

## The Good, the Bad, and the Obligatory

JAMES E. MAHON

*Department of Philosophy, 1879 Hall, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08544, U.S.A.; e-mail: mahon@princeton.edu*

Colin McGinn has argued that ordinary morality requires that each of us be morally perfect.<sup>1</sup> Moral perfection, as defined by McGinn, consists in always doing what is right, where this means always doing what is obligatory, and never doing what is wrong, where this means never doing what is impermissible. Since large feats of self-sacrifice are not obligatory, it follows that moral perfection does not include the performance of large feats of self-sacrifice. Ordinary morality, however, according to McGinn, requires that each of us always do what is obligatory, and never do what is impermissible. Since to do this is to be morally perfect, it follows that ordinary morality requires that each of us be morally perfect.

There are reasons to reject McGinn's definition of moral perfection. In addition to actions that are obligatory and impermissible, there are actions that are neither obligatory nor impermissible, but that are optional. Some optional actions are good to do, and some optional actions are bad to do. McGinn accepts the view that there are actions of these kinds. It is consistent with his account of moral perfection, however, that an agent could always do what is obligatory, and never do what is impermissible, and always do what is optional but bad to do, and never do what is optional but good to do, and still be morally perfect. This is absurd. Hence McGinn's definition of moral perfection must be rejected. In its place we will consider an alternative definition of moral perfection. "Moral perfection" may be defined as always doing what is obligatory, and never doing what is impermissible, and always doing what is optional but good to do, and never doing what is optional but bad to do. On this understanding, McGinn's conclusion that ordinary morality requires that each of us be morally perfect should be rejected. While ordinary morality does require that each of us always do what is obligatory, and never do what is impermissible, ordinary morality only encourages each of us to sometimes do what is optional but good to do, and only discourages each of us from ever doing what is optional but bad to do. Since this falls short of moral perfection, and since in any case this is not something that is required, it follows that ordinary morality does not require that each of us be morally perfect.

## 1. McGinn's Argument

McGinn's argument that ordinary morality requires that each of us be morally perfect may be reconstructed as follows. First, he defines a morally perfect agent, as follows: "An agent is morally perfect iff he always does what is right and never does what is wrong."<sup>2</sup> As his later statements make clear, if doing an action is right, then not doing that action is wrong. Thus, for McGinn, "right" means wrong not to do, or obligatory, and "wrong" means impermissible. According to McGinn, an agent is morally perfect if and only if she always does what is obligatory, and never does what is impermissible. The claim that an agent always does what is obligatory is to be understood as the claim that an agent always performs all obligatory actions that are available to her, and not that every action that she performs is an obligatory action. Secondly, McGinn says that "large feats of heroism or self-sacrifice" such as "giving up my present life to go and work with the poor, going to jail in the cause of animal liberation, offering my vital organs to save the lives of several others" are not actions such that "to do them is right and not to do them is wrong."<sup>3</sup> Large feats of self-sacrifice are not obligatory.

Presumably McGinn also believes that such actions are not impermissible, although he may believe that some large feats of self-sacrifice are impermissible. As he argues elsewhere:

[T]here is no obligation to devote oneself to the relief of suffering one has had no part in producing. . . . Confronted by six people who could use my organs if I were to relinquish them and bid farewell to this life, should I hand them over? Absolutely not, I retort, even though, ranked according to 'comparable moral importance', six lives count for more than one. And the reason is just that I should not regard myself as a means to their ends; my life is not yours to command and control, still less to take.<sup>4</sup>

McGinn switches from claiming that it is not obligatory for someone to hand over his vital organs to save the lives of others, to claiming that it is impermissible for him to hand over his vital organs to save the lives of others, since to do so is make himself solely a means for the ends of others. If a person's handing over his vital organs to save the lives of others is an act of suicide, then anyone who holds that suicide is impermissible will hold that it is impermissible for someone to hand over his vital organs to save the lives of others. However, we may assume that McGinn only wishes only to defend the weaker claim that large feats of self-sacrifice are not obligatory, but are permissible. Hence we may assume that he believes that they are what are sometimes called supererogatory actions, or actions that go "above and beyond" the call of duty.<sup>5</sup>

Another step in McGinn's argument is that, since an agent is morally perfect if and only if she always does what is obligatory, and never does what is impermissible, it follows that an agent may be morally perfect without ever performing a single large feat of self-sacrifice, since none of these actions is obligatory. McGinn also says that "ordinary morality does not oblige me to do these things [large feats of heroism or self-sacrifice]."<sup>6</sup> Again, McGinn would presumably add that ordinary morality does not prohibit each of us from doing them either. Hence, according to McGinn, ordinary morality neither requires nor prohibits each of us from performing large feats of self-sacrifice. Ordinary morality neither requires nor prohibits actions that are neither obligatory nor impermissible.

In addition, McGinn says that "ordinary morality enjoins us always to do the right and refrain from the wrong."<sup>7</sup> To enjoin is to order or command, and as his later statements make clear, McGinn's claim is that ordinary morality requires that each of us always does what is obligatory, and never does what is impermissible. Finally, McGinn says that since an agent is morally perfect if and only if she always does what is obligatory, and never does what is impermissible, where this excludes large feats of self-sacrifice, and since ordinary morality requires that each of us always do what is obligatory, and never do what is impermissible, it follows that "it is actually part of ordinary morality to require each of us to be morally perfect."<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Optional Actions

McGinn's claim that large feats of self-sacrifice are neither obligatory nor impermissible places such actions in a special category of morality. There is no basic category of morality that includes only those actions that are neither obligatory nor impermissible. The category of permissible actions will not do, since the category of permissible actions includes the category of obligatory actions.<sup>9</sup> Instead it is necessary to create the category of optional actions.<sup>10</sup> The category of optional actions is the category of actions that are neither obligatory nor impermissible. To say that an action is optional is also to say that the non-performance of the action is neither obligatory nor impermissible. To say that an action is optional is to say that the non-performance of the action is optional also. Hence, the category of optional actions is the category of actions whose performance is neither obligatory nor impermissible, and whose non-performance is neither obligatory nor impermissible. If large feats of self-sacrifice are neither obligatory nor impermissible, then they are optional.<sup>11</sup> This entails that the non-performance of large feats of self-sacrifice is optional also.

### 3. Optional Actions that are Good to Do

To say that an action is optional is not to say that it is morally indifferent. Some actions that are optional are morally indifferent. But other actions that are optional are not morally indifferent. For example, handing over my vital organs to save the lives of others is optional, but it is not morally indifferent. It is morally significant. It is a large feat of self-sacrifice that greatly benefits others. Large feats of self-sacrifice that greatly benefit others are good to do. People are thanked or praised for their kindness or generosity or courage when they do them. They belong to a sub-category of optional actions, namely, actions that are optional but good to do.

Sometimes we do not perform a large feat of self-sacrifice that greatly benefits others. Let us suppose that Fred does not hand over his vital organs to save the lives of others. We may ask if it is bad for him to not hand over his vital organs to save the lives of others. It is clear that he will not be rebuked or criticized if he does not hand over his vital organs to save the lives of others. Thus it is not bad for him to not hand over his vital organs to save the lives of others. Large feats of self-sacrifice that greatly benefit others are good to do, but they are not bad not to do. Fully specified, the sub-category of optional actions to which large feats of self-sacrifice that greatly benefit others belong is the sub-category of actions that are optional but good to do, but not bad not to do.

This conclusion raises another question. We may ask if large feats of self-sacrifice that are of minor benefit to others are similarly optional but good to do, and not bad not to do. Let us suppose that Fred is a bystander to a car accident in which the victims manage to escape safely. He rushes to one of the burning cars and retrieves one victim's wallet before it is consumed, burning his hand badly in the process. Such an act is one of considerable self-sacrifice, but is of minor benefit to the other person, since everything is the wallet is replaceable. Fred will be thanked or praised for his kindness in retrieving the wallet. He will not, however, be rebuked or criticized if he does not retrieve the wallet. Large feats of self-sacrifice that are of minor benefit to others are also optional but good to do, but not bad not to do. They belong to the same sub-category as large feats of self-sacrifice that greatly benefit others.

We may ask how extensive is the category of actions that are optional but morally significant, insofar as they are good to do. In particular, we may ask if small acts of self-sacrifice that greatly benefit others are optional but good to do, and not bad not to do. Peter Singer has provided an example of a small act of self-sacrifice that greatly benefits another. His example is that of a person wading into a shallow pond, and getting his clothes dirty in the process, in order to save a child who is drowning.<sup>12</sup> According to Singer this small act of self-sacrifice, which greatly benefits another, is obligatory. It is impermissible

not to save the child. There is a problem with Singer's claim, however. We do not normally thank or praise people for doing what is obligatory. We do not normally thank people for telling others the truth. We do not normally thank people for keeping their promises to others. We do not normally thank people for refraining from stealing from others. However, if someone wades into a shallow pond and saves a child from drowning, the person will be thanked and praised for doing this. The person will be, in everyone's eyes, something of a hero. Hence the action is not obligatory.

It is true that we sometimes thank or praise people for doing what is obligatory when such actions are difficult and there is some temptation not to do them. In Singer's example, however, the action is not difficult to perform. The action is supposed to be a small act of self-sacrifice. It is not an example of an action that is obligatory, but difficult to perform, hence praiseworthy. It is an example of an action that is not difficult to perform, but praiseworthy, hence not obligatory. Kant insisted that, although it was obligatory to have the welfare of others as an end, nevertheless any particular act of beneficence towards another person was "*meritorious*" and not "a duty that is owed" to that particular person.<sup>13</sup> Otherwise it would appear that each of us would be obligated to help every single person whom we could possibly help.

Saving the child is not, of course, impermissible. Saving the child is optional. Saving the child is not, however, morally indifferent. The person who saves the child will be thanked and praised. Saving the child is optional but good to do. However, if the person walks on past the pond and the child drowns, the person will be rebuked and criticized for not saving the child. Although it is permissible not to save the child, it is bad not to save the child. Hence, saving the child is good to do, and bad not to do. Saving the child belongs to a different sub-category of optional actions, namely, actions that are optional but good to do, and bad not to do. This sort of action may be called an act of kinship with others. Judith Jarvis Thomson, writing about her example of a boy who is given a box of chocolates and who refuses to give any to his brother, has said that "If the boy refuses to give his brother any, he is greedy, stingy, callous – but not unjust."<sup>14</sup> On the understanding that, if it is not unjust for the boy to not share his chocolates with his brother, it is not obligatory for the boy to share his chocolates with his brother, her claim can be understood as the claim that sharing his chocolates with his brother is optional but good to do, and bad not to do.

The conclusion we reach is that small acts of self-sacrifice that are greatly beneficial to others are optional but good to do, and bad not to do. McGinn accepts this conclusion. Elsewhere he says that in "the context in which a person in front of us is suffering and dying and we can save her by some simple act of generosity – say, by giving her half our dinner. . . I agree that omitting to do this would be monstrous."<sup>15</sup> McGinn does not say that one person omitting to give another starving person half of his dinner is "morally wrong" which

is the terminology he uses in summarizing the argument of Peter Singer, an argument that he rejects.<sup>16</sup> He says that such an omission is “monstrous,” which means that it is very bad, but not impermissible. Insofar as this omission is not wrong, although it is very bad, it follows that giving a starving person half of our dinner is optional but good to do, and bad not to do.

This conclusion raises another question. We may ask if small acts of self-sacrifice that are of minor benefit others are morally significant, insofar as they are good to do, and bad not to do. Let us suppose that Fred gives up his place in a queue at a grocery store to someone else who has only one item to purchase. Such an action is good to do. He will be thanked or praised for doing it. However, such an action is not bad not to do. He will not be rebuked or criticized for not giving up his place in a queue at a grocery store to someone else. Thus small acts of self-sacrifice that are of minor benefit to others are similar to large feats of self-sacrifice that are of major or minor benefit to others. They are optional but good to do, but not bad not to do. A small act of self-sacrifice that is of minor benefit to others is an act of kindness towards others.

In the case of optional actions that are good to do, the greater the self-sacrifice that is involved, and the less the benefit to others that is involved, the more such acts are optional but good to do, but not bad not to do. On the other hand, the less the self-sacrifice that is involved, and the greater the benefit to others that is involved, the more such acts are optional but good to do, and bad not to do. It transpires, then, that there is “a whole realm of actions” that are optional but morally significant, insofar as they are good to do, and that this category is not exhausted by large feats of self-sacrifice.<sup>17</sup> The category of actions that are optional but good to do is very extensive indeed. It ranges from actions that are optional but good to do, but not bad not to do, such as large acts of self-sacrifice that are of major or minor benefit to others, to actions that are optional but good to do, and bad not to do, such as minor acts of self-sacrifice that greatly benefit others.

Given that all actions that are optional but good to do are still optional actions, it follows that, according to McGinn’s account of moral perfection, all of these actions are irrelevant to moral perfection, and none of these actions are required by ordinary morality. It is consistent with McGinn’s account of moral perfection that an agent can be morally perfect without ever performing large feats of self-sacrifice that greatly benefit others, or that are of minor benefit to others, and without ever performing small acts of self-sacrifice that greatly benefit others, or that are of minor benefit to others. According to McGinn’s understanding of ordinary morality, ordinary morality does not require that an agent ever perform large feats of self-sacrifice that greatly benefit others, or that are of minor benefit to others, or small acts of self-sacrifice that greatly benefit others, or that are of minor benefit to others.

#### 4. Optional Actions that are Bad to Do

The conclusion that there are optional actions that are morally significant insofar as they are good to do prompts a further question. We may ask if there are optional actions that are morally significant insofar as they are bad to do. Roderick Chisholm has given the name “offences” to actions of “permissive ill-doing.”<sup>18</sup> Offences, he says, “may be either trifling or villainous (or diabolical).”<sup>19</sup> Offences that are trifling are small acts of selfishness that are of minor cost to others. Let us suppose that Fred hears that pastries are being served before a meeting, and he deliberately arrives early and eats all of the pastries so that there is none left for anyone else. Such an act is of benefit to Fred, but it is not of great benefit to him. Such an act is costly to others, but it is not of great cost to others. It is a small act of selfishness that is of minor cost to others. We may ask if it is impermissible to do this. It appears that it is not. Eating all of the pastries so that there is none left for anyone else is optional. Nevertheless, it is bad to do this. Fred will be rebuked and criticized for doing this.

Importantly, it is not the case that it is good to not eat all of the pastries. Fred will not be thanked or praised for not eating all of the pastries. He is not being generous in not eating all of the pastries. All that he is doing is not being selfish, and he will not be thanked or praised simply for not being selfish. Not being bad is not the same thing as being good. Not being bad is just not being bad. Michael Stocker is wrong, therefore, when he says about offences that “For it seems that if *b* is bad to do,  $\sim b$  must be good to do.”<sup>20</sup> Not eating all of the pastries is not good to do. Eating all of the pastries so that there are none left for anyone else is bad to do, and not good not to do. Minor acts of selfishness belong to a different sub-category of optional actions, namely, actions that are optional but bad to do, and not good not to do.

This conclusion raises a further question. We may ask if large acts of selfishness that are of major cost to others are similarly optional but bad to do, and not good not to do. Let us suppose that Fred is the Chief Executive Officer of a large company, and he fires all of his full-time employees, and replaces them with lowerpaid, part-time employees, and adds the difference to his salary. Such an action is of great benefit to him, and it is also of major cost to others. We may ask if it is impermissible to do this. It appears that it is not. Nevertheless, it is bad to do this. Fred will be rebuked and criticized for doing this. It is an extremely selfish action. Even more than before, this is an action that is optional but bad to do, and not good not to do. This appears to be what Chisholm means by a “villainous (or diabolical)” offence, although some philosophers reject the very possibility of villainous offences.<sup>21</sup> None of these actions are such that they are good not to do. Fred will not be thanked or praised for not firing all of his full-time employees and replacing them with part-time employees and pocketing the difference. All that he is doing is not

being extremely selfish, and he will not be thanked or praised for not being extremely selfish. Not being extremely bad is just not being extremely bad. Hence large acts of selfishness that are of major cost to others belong to the same sub-category of optional actions that are of minor cost to others, namely, actions that are optional but bad to do, and not good not to do.

That still leaves small acts of selfishness that are of major cost to others, and large acts of selfishness that are of minor cost to others. However, these actions also belong to the category of actions that are optional but bad to do, and not good not to do. A small act of selfishness that is of major cost to others, such as refusing to give any of one's water to a person who is dehydrated, is optional but bad to do, and not good not to do. A large act of selfishness that is of minor cost to others, such as the Chief Executive Officer of a successful company giving himself an entire floor for an office and moving his workers into other smaller offices, is also optional but bad to do, and not good not to do. In the case of actions that are optional but bad to do, all such actions are not good not to do. There are no actions that are optional but bad to do that are good not to do. Chisholm is correct when he says that an offence is "something which it would be bad to do and neither good nor bad not to do."<sup>22</sup>

Given that all actions that are optional but bad to do are still optional actions, it follows that, according to McGinn's account of moral perfection, all of these actions are irrelevant to moral perfection, and none of these actions are prohibited by ordinary morality. It is consistent with McGinn's account of moral perfection that an agent can be morally perfect while performing large acts of selfishness that are of major cost to others, or that are of minor cost to others, and while performing small acts of selfishness that are of major cost to others, or that are of minor cost to others. According to McGinn's understanding of ordinary morality, ordinary morality does not prohibit an agent from ever performing large acts of selfishness that are of major cost to others, or that are of minor cost to others, or small acts of selfishness that are of major cost to others, or that are of minor cost to others.

## **5. McGinn and Moral Perfection**

It is now possible to return to McGinn's conclusion that an agent is morally perfect if and only if she always does what is obligatory, and never does what is impermissible. Since this says nothing about actions that are optional, it follows that an agent can be morally perfect if, in addition to always doing what is obligatory, and never doing what is impermissible, she always does what is optional but bad to do, and never does what is optional but good to do. An agent can be morally perfect if, in addition to always doing what is obligatory, and never doing what is impermissible, she always performs large or small acts of selfishness that are of major or minor cost to others,



and never performs large feats of self-sacrifice that are of major or minor benefit to others, or small acts of self-sacrifice that are of major or minor benefit to others. This conclusion, however, is absurd. Since this conclusion follows from McGinn's definition of moral perfection, his definition of moral perfection must be rejected.

A different definition of moral perfection may be proposed. According to our new definition, an agent is morally perfect if and only if she always does what is obligatory, and never does what is impermissible, and always does what is optional but good to do, and never does what is optional but bad to do. The claim that an agent always does what is optional but good to do is to be understood as the claim that an agent always performs all actions that are available to her that are optional but good to do, and not that every action that she performs is optional but good to do. An agent is morally perfect if and only if, in addition to always performing all of those actions that are available to her that are obligatory, and never performing any of those actions that are available to her that are impermissible, she always performs all of those large feats of self-sacrifice that are available to her that are of major or minor benefit to others, and all of those small acts of self-sacrifice that are available to her that are of major or minor benefit to others, and never performs any of those large or small acts of selfishness that are available to her that are of major cost to others, and never performs any of those large or small acts of selfishness that are available to her that are of minor cost to others.

McGinn may reject this definition of moral perfection for the reason that, unlike his own definition, it makes moral perfection unattainable. Although it is possible for an agent to always perform all of those actions available to her that are obligatory, and to never perform any of those actions available to her that are impermissible, and, perhaps, to never perform any of those actions available to her that are optional but bad to do, it is not possible for an agent to always perform all of those actions available to her that are optional but good to do. It is not possible for an agent to always perform all of those large feats of self-sacrifice that are available to her that are of major or minor benefit to others, and all of those small acts of self-sacrifice that are available to her that are of major or minor benefit to others.

Two arguments can be made in defense of the attainableness of moral perfection, as we have defined it. First, by "available to the agent" is meant available to her to perform given her various practical limitations, including her limited knowledge, her inability to be in two places at one time, and her limited resources. It is taken for granted that an agent cannot, for example, benefit everyone else all of the time. She can, however, benefit all of those others it is physically and materially possible for her to benefit, all of the time that it is physically and materially possible for her to spend benefiting others. Second, to say that moral perfection is attainable is to say that it

is attainable in a principle. Moral perfection is not normally attainable in practice, insofar as it is extraordinarily difficult to attain it. However, it is not an objection to a definition of moral perfection to say that it makes it very hard to be morally perfect, even if it is indeed possible in principle to be morally perfect.

McGinn may have an argument that can be given in reply. He may argue that, on our definition, moral perfection is unattainable in principle, since it is either ill defined or transcendent. In his article McGinn considers the standards of perfection involved in the notions of “a perfect dancer and a perfect circle.”<sup>23</sup> He says about the notion of a perfect dancer that it is “not really well-defined. . . . Nobody is a perfect dancer, since it is not clear what this would consist in; people are just better and worse dancers, good or bad ones.”<sup>24</sup> Since it is ill defined, it is unattainable. Concerning the notion of a perfect circle, he says that it is “is well-defined by geometry – the equidistance of every point on the circumference relative to some central point.”<sup>25</sup> However, “actual drawn circles never live up to this ideal.”<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, it would be “unfair to criticize a school geometer for failing to inscribe a perfect circle with a pencil and paper”, because a perfect circle is a “transcendent platonic ideality.”<sup>27</sup> Since it is a transcendent platonic ideality, it is impossible to draw it. Since neither kind of perfection is attainable, and given that ought implies can, it follows that there cannot be “any duty to attain” either kind of perfection. McGinn’s own notion of moral perfection, however, is both well defined and possible to achieve, and is not a transcendent platonic ideality.<sup>28</sup> Hence it is attainable, and there can be a duty to attain it.

Three things can be said in reply to this argument. The first is that the notion of a perfect circle is specious. The geometric definition provided by McGinn is the definition of a circle. A figure either is, or is not, a circle. Being a circle does not admit of degrees of perfection. Hence there is no such thing as a perfect circle, and no such thing as an imperfect circle, properly speaking. If McGinn defends his definition of moral perfection by way of his specious definition of a perfect circle, then the conclusion that must be reached is that McGinn’s definition of moral perfection is also specious. The definition of moral perfection that he provides is simply a definition of being moral. This is all that his definition amounts to. The second thing that can be said is that moral perfection can indeed be well defined in terms always doing what is obligatory, and never doing what is impermissible, and always doing what optional but good to do, and never doing what is optional but bad to do. Finally, such moral perfection is indeed possible, if extremely difficult, to attain. Hence, it is attainable in principle. It is not a transcendent platonic ideality. Since it is attainable in principle, it is possible for there to be a duty to be morally perfect. However, there is no duty to be morally perfect. That is why it would be unfair to criticize someone for failing to be morally perfect.

## 6. Ordinary Morality and Moral Perfection

We may now return to McGinn's claim that ordinary morality requires that each of us always does what it is obligatory, and never does what is impermissible. Some philosophers have rejected McGinn's claim that ordinary morality requires that each of us always does what is obligatory, and never does what is impermissible.<sup>29</sup> This claim will not be contested here. Granted that an action is obligatory, or impermissible, it will be accepted that ordinary morality requires that each of us does it, without exception, or does not do it, without exception, respectively.

Even if this is true, however, this is not all that ordinary morality has to say about how we are to act. Ordinary morality does not merely require and prohibit. It also encourages, counsels or advises each of us to perform certain actions, and discourages each of us from performing certain actions.<sup>30</sup> Ordinary morality discourages each of us from ever performing actions that are optional but bad to do. Ordinary morality discourages us from ever performing large acts of selfishness that are of major cost to others, and small acts of selfishness that are of minor cost to others. It does not prohibit each of us from ever performing these actions. But it discourages each of us from ever performing them.

Ordinary morality also encourages each of us to always perform actions that are optional but good to do, and bad not to do. Ordinary morality encourages each of us to always perform small acts of self-sacrifice that are of great benefit to others. It does not obligate each of us to always perform such actions. But it does encourage each of us to always perform them. Ordinary morality also encourages each of us to sometimes perform some of those actions that are optional but good to do, but not bad not to do. Ordinary morality encourages each of us to sometimes perform some small acts of self-sacrifice that are of minor benefit to others. However, ordinary morality does not encourage each of us to ever perform large feats of self-sacrifice that are of great benefit to others, and it does not encourage each of us to ever perform large feats of self-sacrifice that are of minor benefit to others. If, for example, a person sells everything that she owns and gives all of the proceeds to the poor, then this person has left ordinary morality behind, and has entered moral sainthood.<sup>31</sup>

It has been argued that moral perfection consists in always doing what is obligatory, and never doing what is impermissible, and always doing what is optional but good to do, and never doing what is optional but bad to do. It has also been argued that, although ordinary morality requires that each of us always does what is obligatory, and never does what is impermissible, ordinary morality does not require that each of us always does what is optional but good to do, and never does what is optional but bad to do. Instead, ordinary morality encourages each of us to always do what is optional but good to do, and bad not to do, and encourages each of us to sometimes do some of those

things that are optional but good to do, but not bad not to do, and discourages each of us from ever doing what is optional but bad to do, and not good not to do. Since this falls short of moral perfection, and since, in any case, this is not a requirement, ordinary morality does not require that each of us be morally perfect.<sup>32</sup>

## Notes

1. See Colin McGinn, "Must I be Morally Perfect?," *Analysis* 52 (1992).
2. McGinn, "Must I be Morally Perfect?," p. 33.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Colin McGinn, "Our Duties to Animals and the Poor," in Dale Jamieson ed., *Singer and his Critics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 157.
5. See J.O. Urmson, "Saints and Heroes," in I.A. Melden ed., *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958).
6. McGinn, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. See Joseph Raz, "Permissions and Supererogation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 12 (1975).
10. See Roderick M. Chisholm, "Supererogation and Offence: A Conceptual Scheme for Ethics," *Ratio* 5 (1963).
11. See Joel Feinberg, "Supererogation and Rules," *Ethics* 71 (1961).
12. Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1 (1972), p. 231.
13. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 198.
14. Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1 (1971), p. 60.
15. Colin McGinn, "Our Duties to Animals and the Poor," p. 153.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
17. Urmson, *op. cit.*, p. 205.
18. Chisholm, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Michael Stocker, "Professor Chisholm on Supererogation and Offence," *Philosophical Studies* 21 (1967), p. 89.
21. See Paul Eisenberg, "From the Forbidden to the Supererogatory: The Basic Ethical Categories in Kant's *Tugendlehre*," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 3 (1966).
22. Chisholm, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
23. McGinn, "Must I be Morally Perfect?," p. 34.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. See Michael Clark, "On Wanting to be Morally Perfect," *Analysis* 53 (1993).
30. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Vol. 30: The Gospel of Grace*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Oxford: Blackfriars, 1972).

31. See John Ladd, *The Structure of a Moral Code* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 125.
32. I would like to thank Colin McGinn, Marcia Baron and Robert Adams for their help in the writing of this article. For suggesting the objection to Peter Singer, I would like to thank Brandon Seale. For suggestions about examples of offences, I would like to thank Jonathan Browder. A shorter version of this article was presented at the Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society and Mind Association at the University of Manchester in July 2005. For their comments I would like to thank Rosalind Hursthouse, Anthony Price, Daniel Elstein, Jimmy Doyle and Helen Frowe. Finally, for comments on a draft of this article I would like to thank an anonymous referee for this journal.