could address poverty normatively: we could include as part of our ethical life a norm to devote ten percent of our income to the relief of the poor and regard with scorn and contempt any who failed to do so.[29] Yet such a norm, as a response to poverty, would need to be defended by an argument that it alleviated or reduced poverty. Since the norm is directed toward poverty, the relevant justification is in terms of its effect on poverty, not whether it relieves the suffering of a particular person (in contrast to a case of rescue, there is no particular person we are trying to affect; rather we are addressing poverty). So poverty unavoidably raises the issue whether a proposed response is effective.

### *5. A Summary*

I have argued in the last three sections that it is a fallacy to assimilate the practical logic of our ethical responsibility under a norm to the practical logic of addressing social problems such as poverty. When we are meeting our ethical responsibilities under a norm our behavior is governed by the expectations of ethical conduct that we share with others; these shared expectations constitute the basis on which we live together, and the responsibilities cannot be qualified by speculations about the consequences of doing what we must do. We act as we do because we are bound by ethical norms which simultaneously binds us to others. This ethical culture is the source of our strong intuition about our duty to save a child we encounter endangered in a shallow pond.

Widespread poverty means that there is massive human misery that is not adequately addressed by our *shared* ethical understandings. To address poverty is to try to change a bad situation. The fallacy of philanthropy assimilates the problem of how to address massive absolute poverty to our obligations under a norm. This is incorrect.

### *6. Preface to Section VII: Why Address Poverty?*

In Section VII I will be arguing that the fallacy of philanthropy is harmful to the project of putting an end to hunger and other effects of extreme poverty. But since (as I have argued) our current ethical understandings do not require us to act, why should anyone care about hunger? In a series of essays written over the past fifteen years I have developed an account of practical motivation, centered on our relationships to others,

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29 Singer offers this as a proposal at the end of Chapter 8 of *Practical Ethics*. In 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality,' he cites St. Thomas to the effect that there is a Christian duty to give superfluous wealth away to the poor.

divided roughly into two sorts. In my mind, the demarcation is between the ethical and the political, the ethical grounded in shared norms governing our relationships with and responsibilities to others, the political grounded in conceptions of history which see our long term relationships with others evolving in different ways. On my view, the political is hegemonic over the ethical.[30]

In 'How Morality Works and Why It Fails' I developed an account of normative motivation of the sort I described in Section V;[31] we develop an identity through norms defining what it means to us to be a decent person, a good teacher or philosopher, a responsible parent or loving spouse. Normative identities, when socially shared, represent standards of conduct by which a group defines ethical decency in general or of a particular sort (a good teacher). Practical behavior motivated in this way tends to be conservative (this idea is to be qualified shortly).

On the other hand, there is consequentialist motivation, the motivation to govern our lives by an imperative to contribute as much as possible to a better future; I defended the integrity of this motivation in this journal over ten years ago in 'Consequentialism and History.'[32] I argued (against the eviscerating consequentialisms of Derek Parfit and Peter Railton) that a robust and demanding consequentialist imperative made sense on two conditions: (1) we must not see our devotion to others as 'do-gooding' merely for others; rather we must conceive our lives and interests as bound up with those of others.[33] (2) We must be confident in our own ability to contribute to significant positive change. When these

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30 For the point about hegemony see 'Can a Partisan Be a Moralist?' *American Philosophical Quarterly* **27** (1990) 71-9, explicitly at 77 but implicitly throughout.

31 Cited in note 14. Normative identities and the problems and changes in them are also described in an unpublished essay 'Can We Overcome Racial Division? On Group Identity and Self-Interest' (available from me electronically). The rationality of changing from a parochial group-centered identity to a more universal normative conception is discussed in 'Universalism and Optimism' (see note 27 for reference). The connection to Hegel is developed in 'Hegel on History and Freedom' in Thomas Powers and Paul Kamolnick, eds., *From Kant to Weber: Freedom and Culture in Classical German Social Theory* (Melbourne, FL: Krieger 1999).

32 See note 2 for reference.

33 This idea is further developed in relation to a Marxist conception of history in 'Marxism and Rationality,' *American Philosophical Quarterly* **26** (1989) 53-62. The paper on racial division (note 31) implicitly criticizes the too narrow notion of self-interest that was assumed in 'Marxism and Rationality' and 'Consequentialism and History,' arguing that the notions of the self and hence of self-interest are normative; it attacks the Hobbesian idea of morality depending on interest, arguing that interest itself is a normative conception.

two conditions are met, when we see that what affects others affects us and that our actions can make a difference, it is possible to motivate a demanding conception of a consequentialist life. It makes sense to move beyond a more conventional ethic to a life and identity governed by a form of consequentialism.

I now believe that these two sorts of motivation are themselves intertwined: consequentialist motivation is more easily sustained when one is part of a group with shared norms of acting to change our social world and where those norms become part of an identity by which a person (and others who share the same vision) define the best life.

So I will assume these points here. I will assume a view of history by which I see my own interests as bound up with those of the victims of absolute poverty. I will assume confidence in my own ability to contribute to an end to poverty and to a world in which all of us can flourish in a more fully human way. If I am thus moved to put an end to suffering from poverty, is the philanthropist assimilation helpful or harmful to that cause?

## VII Why the Fallacy of Philanthropy is Harmful

Cullity's and Unger's defenses of Singer's argument show that the analogy between duties of rescue and the problems of poverty continues to exert a strong hold. I have argued that the analogy is incorrect. Still, an incorrect argument might recommend a good practice. What is the harm in the analogy?

In addressing *how* we should respond to poverty, the logic of the philanthropist assimilation is to say, 'Drowning? Pull her out!' so 'Hungry? Feed her!' Just as it is irrelevant to our duty how she came to be in that pond, so how she came to be hungry is irrelevant to our duty to help. As a duty of rescue, our focus should be on saving people here and now. Accordingly philanthropists propose giving to relief organizations. The *causes* of hunger are slighted. Proposals attacking these causes are not made.[34]

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34 An objection: 'But surely you can't blame that on the philanthropist assimilation. You just admitted that we can do both, rescue victims of a flood while addressing the causes of flooding.' In reply: The task of 'rescue' (relief of poverty) is so immense (and by the philanthropist assimilation it has priority) that the philanthropist never gets around to addressing causes. Ironically, the exception is the discussion of Malthusianism, one of the more implausible accounts of the cause of poverty.

To address hunger we would do better to move beyond the proposals of assistance implicit in the philanthropist analogy. According to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization more than 800 million people world-wide lack adequate food, falling 100-400 kilocalories short of their needs.[35] Yet every year food production increases faster than population; from 1970 to 1990 the total food available per person rose by 11% while, outside China, the number of hungry rose by 11%.[36] How are we to understand this situation and possible remedies?

One possibility is that the organization of the production and distribution of food is *creating* hunger;[37] we could investigate how that system creates hunger in order to intervene to prevent this. This is a generally ignored approach to hunger. Alternatively, we might regard as given the overall organization of the production and distribution of food; we look for ways within that social organization to improve the prospects of the disadvantaged. Virtually the entire philosophical literature on hunger is of this sort.[38]

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35 This is from FAO press releases of September and October 2000 available at www.fao.org/WAICENT/OIS/PRESS_NE/PRESSENG/2000/pren0050.htm and /pren0056.htm.

36 Frances Moore Lappé, Joseph Collins, and Peter Rosset, *World Hunger: Twelve Myths* 2nd ed. (New York: Grove Press 1998), 61. It should be noted that the world's population increased more than 11% in these years, so the percentage who are hungry declined. According to the FAO the total number of hungry may have dropped in the late 1990s: they report 828 million hungry in the developing nations 1994-96, 792 million hungry in the developing nations 1996-98. Nevertheless, the huge gap between food production growth and any marginal declines in hunger remains.

37 In 'Poverty and Food: Why Charity is not Enough' in Brown and Shue (see note 13 for reference), Thomas Nagel writes that hunger is the result of a 'system of political and economic institutions,' a remark congenial to the suggestion here.

The discussion that follows is about capitalism and access to food, food being the main topic of philosophical discussion. But poverty creates other devastations, most recently the AIDS pandemic of subsaharan Africa. Capitalist social relations have disrupted traditional family life and sexual practices through the growth of migrant labor, which typically separates men from their wives. This migrant labor system is deeply implicated in African AIDS. So the discussion that follows here about capitalism and food could be supplemented by a discussion about capitalism and AIDS.

38 Nagel's 'Poverty and Food' suggests a redistributive tax to guarantee a social minimum internationally (57-8). Thomas W. Pogge's 'A Global Resource Dividend' in *Ethics of Consumption: The Good Life, Justice, and Global Stewardship*, David A. Crocker and Toby Linden, eds. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield 1998) develops that idea, calling it a 'dividend' (to imply a right to the wealth from resources) and

But if the forces creating hunger can be stopped, then to limit ourselves to addressing their effects without addressing these forces themselves is like trying to bail the boat without fixing the leak. The fallacy of philanthropy is one reason (among many) for the one-sidedness of philosophical discussion of hunger. Focusing our attention on immediate help, the analogy tends to obscure that the ordinary workings of capitalist markets create and exacerbate poverty. So the fallacy of philanthropy narrows the discourse about hunger. It lets capitalism off the hook.

Capitalist social relations in producing food deprive huge numbers of the world's urban and particularly rural populations of entitlements to food and lead to hunger.[39] This analysis of the causes of hunger suggests an alternative: entitlements to food must not be subject to market forces; all people must have an absolute entitlement to food.

### *1. State-level Society And Entitlements To Food*

In his classic *The Evolution of Political Society* Morton Fried defines a 'stratified society' as 'one in which members of the same sex and equivalent age status do not have equal access to the basic resources that sustain life.'[40] Fried argues that stratified societies are almost always at the state level of organization; the exceptions are societies that are in transition to becoming states.[41] The reason, as has been often noted, is that to deprive

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suggesting that it not be considered *re*distributive but rather part of fundamental just distribution. But neither Nagel nor Pogge consider undoing the economic order creating poverty.

This omission is crucial. The norms of that economic order construct their own conceptions of justice and injustice. If the norms governing market transactions create poverty as a perfectly 'just' outcome of their own working, then one might wonder how readily people will agree that the creation of poverty is an injustice. By the lights of those norms taxes are a seizure of someone's property and the resources are already privately owned; any dividends should go to those resources' owners. Hence, the distribution proposed by Nagel or Pogge is, I am suggesting, based on norms that are at war with one another. This conflict of norms makes it unlikely that their proposals will be persuasive.

39 Amartya Sen has used the word 'entitlements' in this broad sense; see, for example, his *Poverty and Famines* in *The Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze Omnibus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999).

40 *The Evolution of Political Society* (New York: Random House 1967), 186

41 Since Fried wrote there has been much more written specifically on societies on the cusp of statehood. See, for example, Timothy Earle, *How Chiefs Come to Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1997). Some of my unpublished work (available from me electronically: <p-gomberg@csu.edu>) analyzes the instability of chiefdoms on the cusp of exploitation and command.

some members of society of the means of subsistence requires the centralization and concentration of force, the vast inequalities of military and political power that are the hallmark of societies at the state level of organization. In contrast, in societies without states, it tends to be the case that all have entitlements to the means to obtain food, and what food there is often distributed so that all eat.[42]

The state can change that so that some bury rice while neighbors die of hunger. Capitalist markets, which are the focus of the discussion here, arise only in the context of states which can secure private property (especially in land, where property is often very concentrated in a few hands) and exchange. As capitalist social relations have spread over the past several hundred years and particularly in the most recent period, large numbers lose entitlements to the means of producing food and often entitlements to food.

## *2. Capitalism And Entitlements*

Before the penetration of European colonialism, many societies in Africa, the Americas, and Asia retained traditional entitlements to food and to the means to produce it: land typically belonged to the village (or kin group) as a whole and was allocated to families in the village or lineage for their use. Land was not alienable, as it becomes in capitalist society. Families had no more land than they could work. Landlessness was not a severe problem. Production for subsistence or for local markets predominated.

As capitalist social relations penetrate agriculture, land becomes alienable, and food becomes a commodity. Growing percentages of the population become dispossessed of land as ownership becomes concentrated. Production is increasingly of cash crops for international markets, markets increasingly dominated by agricultural conglomerates. 'Labor redundancy,' that is, a growing surplus of agricultural labor, weakens the position of rural workers to bargain for wages or other entitlements. Overplanting of the world's lands to global crops further reduces the bargaining power of both rural laborers and small planters. Those who are enriched by these processes become increasingly determined to defeat resistance to their sources of wealth. In these circumstances, food

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42 Here again there is a much literature, but a classical argument on redistribution is Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, especially the essay 'On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange.'

and other commodities flow toward money, not toward hungry mouths. The central entitlement to food (and to everything else) becomes money. In sum: in non-state societies people eat even if they have little else; in capitalist societies that lack guarantees of basic needs, extreme poverty typically entails hunger.

### *a. Loss of entitlement to land*

In capitalist society land is alienable. As a result entitlement to land, particularly the most productive land, is confined to ever smaller numbers. Moreover, an ever smaller percentage of the world's population works the land. As recently as four hundred years ago, in every substantial region of the earth the majority of people worked the land or lived in close proximity to those who did. Now food producers are a small part of the populations of the industrialized countries. In the global South and in East Asia, though these areas are still overwhelmingly rural, the process of depeasantisation is being compressed into a much shorter time frame.[43] Modernization of agriculture is driving even more from the countryside. Traditional entitlements to food that derive from control of land are abolished.

Of the 1.1 billion people who work in agriculture, 500 million workers have no land or insufficient land to support themselves and consequently work for wages. When poor farmers sell land in desperate times they decrease resources for the future, concentrating land ownership and reducing entitlement to land. (A Ugandan farmer explains her accumulation of land: 'The 1980 famine helped. People were in need. For the first time they were willing to sell land, cows — things they would not dream of selling in normal times.') The Green Revolution and other high technology changes in agriculture have pushed out smaller and poorer farmers who cannot compete in applying expensive inputs and as grain prices decline. Food aid itself often forces down grain prices and drives out small farmers, creating more poverty in the long run. As money comes to mediate all food relations, landlessness increasingly means poverty and hunger.[44]

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43 Philip McMichael, *Development and Social Change* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press 1996), 95 & 179-80; also Enzo Mingione and Enrico Pugliese, 'Rural Subsistence, Migration, Urbanization, and the New Global Food Regime' in *From Columbus to Con-Agra*, Alessandro Bonanno, Lawrence Busch, William H. Friedland, Lourdes Gjouveia, and Enzo Mingione, eds. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press 1994), 52-68

44 On the percentage without land see Lappé et al., 66 and International Labor

### *b. From subsistence crops to cash crops*

In the early 1980s industrial countries imported ninety percent of horticultural products; the former 'Third World' countries shipped 30-40 percent.[45] Some recent Brazilian history shows how food crops for local consumption have been replaced by cash crops going to global markets and how people are affected by this replacement. In the 1970s the expansion of export crops (primarily soybeans for cattle feed but also oranges, sugar cane [for ethanol], and tobacco) far outstripped basic food crops. While domestic food production covered 67.7% of the crop land in 1970, by 1980 it covered 59.2%. From 1977-1984 the annual growth rate of sugar cane production for domestic ethanol use was 7.8%; export crops expanded at 2.6%/year while food crops *declined* 1.9%/year. Inequality grew; land tenure become increasingly concentrated. Modern farming displaced peasants as the agricultural workforce fell from 60% of the population in 1950 to 30% in 1980. By the mid 1990s Brazil had become the world's third largest agricultural exporter; the area planted to soybeans had grown 37% from 1980 to 1995 while the production of rice had fallen 18% over the same period. While a third of Brazilians were hungry in the 1960s, by the 1980s two thirds were hungry.[46]

While Brazil is an extreme case, the same story can be told throughout Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia: as production of crops for local consumption is replaced by cash crop farming, agricultural export is combined with domestic hunger. In the less developed countries, 78% of the children under five who are malnourished live in countries with food surpluses.[47]

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Organization 1996 press release for report *Agricultural Wage Workers: The Poorest of the Rural Poor* ILO/96/26 at www.ilo.org. The quote from the Ugandan farmer is from Lappé et al., 17. On the effect of the Green Revolution and food aid see Lappé et al., 58-65, 129-43; McMichael, 68-71. The most powerful attack on food aid is Michael Maren, *The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity* (New York: The Free Press 1997).

45 Africa ships to Europe not only fruits and vegetables, beverages, timber, sugar cane, peanuts, hemp, and cotton, but also flowers. See Barbara Dinham and Colin Hines, *Agribusiness in Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press 1984), 30-3; William H. Friedland, 'The New Globalization: The Case of Fresh Produce' in Bonanno et al., 214-17.

46 See David Barkin, Rosemary L. Batt, and Billie R. DeWalt, *Food Crops vs. Feed Crops: Global Substitution of Grains in Production* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner 1990), 43-9 and Lappé et al., 110.

47 Barkin et al. detail this process for Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Argentina, Peru,

### *c. Agro-conglomerates, labor redundancy, and overproduction of crops*

Changes in power are part of the dynamic of hunger. Capitalist agriculture concentrates capital in food storage, transportation, processing and packaging, and marketing; this concentration shifts power away from the worker and producer toward large agro-conglomerates such as Cargill, Continental Grain, ADM, ConAgra, and Tyson (these are grain and feed firms; other agricultural products [fruits, vegetables, coffee, timber, fibers] would generate a different list). Excess capacity for most global crops develops, and bargaining leverage shifts from producer to agro-conglomerates.[48]

The effects can be catastrophic when commodity prices collapse. In 1994 Rwanda suffered horrible ethnic cleansings. The political background and causes were complex. But there was also an underlying economic crisis. In 1989 U.S. coffee traders engineered the failure of a system of coffee quotas that maintained prices, and prices fell by over half (in Rwanda roughly 70% of rural households produced coffee); by 1992 coffee prices were 75% below the 1986 level. In the words of Michel Chossudovsky, 'When coffee prices plummeted, famines erupted throughout the Rwandan countryside. According to World Bank data, the growth of GDP per capita declined from 0.4% in 1981-86 to -5.5% in the period immediately following the slump in the coffee market (1987-91).' In 1990 a civil war broke out, and the country became increasingly dependent on foreign loans. A World Bank structural adjustment then imposed a 50% devaluation of the Rwandan franc in 1990 and a second devaluation in 1992. The devaluations led to hyper-inflation which further damaged the situation of poor Rwandans: public services collapsed,

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Egypt, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia, and others. The figure on undernourished children and food surpluses is from Lappé et al., 9.

48 On the grain conglomerates see William D Heffernan and Douglas H. Constance, 'Transnational Corporations and the Globalization of the Food System' in Bonanno et al., 29-51. On the contract or 'outgrower' system where local small farmers retain title to land while power and consequent wealth go to agricultural corporations see Dinham and Hines, 31 and Lappé et al., 112. Contract systems also enable compliance with land reforms laws while the essence does not change.

Part of agricultural overproduction is the substitution of one crop for another, for example, the substitution of corn sweeteners for sugar cane and of enzyme-engineered 'cocoa butter equivalents' for cocoa. See Walden Bello, *Dark Victory: The United States, Structural Adjustment and Global Poverty* (London: Pluto Press 1994), 25.

malnutrition skyrocketed, malaria spread. 'Rapid impoverishment of the population radicalized ethnic relations.' While there is no simple account of the causes of the Rwandan catastrophe of 1994, the economic collapse, as a result of a world glut of coffee and mass dependence on coffee as a cash crop, was integral to it.[49]

As farming becomes 'rationalized,' the need for farm labor declines, creating a 'relative surplus population,' or 'redundant' population. In addition, the oversupply of agricultural commodities on world markets makes small producers everywhere vulnerable and tends to drive them out. Both processes, part of the penetration of capitalist social relations into rural societies globally, create huge inequalities of power between small farmers and agricultural workers, on the one hand, and, on the other, the conglomerates that dominate so much of storage, transportation, trade, and marketing of agricultural products. Both lead to rural unemployment and to migration to cities and to other countries. These unemployed and displaced people are often hungry.

### *d. Capitalism and hunger: A summary*

The remarkable thing about capitalist social relations is that they produce so much food and so much hunger at the same time. There have probably been periods and societies that have created hunger for a greater percentage of their people, but never before has so much hunger existed in a world with so much surplus food, where the production of food is growing faster than population. In 1995 India exported $625 million worth of wheat and flour and $1.3 billion in rice; 200 million Indians are hungry. Brazil exported $13 billion worth of food in 1994; 70 million Brazilians are hungry.[50]

We may regard the story of Brazil, told above, as the core of my argument: successful capitalism — creating immense wealth and food — creates poverty and hunger. The tremendous wealth of the agro-conglomerates and the large growers is possible because so many are so poor, because agricultural labor is so poorly paid; it is possible to pay these laborers so little partly because there is such a huge army of even more desperate workers — the poorest, most destitute, the most hungry — who are eager to take their jobs. Because the norms that create poverty

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49 The story of Rwanda is told in Lappé et al., 21-3 and more fully in Michel Chossudovsky, *The Globalisation of Poverty: Impacts of IMF and World Bank Reforms* (Penang, Malasia: Third World Network 1997), 111-20. The quote from Chossudovsky is from 115. The second quote is from Lappé et al., 23.

50 Lappé et al., 9-10

are not only legal and economic but also ethical, poverty is woven into the ethical life of capitalist societies.

### *3. So What Should We Do To Combat Hunger?*

State level societies in general and capitalist society in particular undermine traditional entitlements to land and food, thus creating the problems of hunger and absolute poverty in their current form. Specifically, the ordinary workings of markets create poverty and make entitlement to food depend on money (these ordinary workings have been amplified and accelerated by state and IMF/World Bank interventions).[51] Moreover, those who benefit materially from this situation are entrenched, powerful, and resistant to change.[52] So if we wish to address poverty, and specifically hunger, what should we do? How can we change people's entitlements to food?

The considerations of the last few pages should be sufficient to raise the *possibility* that the best response to extreme poverty is to attack the capitalist institutions that create and recreate it, to put an end to market institutions that systematically deprive people of entitlements to food, to put in their place social understandings and relationships that put the fundamentals of human well-being outside the forces of the market.[53] To

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51 For the story of Structural Adjustment Programs imposed by the IMF and World Bank see Bellow, *Dark Victory*; Chossudovsky, *The Globalisation of Poverty*; and Biplab Dasgupta, *Structural Adjustment, Global Trade, and the New Political Economy of Development* (London: Zed Books 1998). These books document the devastating effect of structural adjustment, but the argument here is that it just accelerates processes that are already at work as a result of ordinary market capitalism.

52 Angus Wright's *The Death of Ramon Gonzalez: The Modern Agricultural Dilemma* (Austin: University of Texas Press 1990) is useful for its many interviews with scientists, government officials, and businessmen, giving a flavor of how the actors in contemporary agriculture think. Perhaps most striking are a few pages where he describes an evening he and a reporter for the *Wall Street Journal* spent as guests of a grower and his associates from the Culiacan Valley, an area of intense cultivation for export. One of the businessmen became angry and defensive, challenging the host, 'you don't understand about these bastards [the guests].' Wright was asked about the reporter, 'Where did you get this Jewish prick?' One businessman asked, 'Aren't you afraid to come down here where we kill gringos who get in our way?' then added, 'No, don't worry, we're not going to kill you' (188-9). But those of us who lived through the Vietnam War are aware that there can be powerful and brutal resistance to social reform, including land reform that would break up large holdings.

53 We could go further than the text proposes; we could put *all* entitlements to material goods outside the framework of the market, indeed make all material entitlements

do this would require a struggle against the institutions that subject entitlement to food to money and market relationships; it would require a 'common struggle' approach, rather than doing for others.

The alternatives — whether micro-finance, humanitarian relief, or radical reform — leave access to food under the control of markets. These alternatives try to enhance entitlements to food within capitalist social relations. Such efforts leave people highly vulnerable to hunger because they leave intact the very forces creating poverty and hunger (as we saw in the case of Rwanda). A modern social organization, like traditional ones, can create absolute entitlements to food and water: no one eats unless everyone does, and if there is not enough, then we share what there is according to need.

Of course, our period is skeptical of large scale solutions to social problems. The failures of the socialist and communist movements of the twentieth century have left many believing that only small scale, local responses can be constructive. This is the essence of the politics of postmodernism. But note two things: first, it is not obvious what lessons are to be drawn from the failures of the radical egalitarian experiments of the twentieth century.[54] Second, there is evidence that such radical interventions are promising. From the time of the 1949 revolution China adopted methods of increasing food production, sharing what was produced, and maintaining a high level of rural health. These led to large gains in life expectancy. During the years of the Great Leap Forward in China there was a famine (1958-61) that may have cost twenty-three million lives.[55] India, which never broke from capitalist relations in

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independent of individual effort. For some defense of this see Progressive Labor Party, *Road to Revolution IV* (Brooklyn, NY: Progressive Labor Party 1982 [GPO Box 808, Brooklyn, NY 11202]; also available at www.plp.org).

54 Many believe that the history of the twentieth century shows that radical alternatives to capitalist social relations are hopeless. Here the literature is huge, ranging from abstract arguments from the tradition of Austrian economics that planned economies are hopelessly inefficient to more concretely grounded assessments that planned economies do not respond to human needs to arguments that any effort to plan out human social relations slights the real needs of real people. For an alternative assessment of the experience of twentieth century socialism, one that holds out the prospect that humans can, in a modern society, organize direct relationships of mutual regard and responsibility, see *Road to Revolution IV* and *Road to Revolution III* (Brooklyn, NY: Progressive Labor Party 1971); available online at www.plp.org.

55 Xizhe Peng, 'Demographic Consequences of the Great Leap Forward,' *Population and Development Review* **13** (1987) 639-70 contains this estimate of excess mortality. Peng develops some of the factors that may have led to a collapse of grain produc-

producing and distributing food, has avoided famine but harbors chronic hunger along with many efforts at combating the effects of hunger on the poor. Which country has fared better? Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen write, 'India seems to manage to fill its cupboard with more skeletons every eight years than China put there in its years of shame.'[56] So we should take seriously as a solution to hunger large scale interventions to remove food from the influence of markets.

The fight to end hunger is, in part, a fight for power. Earlier, when discussing stratified societies, we noted that norms that deprive people of entitlements to food require, to enforce these norms, concentration of political and military power, the power of the state. Defeating capitalist social relations that deprive 800 million of entitlement to sufficient food entails defeating the state powers that sustain capitalist norms. But this way of looking at the problem is virtually absent from the philosophical literature.

The purpose of this section has been to argue that the fallacy of philanthropy is harmful. The philanthropist assimilation of problems of poverty to duties of rescue rivets attention on saving the victims. Thus it tends to deflect attention away from investigations of the institutional causes of hunger and from practical proposals that would attack those institutions. In these pages I have indicated some of the effects of capitalist social relations in the production and distribution of food. I have suggested that it is profoundly harmful to accept these. I hope to have shown that anti-capitalist approaches to hunger are plausible enough that any approach which short-circuits or limits discussion of them is harmful. The fallacy of philanthropy tends to limit discussion of these radical alternatives. For that reason and because there are, I believe, more effective approaches, it is harmful.

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tion in China during those years. The Great Leap Forward was not a single unified social experiment. It contained both egalitarian elements (distribution according to need on large communes) and elements oriented toward expansion of industrial production. (Peng cites, for example, the transfer of a large number of workers from agricultural to industrial production.) I believe that a close examination of the evidence would show that the latter were implicated in the grain shortages, not the former.

56 Drèze and Sen, *Hunger and Public Action* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989), 215

## VIII Expanding the Discourse

When our actions are required by a norm of rescue our ethical culture prohibits us from responding, 'The issue here is how this emergency arose; therefore, I will devote my efforts to seeking the causes of such emergencies in order to prevent them.' So the philanthropist assimilation short-circuits the deepest political analyses of the causes of poverty. It causes us to take for granted the context of social relations that *create* poverty and inequality. It promotes political quietism. It shifts our focus from political, social, and economic issues to abstract philosophical argument, implying that we have a moral obligation to rescue the victims of poverty.

To this someone may reply that we can do *both*: save the victims and seek solutions that would prevent hunger.[57] I have argued that the hunger of 800 million people derives from social relations that create poverty. Even the famines that break out continuously in one place or another are occurring in societies that are exporting food or other agricultural commodities. Let me assume that effective actions aimed at defeating the large scale causes of hunger are possible. Whatever money we devote to relief of famine or hunger is money that we do not devote to putting an end to the social relations that create hunger; whatever time we spend in activities of famine or hunger relief is time taken away from addressing large scale causes. That is, both projects, relief and prevention, are so huge that in doing more of one we do less of the other. In addressing poverty these are *competing* ways of using our time, energy, and other resources. So the proposal 'do both' is not a viable way to defend philanthropist duties of rescue. Only under the most unusual circumstances (where the optimal response to poverty was to give some aid but not to devote all one's efforts to giving aid) would it be the case that the best response would be to 'balance' giving aid with addressing the causes of poverty.

The purpose of the argument here is to expand the discourse, in this last instance to point out that we cannot avoid hard thinking about whether rescue of its victims is the best response to hunger. There is no short or simple argument that will resolve the question of what to do.

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57 A suggestion of Cullity's in correspondence. The issue here is different from the one raised in note 34, where we were discussing the implications of the philanthropist assimilation. Here we assume the consequentialist goal of doing the most possible to combat poverty. Should we do both, aid victims and address causes?

The fallacy of philanthropy — its analogy of rescue — does not help. It misleads us.[58]

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58 Seven years ago Shelly Kagan read an ancestor paper and offered extensive (and pretty devastating) criticisms that led to a reformulation of the argument along the lines developed here. Thomas Pogge, Garrett Cullity, Peter Singer, and two reviewers for *CJP* made exhaustive comments that led to many revisions. Peter Unger offered encouragement. John Deigh, Bernard Walker, and Emmett Bradbury commented on earlier drafts. The paper was the subject of a Philosophy Department colloquium at Bowling Green State University; thanks to Marina Oshana, Loren Lomasky, David Copp, Chris Morris, Marvin Belzer, and others there for their hospitality and comments.