

## **Aid: are we doing our bit?**

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Singer argues for aid to strangers on the ground that it is morally required from a non-discriminatory consequentialist perspective, while Unger argues that if we have intuitive moral obligations to aid those near to us then we have as strong an obligation to aid strangers. I shall argue that aid to strangers in a well ordered world would be a collective responsibility in which all nations and individuals would play a part according to their capacity. I shall argue that this responsibility is as much a matter of rights and justice as is our responsibility not to commit aggression against strangers. However, given that our collective responsibility to aid is hardly discharged in our less than ideal world, the question arises as to what responsibilities we still have as individuals to provide aid. I shall consider and reject Liam Murphy's argument that individual responsibility is limited to what we would contribute if anyone did their bit also but I shall argue that, nevertheless, our individual responsibility to aid strangers — while more substantial than Murphy allows — is limited by being a responsibility to play a part in collective aid.

### **Introduction**

The issue of what we — a wealthy, if relatively small, country containing a spectacularly wealthy propertied class — should do to help others in need grows more acute with our prosperity. The more clearly we are able to do something to help, the more the question arises of what we should do in reducing poverty elsewhere, especially if large numbers are in extreme poverty and in danger of starvation or death by disease. To date, the world economy has achieved a modest reduction in the proportion of those in extreme poverty — currently about 20 per cent according to the 2002 UN Human Development Report (UN 2002: 18) — but has failed to make much of a dent in their absolute number. Given the growing gap between the global rich and poor, with the richest 5 per cent now having incomes 114 times those of the poorest 5 per cent (UN 2002: 19), we are forced to examine our

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conscience. Have we done what we ought to aid those in need? Is the 0.25 per cent of GDP that the Australian Government devotes to aid adequate, especially when a significant part of that has been used in recent years to sweeten agreements to take asylum seekers away from our shores?

Some claim that our conscience should be clear. We are obliged only to refrain from harming our fellows and cannot be condemned for failing to help them. We should applaud generosity to needy strangers when we see it but should only shake our heads at those who take no step beyond commonplace efforts to care for their nearest and dearest. Australians may have no cause for pride in what we have done toward helping strangers but we should feel no shame if we have not actively sought to harm them (Narveson 1993: 138-50).

Although we Australians might come to feel shame at harm we have done to others in war, I shall assume, in what follows, that we are talking about what obligations we have to aid the needy in a world that is ideal enough for the issue of aid not to be merely one of reparation for wrongs. That justice may call for aid by reparation is not disputed, at least in principle. Everyone, even those arguing that indifference to need as such involves no wrong or injustice, concedes that we have some obligation to rectify past injustices committed by us or from which we have profited. Clearly, in the case of aboriginal peoples who had their land stolen from them by force, and thus had their poverty exacerbated by the aggression and exploitation of colonial powers, there is general agreement that some aid by way of reparation ought to be given, even though there is argument over how much and what kind of aid is called for. In other cases, there may be dispute as to how much present poverty can be attributed to past wrongs but no dispute that, to the extent it does, aid by way of reparation is warranted. In what follows, I am primarily concerned with an assumption that indifference to those in need involves no wrong, when this is not to be taken merely as a refusal to make restitution for past wrongs.

### **Loss of innocence**

Peter Unger hopes to disturb such assumptions of moral innocence (Unger 1996). Unger addresses the prevailing view, allowing that most of us would not base our clear conscience on a quite general indifference to the plight of strangers such as that outlined. Coming across a stranger in distress whom we are able to help without great cost to ourselves, most would accept that we have an obligation to attempt rescue. However, when it comes to the plight of strangers not connected to us in any salient way, most are much less likely to feel any obligation to provide aid, even if it is not very costly. Why do we feel obliged to aid strangers with whose plight we are confronted but not obliged to aid remote strangers whose plight may be worse but

with whom we have no particular connection? Unger argues that we have no good reason to differentiate in this way. Failure to donate a small amount to UNICEF or Oxfam, say, is ultimately just as reprehensible as failure to provide what aid we can when we are confronted with an accident victim at the scene.

Yet Unger also feels that we cannot simply appeal, as Peter Singer once did, to the principle that if we can prevent something bad from happening without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it (that is, we would commit a moral wrong if we did not) (Singer 1972: 231). Our intuitions do not consistently support this idea. It is not that Singer's principle requires unlimited sacrifice for others. Our own life is surely of comparable moral importance to the life of any other, so that we cannot be expected to sacrifice it for the sake of other lives. However, it is not so clear that a life at the level of bare subsistence could be, impartially considered, of comparable moral importance to the deaths of others, especially if those deaths are many. On Singer's principle, we could therefore be expected to make the sacrifice of living at bare subsistence level to save others, since that is not, impartially considered, a sacrifice of comparable moral importance. Intuitively, however, we flinch at the idea that we are morally obliged to sink to the point of starvation to save the lives of distant others, even when these are many.

Rather than appeal to a general principle such as Singer's, Unger focuses on a discrepancy between the general response to a person failing to save a child from drowning in a pond — condemnation — with the general response to failing to respond to a request for a donation of \$100 to UNICEF, which is that nothing wrong would thereby be done. Unger strives to provide a rational reconciliation of these positions, which would show why most do not condemn the latter omission even if, when deeply considered, such neglect of others violates our values as much as the act of refraining from saving a drowning child. Unger suggests that it is easy to see why people with conventional beliefs would be indifferent to distant strangers, since they have inherited the prevailing view that distant people are beyond moral consideration: a view held in the past partly for the very good reason that it was impossible, until very recently, to help distant others in ways now routinely available to international aid agencies.<sup>1</sup>

Acceptance of acts that fall within conventional moral attitudes is not unique to this case. Unger points out that we do not now morally condemn otherwise morally

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1 Cullity (1994: 108-10) argues that we should now condemn indifference to remote strangers on the same grounds as we condemn racism, since we now know that there is no morally relevant difference between immediate and remote need.

decent slave owners in the early years of the American Republic, such as Washington or Jefferson, for failing to free their slaves while they lived, even though the principles of the Declaration of Independence would require them to condemn slavery if consistently applied (Unger 1996: 14-17). These otherwise decent men went along with the belief of their time that Negroes were not fully human, at least in the sense of being sufficiently capable of moral self-government as to render their enslavement a great wrong. This accommodation with the prejudice of their time was also convenient, as it allowed them to remain men of means, with status second to none. Nevertheless, they wanted their slaves freed on their death rather than have them inherited along with their property in land, money, and animals. Unger suggests that such failures to rise high above contemporary moral horizons and prejudices are not damnable, especially if at least some steps — however hopelessly inadequate now — were taken in the right direction.

### **Principled indifference**

However, reconciliation of our intuitions with our deeply considered moral values could proceed in the opposite direction to that proposed by Unger. Libertarians and some neo-Kantians have sought to reconcile our repugnance for actions such as failing to save a drowning child with the view that justice does not demand that we take positive steps to aid even in the case of an easy rescue of a drowning child. Michael Levin graphically puts the Libertarian view:

If a baby is abandoned on a public thoroughfare, the negative theory of rights gives him only the right to be left alone. It allows him no right to food or shelter. If indifferent passers by let him die, his rights remain intact. If the police rescue him, they are squandering taxpayers' money (Levin 1984: 95).

Putting it in this way, Levin invites the response: 'So much the worse for the negative theory of rights.'

Nevertheless, some would argue that Levin is correct in claiming that no violation of rights occurs, while conceding that his way of putting it is brutal in the extreme, since he contemplates no evils other than violations of rights. Murphy does his best to reconcile the strength of our repugnance for indifference to the plight of the vulnerable by claiming that this is not a response to an injustice but rather a rejection of the vicious moral character displayed by such indifference, which can be more gravely immoral than some relatively minor rights violation such as failing to pay a debt (Murphy 1998). Indifference raises an issue of virtue rather than justice which, Murphy stresses, can be morally more pressing than issues concerning rights and justice.

I believe this opposite reconciliation of intuitions fails. In Murphy's case of the poolside loungeur who would rather continue lounging than rescue a drowning child, he claims that no matter how rightly appalled we might feel about such conduct, or how seriously immoral it is, the loungeur has violated no right of the child. Of course, it is possible to imagine situations where no particular person in need of rescue has a right to it, such as when the rescuers are incapable of rescuing all. Since the rescuers have no obligation to attempt the impossible, they are only obliged to rescue one or other subset of those in need of rescue, with each subset containing as many as can possibly be rescued. At least one of these subsets will exclude any particular individual, and this may well be the subset of those actually rescued. No one in particular therefore has a claim to be among those actually rescued. However, this is not the case Murphy envisages. In his example, no question of duty voided by incapacity arises.

Feinberg persuasively argues that the moral indignation and vicarious grievance that we would feel against the loungeur on behalf of the drowning child's parents cannot plausibly be treated as merely what we would feel against a morally deplorable character, even granted that such character lapses are more morally pressing than some violations of less important rights (Feinberg 1984: 148-9). We rightly feel aggrieved with the loungeur for failing to meet a claim of the child and parents on him, in part because of the grossly preferential and baseless consideration the loungeur has given to his own convenience over the needs of the child, which we consider patently unjust (Cullity 1994: 109). To fit with our intuitions, some way of saying that rights are violated in such cases must be found. Further, we need not contemplate revising our intuitions because we can provide no account of rights that endorses them. Our intuitions are consistent with an account of rights derived from Raz (1986: 166) and Shue (1980), which can be put as follows: a person has a right if and only if, other things being equal, that person has an interest that is sufficiently important to warrant others being under an obligation to not set-back (to respect) the interest, and to protect it with negative sanctions, where this obligation may be overridden when other things are not equal only by sufficiently stringent or compelling reasons (Jarvis Thompson 1990: 175). The claim that Murphy's poolside loungeur violates the drowning child's rights accords with this account of rights: clearly, the child has a sufficiently vital interest in life to warrant the loungeur being under an enforceable obligation to save the child, where his own convenience can hardly be a sufficiently compelling reason to let the child drown.

## **Them and us**

What if we do not need to reconcile our intuitions in either direction? What if there really is a moral difference between near and remote cases of need that would justify

our treating failure to help as a violation of rights in one case but not in the other? One way of explaining the difference is that we should attribute greater weight to the interests of those close to us — our kin or countrymen — than to those of remote strangers. But this threatens to do too much, as it also suggests that people have less reason not to kill remote strangers ('them') than those nearer and dearer (Bennett 1995: 158-160). It may be that when the rights of remote strangers to aid conflict with the rights of those close to us, the latter should override the former. However, there need be no conflict between these rights. Although we cannot, as individuals, meet all the claims of remote strangers without violating the rights of those near and dear, there need be no conflict between our participating in a collective effort to aid remote strangers while respecting the rights of those with whom we live. While we cannot individually help all remote strangers consistently with our other obligations and entitlements, it does not follow that we may individually ignore the claims of all strangers, or collectively ignore the claims of any.

Wellman, however, has three reasons that are consistent with impartiality for being more concerned with achieving a measure of economic equality within a country than between countries (Wellman 2000: 545-49). The first is that inequalities of wealth can leave some with only formally the same rights as others: rich and poor alike may be entitled to stand for political office but only the rich can really do so. They will have political influence and the capacity to organise society in their interests, while the poor will be politically marginalised. This does not apply to foreigners, whose claims to political influence in their own society cannot similarly be compromised by the power of the wealthy in another society. The second reason for prior concern for inequality within a society is that it renders the poor subject to oppression and exploitation and is therefore unjust. If we take Anderson's view (1999) that people are entitled to sufficient capabilities to avoid oppression or exploitation and to function as equal citizens within a specific society, a given level of poverty within that society might deny this entitlement, even if greater poverty elsewhere would not put others in the same position. Thirdly, poverty is relative, so that a peasant living in a hut ends up living in a hovel once a palace is built alongside, as Karl Marx once observed. Wellman makes the further point that the advantages of the wealthy can reduce the opportunities of the poor in the same country but not those elsewhere, just as a few people watching a game may obstruct the vision of others by standing on tip-toe, while not affecting those watching other games.

One rejoinder to Wellman from Singer is that everything is different in a globalised world (Singer 2002: 189-92). While Singer's dismissal of Wellman's case is far too sketchy, he has a point, as a few telling examples show. The wealthy in the US and other major OECD countries, for example, are clearly able not only to compromise the effective rights of their poorer countrymen, but also the effective rights of the

poor elsewhere, as shown, for example, by cases where other governments pursue the Washington recipe for sound economic policy in the teeth of strenuous objections from their own poor. Palestinians have reason to resent the use of US wealth and power to frustrate their right to political self-determination, regardless of the degree to which it also has had legitimate uses, such as protecting Israeli citizens from organisations like Hamas. As to vulnerability to oppression and exploitation, in a global economy with relatively free movement of capital the wealthy may oppress the poor in other countries as much if not more than their own countrymen. That national boundaries are no barrier to exploitation is shown by developments at certain sites on the US/Mexican border, where US-owned factories have been relocated on the Mexican side. These employ internal Mexican migrants living in temporary shanty towns around the factories, who are exploited with low wages, while what they produce is shipped straight back over the border. More ambiguous cases, perhaps, are factories set up by the wealthy of many countries in economic zones such as those offered by China, where the object of the exercise is in part to exploit needy Chinese workers. Singer makes a further claim that the affluence of Western societies has exacerbated, by comparison, the poverty of people in developing countries, but this has less substance, taken as a general rule. The middle classes in developing or stagnating countries might feel impoverished by comparison with the lifestyles of the West, but people leading isolated lives in rural poverty are hardly subject to the same comparisons, even though they aspire to the fabled wealth of the West once they become economic migrants.

Wellman has therefore not made a compelling case for concluding that compatriots have special distributional responsibilities to one another, at least if these are taken to be exclusive of similar responsibilities to foreigners. To the extent that state boundaries are porous, we must suppose that the issues of justice that concern one cannot simply be issues of inequality among one's own countrymen. However, to the extent that strangers are not just geographically remote but have few or no social ties with the people of another country, rich or poor, we can conclude with Wellman that inequalities with such remote strangers will not matter in the same way as inequality between the rich and poor of the same country. There is thus some ground for us to suppose that the problem of inequality begins at home, though we cannot also suppose that it ends there. If our country exports capital or is capable of exercising political power over other countries, then wealth in one society can become a problem for the poor of other societies.

In any case, relative poverty elsewhere is a concern of those everywhere, if we have obligations to aid the vulnerable. The wealthy of our society may not be a problem to the poor of other societies if they keep to themselves. But the wealthy of other societies can, on Wellman's grounds, injure the interests of the poor of those societies

and these, in turn, have a claim to our aid. Such aid may have to include measures to lessen international inequalities in order to reduce inequalities within nations.

Even a qualified endorsement of patriotism is not available in the case of extreme poverty. Poverty relative to one's fellow citizens can undermine the social bases of self-respect and thus be unjust, even if a similar standard of living elsewhere would be acceptable (see Rawls, 1999: 478-9). But extreme poverty is not thus relative: it undermines the social bases of self-respect regardless of what culture surrounds it. A decent level of capabilities required for self-respect in a given society is relative to that society's standards, but extreme poverty deprives its sufferers of a decent living by any human standard. Wellman's argument cannot therefore show that we can ignore extreme poverty, because it is unjust regardless of the considerations he advances. People on the point of starvation do not have to compare their condition with others, nor be subject to exploitation or oppression by the rich, in order to complain of an evil besetting them. This evil is the same concern everywhere.

### **Universal rights and special rights**

One further ground for differentiating between remote and immediately present need of rescue can be advanced. Although an injustice is really, rather than merely apparently, involved in cases such as failures to make an easy rescue of a drowning child, this can be conceded while claiming that giving aid is nevertheless a matter of virtue rather than justice at the level of universal rights. A failure to give aid can still be an injustice because it violates some special right to aid derived from some undertaking of individuals or organisations. This is the position of Onora O'Neill, who takes 'liberty' and 'welfare' rights to differ importantly because the former are 'negative' rights, which sustain corresponding universal perfect obligations, while only imperfect obligations correspond to 'positive' claims for welfare.

O'Neill asserts a 'disanalogy between universal liberty and welfare rights', because violations of liberty rights can be imputed to particular individuals, while failures to meet positive claims to welfare cannot, unless some institution has allocated obligations to aid to specific individuals (O'Neill 1996: 132; 2000: 136). No one can be obliged to aid those in need, because it is impossible for any individual to aid all in need and indeterminate what aid any individual can or should provide. Further, as Trammell points out, one person's failure to aid will not entail that he or she is the one who violated a right to aid, since someone else could have provided the aid needed (Trammell 1994: 294-5).<sup>2</sup> According to O'Neill, positive rights have substance

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2 O'Neill makes the same point.



only as special rights consequent on specific arrangements.

So although providing aid is a requirement of virtue rather than justice at the level of universal rights, it can be claimed that the circumstances of a drowning child create a special right and corresponding strict and enforceable obligation on anyone who knows of the child's peril and is able to help without risking anything of comparable value to the child's life. On the other hand, the circumstances of people remote from us do not create any similar special obligations. We have only an imperfect, indeterminate obligation to aid those with whom we have no immediate connection, and no injustice is done to any particular individual whom we choose not to aid on any occasion.

How do the 'circumstances' of a present danger create a special obligation on us? We accept obligations that we have voluntarily incurred and even obligations that arise from circumstances of birth, such as to parents and children. Although, in common law countries, the law recognises such obligations, it recognises no involuntarily acquired special obligations arising from mere proximity to a person in danger. Legislation can fill the gap, but common law countries have generally refrained from legally requiring aid except in special circumstances, such as witnessing a car accident. The State of Virginia in the US is one exception because it has a 'Good Samaritan' law:

A person who knows that another is exposed to grave physical harm shall, to the extent that the same can be rendered without danger or peril to himself or without interference with important duties to others, give reasonable assistance to the exposed person unless that assistance or care is being provided by others (cited by Feinberg 1984, 127).

In Virginia, therefore, a special obligation exists for aid to strangers in danger of 'grave physical harm', provided the danger in question is not so remote as to be unknown or beyond remedy. Australian states do not have such laws. Nevertheless, despite there being thus no basis in legislation or voluntary undertakings for a special right that would require a stranger to rescue a drowning child, our strong moral intuition remains that a right is violated by failure to rescue when that could easily and safely be done. It is therefore difficult to see how to account for such rights, if we take aid as ultimately a requirement of virtue rather than justice.

### **Individual and collective responsibility**

On O'Neill's account, no one has a right to aid in the absence of individual undertaking or special rights derived from arrangements that society adopts to see that aid is provided to those in need. This surely leaves a crucial gap. Individuals do

not only have such rights to aid as flow from whatever undertakings they receive, or from arrangements that society has as a matter of fact adopted, but have a right that society adopt adequate arrangements to provide aid. This is a right that one's fellows act collectively to aid. McKinsey recognises collective obligations to aid falling on a group of persons when only that group is able to aid (McKinsey 1981: 309-23).<sup>3</sup> But claims and corresponding obligations to aid also fall on a collective when a sub-group — even an individual — is able to provide the aid required. As noted, Trammell suggests that obligations on an individual to rescue are less pressing than those to forbear from harm because someone else could make the rescue. On his view, neither of two persons by a lake, where each is able to rescue a drowning child, could be held accountable, since the other could rescue instead. On my view, however, there is a collective obligation to rescue that devolves on the two who, in this case, are able to do it. As Bennett, says, when either of two people could make a rescue, the finger of blame points to both rather than neither if they fail to do anything (Bennett 1995: 160). But the finger demands not that each make the rescue, since that would not be necessary if the other did it. Rather, the finger of blame requires the two to arrange for one of them to make the rescue. The obligation on both is collective because it demands a collective act of co-ordination between them.<sup>4</sup>

That the claim for rescue is a claim on others for their collective action accounts both for the role of special rights consequent on social arrangements and for the fact that we still feel there is an obligation to aid even when no special rights exist. A right to aid held by others, whether they be near or remote, entails a strict and perfect duty to provide aid collectively, which society discharges by establishing specific institutions and arrangements to that end. Once these arrangements for aid are made, they imply specific claims on individuals designated as those responsible for its provision.

My position is not that there can be no individual obligations to aid or obligations to perform individual acts of aid. Where only one person is in a position to aid, any collective obligation coincides with an individual obligation, and an obligation to take individual action, as is the case with Jeffrie Murphy's poolside lounge. In other cases, individual acts of rescue are not feasible. In an encounter with a person suffering a heart attack, for example, the obligation on any medically unqualified individual is to participate in collective action, which crucially would include

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3 On p 316, McKinsey notes that two people are obliged to co-operate in rowing a boat to rescue three drowning people in a lake, when individually, each of the two would be capable of rescuing no more than one.

4 This accords with Robert Goodin's 'Principle of Group Responsibility' (Goodin 1985: 136).

appropriate medical treatment. Since remote cases always call for collective acts of rescue, the right to rescue here must initially entail a collective obligation, from which individual obligations to participate in collective action are derived. This is why hitherto there has been no felt obligation to provide aid to remote strangers, since collective action to that end was not feasible. Now that it is, individuals have obligations to participate in the collective effort, by means such as donating money to UNICEF.

The distinction between what we are obliged to do collectively and individually to provide aid (or prevent harm) also accounts for the felt difference in obligations to provide aid and to forbear from harm in cases where discharging the obligation may impose substantial cost on the agent. As Joel Feinberg suggests, costs can excuse the agent from providing all the aid required because we provide aid collectively (Feinberg 1984: 170-1). Collectively, however, we are no more excused of rescue by its cost than we could be excused of harming someone by its cost. We cannot excuse ourselves of killing a relative who was about to will many millions to others at our expense. Nor can we collectively excuse ourselves of rescue by its costing millions, as the Australian Navy appreciated by rescuing solo yacht racers in trouble in the Southern Ocean despite the immense cost to the taxpayer, even though we have no duty as individuals to spare no expense when individual actions will not suffice and only collective arrangements for rescue will. Nor is our responsibility for rescue diminished when those in distress are responsible for their predicament, although we might subsequently seek some redress for the cost of rescue if reckless or negligent actions made it necessary.<sup>5</sup>

When we participate in collective rescues, our individual share of their cost may not be great, and may be a matter of discretion in various ways (McKinsey 1981: 321-2). Clearly, aid to remote strangers in a world where everyone respected their obligations would be a collective responsibility, in which all nations and individuals would play a part, contributing their fair share according to their capacity. The wealthy and powerful could be expected to contribute more than the poor or weak, since their capacity is greater, though everyone could be expected to do what they reasonably can. The cost of this to many of us, even in the wealthiest countries, would not be all that great.

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5 As Goodin (1985: 126-133) argues, although he concedes too much, in my view, in appearing to allow that those in distress have no claim for rescue as a matter of right, when what he perhaps means is only that no special or particular right claim is applicable in their case (pp 133-4).

Given this, it is hardly surprising that the duty to aid seems less stringent from the individual standpoint. Individuals feel the force of positive obligations less because their individual obligation derives from their part in collective obligations and in arrangements made to discharge those obligations, and will thus reflect different demands because of differences in individual capacity to meet obligations. Individual capacities depend on varying knowledge of an occasion for action and the means to act on that occasion. I cannot be expected to rescue a drowning person of whom I know nothing, even if I could easily rescue the person if I were in a position to, nor can I be expected to rescue a person I see drowning if I am not a strong swimmer. Even a strong swimmer who had acquired aquaphobia would be incapable in a way of rescuing someone drowning. We might even say that people who cannot free themselves from the self-interested perspective of an individualistic society could be considered unable, rather than merely unwilling, to aid others, though my rankling at the prospect suggests that I do not myself consider such a disability could be common, even if simple indifference to others is.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, we live in anything but a well ordered world, wherein everyone would respect claims upon them. We face massive moral failure by both governments and individuals on the issue of aid to strangers. In these circumstances, are the obligations on those who recognise claims for aid to strangers more stringent than what would otherwise have been their fair share? Are we obliged to make up, at least to some extent, for the failures of others?<sup>7</sup> Liam Murphy reassuringly answers that, in a non-ideal world, the demands on each individual are still only to contribute what would have been his or her fair share had others done their bit also (Murphy 2000: especially 117-8). However, Liam Murphy also recognises two problems with his account in cases of rescue (Murphy 2000: 124-5, 127-8 and 132). Given that we are committed to do no more than what would be our fair share if everyone did their bit, it seems: firstly, that if one of two potential rescuers fails to do his or her share in rescuing two drowning children, then the other rescuer would be required to rescue no more than one child; secondly, the poor would not be required to make any effort at all, since their level of welfare needs to be increased rather than reduced by any costs of rescue. In the end, Liam Murphy reconciles the conflict between our intuitions and his account by falling back on the already rejected claim of Jeffrie Murphy that we react negatively, not to a failure of duty in such cases, but to the bad

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6 Wellman (2000: 558) rejects incapacity of this kind because he supposes that it derives from a mere unwillingness to do what is required. However, some do have motives, such as phobias, that they cannot choose not to have, and this might also apply to prevailing worldviews though probably only in a few cases where individuals are so mired in them that they cannot escape.

7 This problem is raised by Wyk (1988).

moral character displayed. I think that this view is fundamentally mistaken. In matters of rescue, we are expected to act without regard to what we owe the world or the world owes us in the way of means for action. Liam Murphy's idea that responsibility is limited to doing what would be one's fair share in an ideal world therefore cannot hold.

We should do what we reasonably can to rescue people when we know they are in urgent need of help. Meeting such demands need not be an oppressive burden since they are necessarily limited by our capacities and the number of problems that we are capable of paying specific attention to. However, in the case of remote strangers, where would one stop along the path of doing more than one's fair share? Wyk claims that entering on this path 'would threaten to eclipse everything else a person might choose to do with his life' so that one 'would become nothing but a means to meeting the needs of others' (Wyk 1988: 84). It may well be, as Wyk suggests, that we may stop well short of the point of starving ourselves through generosity to others, since we cannot reasonably be asked to sacrifice the value of being capable of leading a good life of our own for the sake of giving others a chance to live good lives of their own.

Helping remote strangers is an inherently collective task. This does not distinguish it absolutely from cases of rescue, since that can also be an inherently collective task. Nevertheless, in the case of remote strangers, the effective co-ordination of all who are capable of contributing is the crucial and, in our world, the pressing task. The feeling that individual efforts to aid remote strangers are merely 'a drop in the ocean' has some basis in comparison with what could be achieved so much more effectively and efficiently by collective effort, if only all nations worked together according to their capacities to rescue those in dire poverty and provide what is necessary for all to achieve self-sufficiency. Promoting a collective solution to the problem of aiding those in need must therefore be a first priority.

My claim is not that working toward an adequate collective solution is the only priority. There are already some collective institutions for aid in place, and even though these are incapable of doing anything more than mitigating the problem, some contribution seems minimally required, especially to those organisations that help others to help themselves. We could reasonably be expected to contribute materially to existing organisations what would be our fair share if everyone did their bit. Singer seems to suggest that we are obliged to do much more. Given that achieving a collective solution is the first priority in achieving an adequate long term solution to the problem, this is arguably a mistake. However much contributions to aid agencies contribute in the short term, we cannot put off collective solutions because they seem too hard or will take too long. The failures of others to contribute

oblige us, not so much to dig further into our own pockets, but to promote a more adequate collective solution to the problem of poverty, while contributing in the short term at least what we would be required to contribute if everyone did their bit too.

This is possibly a bit unfair to Singer, since he could claim that digging further into our pockets because others have failed to contribute does not preclude collective action as well. Moreover, he clearly intends that his own efforts to aid, which are almost certainly in excess of what would be required if others did their share, should provide exemplary encouragement to others, and thus promote participation in collective provision of aid. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that exemplary efforts alone will persuade others to contribute what would be their fair share if everyone did their bit. In addition, appeals for greater individual contributions to existing — patently inadequate — collective arrangements for aid are likely to divert attention from what is required for long term solutions. Though to some extent useful, Singer's appeal ultimately points in the wrong direction, when what is needed is that we should acquire a greater capacity for collective action than we have now. This could lead by way of international action to reform of the global economic system to achieve fair trade and investment practices, and fairer tax systems that could support greater government contributions to aid by drawing more effectively on those who are most capable of making a contribution.

## Conclusion

In advocating that we concentrate on the political task of organising effective collective aid rather than individual participation in existing efforts, I do not mean to propose that we are morally required to turn our whole lives over to organising aid for others, any more than we are morally required to turn our whole lives over to exemplary individual acts of beneficence. For a start, turning our lives to political agitation might well prove pointless if others fail to join in. I suspect that we are, therefore, limited in what we can effectively do by way of collective organisation by what others are willing to do. In any case, we still have a right to lives of our own. Consistently with this, we can and should devote far more resources and political effort than we currently do to bring about effective collective action to eliminate extreme poverty and guarantee people everywhere sufficient capabilities to secure the social bases of self-respect within their own societies. Even if, in the meantime, we contribute materially only what would be our fair share in an ideal world, we are also — and more importantly — required to contribute to the immense effort required to bring that world nearer. Justice demands nothing less. ●

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