MORAL LIVES, MORAL WORLDS: PARTIALITY, CONSUMPTION, & GLOBAL JUSTICE

by

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this project is to reconcile conflicting impartial and partial views of obligation, and to explain how this reconciliation alters our understanding of obligations to the global poor. Part One begins with a description of the “Personal and Impersonal Moral Worlds,” and provides an explanation of why these two common conceptions of morality are at odds with one another. It closes with an argument for why we ought to seek a reconciliation of the two views, rather than simply rejecting one or the other. Part Two addresses problems of justification and sketches out a moral framework designed to ease the tension between the impartial and partial views. This framework takes the form of a pluralistic conception of the good. Principally, it rests on the distinction between “foundational goods,” the value of which originates in their close connection with the fundamental needs of human beings, and “relative goods” which are correlated with desires or preferences. How partial attachments and relationships fit into this pluralistic conception of the good is made clear. In this section, where both individuals and nation-states can be legitimately partial, and where such partiality begins to be unacceptable, is also marked out. With respect to the conduct of private individuals, citizens and national governments, it is concluded that limited partiality is justifiable, but that their obligations to ameliorate global poverty are much more extensive than is typically recognized. The third part of the thesis takes up issues surrounding the practical application of the theory. It is chiefly concerned with problems relating to the practical fulfillment of our obligations to the global poor, such as: how to determine when the need for a particular good has been fulfilled, how to best understand the exact character of our concrete duties and whether states or individuals are responsible for carrying out these duties. This thesis presents an integrated view of morality intended to be more theoretically satisfying than the conflicting partial and impartial views. In addition, it sets out a more practically feasible approach to fulfilling moral obligations. Thus, it is both a clarifying and a constructive project, designed to shed light on how we might create morally acceptable lives and societies.
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Chapter One: Introduction

There are a great many people in this world who live in absolute poverty. They suffer a great deal of unnecessary pain from disease, malnourishment and lack of sanitation, as well as the emotional pain of degradation, disrespect, and helplessness. There are also many people in this world who live in conditions of extreme affluence, who enjoy luxury goods, good health, and their choice of active, fulfilling, self-actualizing, pursuits. The latter group of people consumes many, many more of the goods and services made available on the global market. The existing degree and scope of material inequality is both startling and concerning, but how can affluent individuals and states come to grips with it?

Radical inequality, coupled with our newly-emerging global consciousness and economic interdependence, generates a whole host of questions surrounding the moral status of consumption in affluent countries. What is a need? What is a luxury? Whose interests must I consider when I make consumption choices? What about the commitments of states to their citizens, and individuals to their loved ones and life-plans? Where do they fit in? If I want to be moral, what should I do?

This project aims to provide answers to some of these difficult questions. In particular, it is the starting-point of this thesis that a fundamental mistake has been made in the approach of many philosophers to these questions. Two radically different conceptions of morality have been pitted against one another in an attempt to define what count as moral obligations. Not surprisingly, these conceptions arrive at competing (and conflicting) answers about the ethical use of resources and how they ought to be distributed. These answers, in turn, demand different courses of action with respect to
the poverty-stricken of the world. This conflict would not be nearly so problematic if one view of morality was simply and obviously wrong about what are legitimate moral concerns. But they are both intuitively plausible, and I will argue, represent some genuine elements of morality. Thus, their conflicting conceptions of obligation leave people with no idea how to proceed. The answers of one theory cancel out the answers of the other.

I call these two competing conceptions of morality the "Personal and Impersonal Moral Worlds." The Personal World focuses on our obligations to those with whom we have ongoing relationships, or "partial obligations." These have their origin in our particular relationships with others, and so are only owed to those specific others, such as our friends, children and parents. By contrast, the Impersonal World emphasizes impartial obligations, or those that originate in our concern for fairness and equality. These are owed to all people, regardless of their attachment to us or lack thereof. The two central claims of this thesis are that (a) it is both possible and desirable to work out an integrated view of obligation which eases the tension between impartial and partial views and (b) such an integrated view will necessitate a revision of our commonly held views on how we ought to treat the needy.

I start from the common-sense view that we do have genuine obligations to others. In taking up the question of how our partial and impartial obligations may be reconciled, I address those people who are already convinced that morality may justifiably require sacrifices of personal interest, but find that the appropriate content of these sacrifices is extremely difficult to determine. Hence, I do not address concerns about the existence or legitimacy of moral obligations that a thoroughgoing sceptic, or
egoist, may have.

The general strategy of the thesis will be to develop a moral framework in which (a) partial obligations do not come across as unfair, and (b) impartial obligations do not come across as so demanding that they require us to abandon the commitments which constitute the main fabric of most peoples' lives (aside from thoroughgoing saints or scoundrels). On the one hand, the partial views looks \textit{too} partial. In particular, since it allows strangers in need (unrelated others) to be seen as at best the objects of supererogatory concern, it seems to be not nearly morally demanding enough. On the other hand, the impartial view seems far too demanding - at the extreme seeming to require rejection of the commitments to particular persons and projects that enrich our lives and to a considerable extent are central to individual character. In response to these concerns, the framework developed here qualifies and combines the partial and impartial views, in a manner that casts both types of obligation as making morally reasonable demands.

I have chosen to explore this theoretical problem in conjunction with the related practical problem of providing for those people living in extreme poverty. This two-pronged approach is instructive because the consumption and distribution of resources is one area in which partial and impartial obligations often come into conflict. Any framework which is designed to resolve the tension between these distinct types of obligations should be capable of dealing with this issue. Moreover, it is an issue regarding which not nearly enough is being done, partly, in my view, because we lack a coherent picture of what we ought to do.
Of course, this is no easy task, and I will not be able to address every theoretical and practical problem associated with the relationship between consumption and global poverty. Nevertheless, by providing a resolution of this particular theoretical conflict, I hope to sketch out a method of determining our obligations to the needy which will be a helpful guide for evaluating different practical options. Along the way, many interesting philosophical issues will be addressed in a necessarily limited fashion, but in sufficient depth to see the argument through to its practical implications.

1.1 The Role of the Good

The Personal and Impersonal Worlds are distinct views of morality, which differ with regard to both its subject and its scope. This means that they are at odds about two fundamental points: (1) what counts as morally valuable, and (2) how this value ought to be promoted and distributed. The combination of disagreements about (1) and (2) creates disagreement in a third area, namely, what counts as the right thing to do. There is a close fit between a given theory of obligation and the conception of the good upon which it is founded. The two views generate conflicting sets of obligations, in part, because they rest on different conceptions of moral value. Additionally, prescriptions for promoting and distributing the good are usually derived from one of several principles embodying equal respect, “for example, counting everybody for one, nobody for more than one; or being governed by the difference principle; or maintaining a minimum acceptable level of welfare.”1 If the principles that determine distribution of the good differ, as they do in the Personal and Impersonal Worlds, then the resulting prescriptions for action will also be at odds.
Thus, if these competing conceptions are to be reconciled, and the important elements of each retained, then an integrated conception of the good must be specified first. This new conception of the good needs to incorporate the significant values that each of the Personal and Impersonal Worlds is attempting to capture, and place these values in a framework in which they are cast as the same types of things. This makes it possible to adjudicate between them. Without such a framework these values remain incommensurable, and so no coherent set of moral obligations can be specified.

Of course, the obligations in which I am especially interested here, are those that have economic or material implications. Specifically, I am interested in bringing those material obligations which arise from partial relationships and those that stem from the impartial concern for human welfare into the same, pluralistic framework. It does not seem too much to ask that a model of morality, at its core, should be able to consistently integrate these two central aspects of morality, and as a result, generate a feasible picture of social justice.

1.2 Thin vs. Thick Theories

The conception of the good that is the backbone of this thesis sits squarely between those of John Rawls and Martha Nussbaum. Rawls provides a list of “primary goods” which, he says, are “things that every rational man is presumed to want.”² He also characterizes primary goods as things which rational individuals, “whatever else they want, desire … as prerequisites for carrying out their plans of life.”³ He includes, income, wealth, liberties, opportunities and self-respect in this list. Primary goods are thought to be indispensable elements of a wide variety of life-plans, and in practice, cash
out as formal equality with respect to liberty and opportunity, as well as a minimum level of income determined by the difference principle. Primary goods are the content of Rawls’ “thin theory of the good.”

By contrast, Nussbaum suggests that only a “thick vague theory of the good” is truly effective in thinking productively about social justice. She puts forward a list of basic human functions which is intended to sketch out the “overall shape and content of the human form of life,” in a prescriptive as well as descriptive, Aristotelian sense. She claims that until we know the distribution of these fundamentally human ends in people’s lives, we can have no useful information about well-being, and so no useful information about whether a society is just. In this, she is allied with Amartya Sen, who has argued very convincingly that due to the differences in individuals and cultural contexts, measurement of income and assurance of formal equality are insufficient to indicate whether or not people are, in fact, well off. Instead, he claims that we need to look at the functional abilities and states of being (called “functionings”) that people achieve, such as being well nourished, and being literate. Additionally, both Sen and Nussbaum think that we ought to be looking at the overall set of possible abilities and states (called “capability sets”) from which individuals can choose.

I agree with Sen and Nussbaum that it is human abilities and states of being and not income and/or formal freedoms which are central to measuring human welfare. Still, I disagree with Nussbaum that we need to specify the overall shape of the good life in

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For example, Sen tells us that Bangladeshi men have a better chance of living past 40 years of age than African-Americans in Harlem; GNP measurement does not reveal the causes of this, and their formal equality does not prevent it. Myriad other factors affect people’s actual achievement of certain abilities and states of being, such as the availability of basic health care, and the effectiveness of police control over violent crime. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), p. 23.
order to determine that a society is economically and materially just. Rawls has the right idea when he attempts to specify a “benchmark for judging improvements” which is characterized by the equal distribution of primary goods. However, Nussbaum’s emphasis on what are the minimum elements of the human good, that is, which abilities are central to good human lives, is much richer, since it specifies what it is that we are trying to promote in a more exact fashion. Further, it takes account of human diversity better, because it does not take for granted (incorrectly) that welfare generally corresponds to level of income.

It is not enough to say that the benchmark for distribution should be equality — the benchmark needs to be equality in the essential human capacities, because equality should not be put before welfare. The most basic assumption of this thesis is that the equal distribution of resources is not good for its own sake. A world in which only some people met the minimum threshold of functional abilities for good lives is better than one in which everyone had equal resources but none reached the minimum threshold. Only a world in which everyone met the minimum threshold could be a just one, given that enough resources exist to achieve this.

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\[\text{Of course, Rawls' theory of the good is necessarily thin, because it needs to meet the requirement of anonymity in the Original Position (which is needed in order to generate fair rules). A rich account of human welfare was not his objective. I mention it here in order to situate myself in the literature and to demonstrate how my conception is similar to his - that it involves the idea of a benchmark or threshold for judging equality across a range of goods.}\]

\[\text{This is the case in the world right now. We have the technical ability to grow enough food to feed everyone. Sen notes that there is no food crisis right now, and although food production varies over time, “the trend is clearly upward.” Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), p. 206. There is also no reason to believe that with the cooperation of the citizens of affluent countries, non-governmental organizations, and national governments, the other necessaries of life could not be provided.}\]
The conception of the good proposed here, as the basis for a reconciliation of the two moral Worlds, will combine Nussbaum's emphasis on the basic human functions with Rawls' idea of primary goods. The core idea is that some human abilities and states of being comprise a set of goods that are the foundation of most good lives. The content of these goods is not derived from some absolute principle or metaphysical truth, but rather from observations about the kind of creatures human beings are, and the social and environmental conditions in which they live. I will call these "foundational goods." To reformulate Rawls then: foundational goods are things which people need as material prerequisites for building good lives. Like Rawls' primary goods, foundational goods are goods regardless of the exact type of life that would be good for any particular person. Both notions support plural conceptions of the good life.

Foundational goods resemble primary goods in that they are vital components of good lives, but they are derived from the ideas of human nature and human needs, and not from a set of rational preferences. Rawls relies on the idea of rational preferences because he is working within a social contract framework, and so must show that primary goods are the kinds of things that people in the Original Position would agree that they all want. I, however, am skeptical of building a theory of the good that is designed to address welfare issues primarily on the ideas of rationality and desire. The firmer ground seems to be the notions of human needs and human goods, which are objective in character, and so not susceptible to the charges of relativism and subjectivism. Theories that are either basically relativist, or dependent on subjective preferences, are rarely helpful for evaluating global justice, since there are far too many preferences and value-
systems under consideration. Thus, we need a theory that is not rooted in either people's mental states or their morally arbitrary desires.

Not that Rawls is either a relativist or a subjectivist. He is appealing to a kind of objectivity when he specifies that it is rational preferences which determine what count as primary goods, rather than plain, old desires or preferences. (He also makes it impossible to have any other kind of preferences in the original position). Nevertheless, it is more straightforward to acknowledge that human beings need certain things in order to live good lives, regardless of what they may desire. This is because the notion of rationality seems empty in the absence of distinct social and personal circumstances, and because needs are generally not thought to be merely a subset of desires. In fact, the notion of needs has its force precisely because they are thought to be something distinct from, and more basic than, desires or preferences.

Further, adopting a human nature approach does not tolerate the vast range of conceptions of the good which the Rawlsian approach does. Foundational goods ground a wide range of good lives, but since they are considered constituent elements of good lives, those lives that exclude them or are radically at odds with them can be legitimately considered lacking.

This does not make the theory of foundational goods either illiberal or intolerant, however. To say that there are some basic human needs the fulfillment of which is the foundation for good lives does not mean that all those lives must be cookie-cutter clones. Quite the contrary, actually. This claim is completely compatible with the additional claim that these needs have been shaped by thousands of years of culture and convention which makes them what they are today. This is why I am careful to characterize
foundational goods in such a way as to allow for a wide variety of concrete methods of realization, that are closely tied with specific cultures and geographical locations. Further, claiming that some goods provide the foundation for good lives does not exclude other things from contributing to good lives – it just excludes them from counting as prerequisites.

Understood in this way, the fact that foundational goods are rooted in human needs becomes less important in evaluating the overall theory. Providing this background is only one of many ways to avoid the myriad problems associated with relativism and subjectivism. Anyone who is skeptical about the existence of a “human nature” and would prefer to root conceptions of well-being in rational desires or intersubjective agreement, will likely find that foundational goods are compatible with those background views as well. Although I firmly believe that there are such things as fundamental human needs, and that they cash out in different culturally and socially constructed forms, thorough resolution of this controversy is not necessary for this project to go forward. Those readers who have different views about why these goods are valuable are unlikely to disagree that they are valuable.

The notion of foundational goods is thus thicker than Rawls’ primary goods but thinner than Nussbaum’s basic functions. It is not so thin that it tolerates any conception of the good which is compatible with social harmony in a liberal society. Unlike primary goods, foundational goods are not made up of a fixed set of formal freedoms and opportunities coupled with a set income relative to the overall income of society. Rather, they are each made up of a web of specific functionings that have some material requirements, but are only loosely related to income. The specification of these
functionings gives foundational goods a greater thickness than primary goods. Clearly though, foundational goods are not the end of the story when it comes to fashioning good lives, and so do not even approach the thickness of Nussbaum’s more comprehensive set of basic functions.

Foundational goods are not intended to be descriptive of all the elements of the human good, as Nussbaum’s functions are. Rather, they are goods which are ordinarily required for good human lives, and that depend heavily on the material conditions of those lives. It is this materiality which makes them the appropriate subject of a theory that is concerned with ethical consumption. Indeed, many of the things which contribute to good human lives are neither amenable to distribution nor directly related to one’s material conditions of existence (for instance, having a good sense of humour). Questions of global justice must be cast in terms of goods which are susceptible to redistribution, though it is clear that money cannot buy all of the things required for a good life.

1.3 Specific Issues and Arguments

The general problem of the thesis, its resolution, and some closely related practical issues will be discussed in the following manner. Chapter Two will be dedicated to describing the Personal and Impersonal Worlds in detail, and spelling out why they are in conflict. In addition, an argument will be made to the effect that each World is intimately related to a particular vision of appropriate poverty-relief measures; in one world they are based on the idea of charity, and in the other, on distributive justice. This relation can be either explicit or implicit, but is easily demonstrated on the basis of the principal conceptual components of each World.
Chapter Three is a series of interconnected arguments. The first is that voluntary charity, understood as being over and above the call of duty, is simply not a strict enough moral requirement, given what is at stake. Instead of thinking that aiding the needy is “something which it is good to do, but not bad not to do,” we ought to think of it as a positive obligation, the non-performance of which makes us blameworthy and subject to moral criticism. This argument is motivated primarily by the ubiquitous North American idea that giving to charity is the kind of thing that is a mere matter of taste or personal preference, and that there is nothing objectionable about that.

A related objection will then be addressed, namely, that resources do not exist in some kind of global pot from which they can be divvied up; they already belong to people. These people have property rights which protect their property from being forcibly taken away, and that right entails that they are the sole arbiters of what happens to it. Indeed, from the point of view of Western property law, this is an accurate account.

I will argue that there is a tension between legal and moral entitlement. As such, it is possible to be entitled to something according to the dictates of property law, while at the same time having no moral entitlement to it. The relationship of legal entitlement to the notions of desert and need will be investigated, and their tension illuminated. This discussion wraps up Part One, which is concerned only with presenting the problems at issue, and with demonstrating why we need new conceptions of obligation and entitlement in order to satisfactorily resolve them.

In Part Two, the resolution of the main theoretical problem is presented. Chapter Four, outlines the pluralistic conception of the good which is the core of the reconciliation project. After marking out its conceptual structure, I go on to describe how
it divides up aspects of the good life in a way that promotes the redistribution of wealth to the poor, while at the same time protecting partial attachments, commitments, and the development of personal identity. Finally, I demonstrate how the theory would work in the context of personal choices in individuals’ private lives.

Chapter Five moves from the personal to the political sphere. Here again, I explain how the new, pluralistic theory operates in this context, and how the obligations of the state can be deduced from it. As in Chapter Four, the strategy is to articulate what manifestations of partiality are legitimate and why, and to use the boundaries of acceptable partiality as a guide to the appropriate scope of impartial obligations.

The third part of the thesis takes up issues surrounding the practical application of the theory. In Chapter Six, I explain how each of the goods included in the theory can be broken down into a specific list of functional abilities and states of being that individuals must have in order for a particular good to be deemed adequately provided. This amounts to specifying a threshold above which having more of a particular good can no longer be said to be fulfilling a need. This is a crucial step in determining the threshold for acceptable consumption generally.

Suggestions are made here about how the achievement of these functionings might be measured, and the positive effects of collective action on redistribution schemes are noted. This is followed by a thorough description of the concrete duties that are mandated by the theory for both states and individuals, and a discussion of who they ought to be helped. The chapter closes with a demonstration of how well the theory can handle two typical objections to redistributive theories: (1) that the obligations placed on affluent people by these theories are temporally and fiscally indeterminate and so overly
burdensome, and (2) that the implementation of such a scheme will result in a morally objectionable leveling-down of the global quality of life.

Chapter Seven deals with one last practical problem - whether or not all the responsibility for carrying out poverty-relief aid ought to be placed on the shoulders of governments, or if individuals may plausibly be thought to have this responsibility too. The thesis closes with some thoughts on what it might mean to adopt the role of a global citizen.

The position put forward in this dissertation can be understood as mid-way between two points. Each of the two points are home to either (a) those who see morality as first and foremost a personal affair, tied up with obligations to loved ones, or (b) those who see it as demanding a strict concern for fairness and equality which "trumps" other concerns. I am arguing against the claim of each conception to be exhaustive of the moral sphere, but also arguing that they each capture some genuine elements of morality.

In order to eliminate the clash of obligations created by these competing camps, I mean to set out an integrated view of morality. The point of this integration is both to illuminate and reduce many of the substantial moral conflicts that individuals and nation-states often face. A unified framework will be more theoretically satisfying, and will make it easier to identify and fulfill our moral obligations. Thus, the thesis is both a clarifying and a constructive project, designed to shed light on how we might achieve the goals of creating morally acceptable lives and societies.
Notes

3. Ibid., p. 348.
4. Ibid., p. 349.
Chapter Two: Two Moral Worlds

What follows is designed to be a detailed explanation of the theoretical problem at the heart of this investigation. Leaving prescription aside for the moment, I want to paint a picture of two distinct spheres of our moral lives - the Personal and Impersonal Moral Worlds. A rich description of the structure and content of the two worlds will reveal that they each have a unique hold on our intuitions and actions. As illustrated by our everyday activities and judgments, we are familiar with their various requirements and can comfortably move back and forth between them. However, upon closer inspection it becomes clear that with respect to some weighty moral issues, the two worlds we inhabit are deeply in conflict.

In addition to outlining what constitutes the two worlds, I will draw out the connection between each sphere and a particular view of our obligations to the less fortunate. The internal logic of each moral world gives rise to a particular view of how we should act when we know that the poverty of strangers is causing them to suffer; a charity view follows from the Personal World, and a distributive justice view from the Impersonal. Making explicit the opposing notions of responsibility and duty implicit in each of these moral viewpoints will demonstrate why the theoretical conflict must be resolved prior to arriving at any satisfactory conclusions about the existence, nature, and scope of our obligations to the poor.

2.1 The Personal Moral World

We experience ourselves as living in a world in which we are attached, in different ways, to specific people, places and projects. We live in particular
communities, work for particular employers, have friends and families, and enjoy certain leisure and educational activities. We belong to unions, sports teams, the PTA, reading groups, charities, professional organizations, and political parties. These are the types of close personal relationships and attachments to individuals, groups and pursuits of which the Personal Moral World is made. Together, they form a web that gives our lives meaning and structure.

As Thomas Nagel notes, this world "involves strong personal allegiance to particular communities of interest or conviction or emotional identification, larger than those defined by family or friendship, but still far less than universal." In this world, we are mainly concerned with our own lives and the lives of the people we care about. We can think of ourselves as being at the "centre of a set of concentric circles of rapidly diminishing identification with others." From here, we judge morally correct behaviour by referring to the concrete histories, expectations, needs and personalities of the people with whom we are in various types of relationships.

Despite their enormous variety, it is still possible to identify some common moral features among many diverse relationships, which can help us understand their significance for ethical reasoning. The fundamental moral features of close relationships are that they (1) are non-instrumentally valuable, and (2) generate special obligations.

(1) Thomas Donaldson comments that there is something about the particularity of those persons which helps ground the value and the commitment of the [relationship]; and which would be lost by substitution. Your [relationship] is with a particular person. This goes beyond the mere fact that the value must be grounded in a particular relationship.
He also observes that the value of close relationships is grounded in a basic concern for, or identification with, the other, rather than being derived from a larger concern for behaving morally. In other words, we do not care about the welfare of particular people, or about sustaining particular relationships, because of the good consequences these practices will bring about. Rather, we care about people and relationships for their own sakes. Once we are in relationships, *then* they can provide us with some of the parameters for our moral lives, but we do not enter into them as a result of moral requirements. In many cases, we do not *enter into* them at all, but merely find ourselves situated in relation to particular people and groups.

It is this concern for particular others that characteristically motivates people to fulfill obligations in the Personal Moral World. This type of motivation just highlights the fact that we think close relationships generally have intrinsic, rather than instrumental, value. We consider them morally important in and of themselves, without reference to some further end. It is “a special concern for [the welfare of] *this* person, or *that* person, or *these* persons, and not for *persons in general*, that informs relationships of family and friendships and provides much of their moral significance.”

(2) As a result of their intrinsic value, we come to see special relationships as generating special responsibilities. Sam Scheffler points out that *what it means* to value a relationship non-instrumentally is just to “see a person as a source of special claims in virtue of the relationship between us.” People routinely make moral claims on one another by invoking their mutual involvement in a relevant relationship. For instance, claims can be made on a parent’s or friend’s time, on a citizen’s loyalty to her country, or on a mentor’s professional advice and encouragement. When we are operating in the

**PART I: THE PROBLEM**
Personal Moral World, we see ourselves as able to make positive claims on particular others, over and above those we can make on all human beings. In practice, the specific obligations we have vary according to the type, intensity, and history of each relationship, as well as myriad other factors such as the desires and needs of the individuals involved.

Of course, special obligations can take a number of other forms, such as compensation for past wrongs, and return on benefits received. I will not discuss these types of obligations at length here, since they are generally seen to be compatible with both the Personal and Impersonal Worldviews. As such, these other sorts of special obligations do not contribute to the principal conflict which I am examining.

Critics of partiality (and so of the Personal World) may well doubt that special relationships give rise to special responsibilities. Indeed, it has often been argued that our personal relationships only seem to generate responsibilities, because we feel so naturally generous and kindly toward people we care about and with whom we share common interests. Such critics argue that the commitment we feel to these people is the result of natural, spontaneous benevolence and so, while it may be a powerful emotion, it does not denote the existence of a moral obligation. The sphere of moral regulation, so this objection goes, is not determined by whether or not I have benevolent feelings towards this or that person.

Indeed, we do not normally think of morality as the kind of thing which is contingent on the highly changeable mental and emotional states of individuals. My obligations do not come into and out of existence according to my mood. However, this does not mean that relationships do not generate special responsibilities. My relationships neither come into and out of existence at a rapid rate, nor does their
existence depend exclusively on how I feel right now. Scheffler argues that "one's
relationships to other people give rise to special obligations when they are relationships
that one has reason to value." It is the value of the relationships which creates the
obligations, and this value comes from the meaning that relationships give to our lives,
and not from our feelings of benevolence.

We may well feel anger, disappointment and embarrassment when we
contemplate certain people to whom we are attached, but this does not mean that those
same attachments are not the root of considerable meaning and value in our lives.
Relationships are the contexts in which we learn, grow and come to understand how we
are related to the wider world. It is hard to imagine a plausible blueprint for human
welfare that does not include genuine love, friendship and trust. They are some of the
things that make our lives worth living, despite their tendency to generate emotions such
as sadness and frustration as often as they produce feelings of love and comfort.

Not all relationships will be valuable in the sense that they are significant sources
of meaning in our lives. They will be too fleeting, too superficial, or too traumatic. But
the ones that do are valuable, and it is their value as contributions to our lives which
make them the source of special responsibilities. If we do not look out for the welfare of
the other person or people, then we are not protecting that value.

The Personal Moral World is the world of caring for elderly parents and young
children, participating in community associations and projects, and "being there" for
friends who need help. But that's not all. The Personal World also encompasses one's
commitments to oneself and to the projects that one deems to be valuable. John Kekes
notes that we can conceive of this world as including our concerns about creating good
lives and characters, in the sense that our commitments to particular people and projects are constitutive of who we are and so substantially shape our characters and life-plans. We set goals and make commitments with regard to who we want to be and how we want our lives to unfold. Insofar as we take these goals seriously as things worthy of our efforts, they also act as moral constraints on us and create moral guidelines for us.

How so? John Cottingham comments that “adding special extra weight to one’s own concerns” seems to be required for thinking of oneself as an individual, or as “a person with a distinctive identity.” To be a person with a history, a prospective future, ongoing commitments, unfulfilled desires and aspirations is to be involved. This involvement in things we deem valuable puts constraints on us and obliges us to spend our time, energy and resources on them. If I aspire to be well educated because I think that is a worthwhile kind of person to be, then I must spend a certain amount of time on my studies, or else I will fail to become the sort of person I want to become. Bernard Williams calls the kinds of individual commitments which are identity-forming “ground projects.” He describes them as the kinds of pursuits that provide the “motive force which propels [people] into the future and gives [them] a reason for living.” Ground projects give rise to constraints and guidelines for positive action because they are an important source of meaning and integrity in the narrative of our lives.

In short, the Personal World is constituted by obligations that arise out of personal attachments of various kinds and those personal projects which arise out of our own commitment to living good lives.

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2.2 The Personal World & The Charity View

It is evident that in the Personal Moral World our obligations to the particular people, projects and communities with which we are involved are believed to take precedence over other, more general, moral concerns. Examples of how this notion shapes our judgments are abundant. For instance, we would find it objectionable for a single father to donate all his time to a soup kitchen that feeds the homeless, if, as a result, his own children were left hungry and unsupervised for long periods of time. Regardless of whether he did more good at the soup kitchen than harm to his children, we would still tend to think that he was in the wrong. This is because we consider his children to have a claim on him that is prior to that of the homeless people.

Staunch act-utilitarians would likely disagree that this priority is justifiable, since it is their view that the right act is always the one with the best consequences overall. Nevertheless, there is an equally legitimate counter-claim that the welfare of my children is my particular role-responsibility, and once that responsibility is undertaken, it cannot be ignored whenever some marginally better circumstances would result. Moreover, in the Personal World, role-responsibilities are not the kinds of things that are typically voluntary, so that in many cases it is not possible to wholly renounce one’s responsibilities, but merely to be better or worse at fulfilling them.

Additionally, since the Personal Moral Worldview focuses on the commitments that constitute the substance of our daily lives, we tend to take the view that our obligations to humankind generally are primarily negative. That is, we assume that most obligations demanding actions rather than omissions are owed to specific others, whereas duties not to steal, to refrain from harm, etc., are owed to everyone. The logic of the
Personal Moral World requires that strangers mainly hold what are sometimes called “negative” rights against us.\textsuperscript{12}

Very limited positive duties (actions rather than omissions) of the “good Samaritan” variety are part of the Personal Worldview, but they are generally restricted to imminent rescue sorts of situations. This means that it is a recognized positive duty to rescue people in danger when that danger is immediate, the sacrifice to oneself is small, and the benefit to the other is great. An example of this type of duty would be saving a child from drowning in a swimming pool, as contrasted with saving the same child from the more mundane, unseen, and ongoing threat of malnutrition.

As we can see, in the Personal World negative duties are both stricter and more extensive than positive ones. Scheffler attributes the difference in the strength of negative and positive duties to the intuition that: “it is more important to avoid doing certain sorts of things to people than it is to prevent unwelcome occurrences from befalling them or to provide them with positive benefits.”\textsuperscript{13} Further, he notes that negative duties are understood to “constitute a greater constraint on one’s pursuit of one’s own goals, projects and commitments.”\textsuperscript{14}

The dual notions of duty and responsibility characteristic of the Personal Worldview are what requires people operating within it to take what I call the “charity view” of helping the needy. I am working with a relatively common-sense view of charity here, which includes the ideas that charity is supererogatory in nature, and that it is not an obligation.\textsuperscript{15} Peter Unger captures this view nicely in the following example:
In your mailbox, there's something from (the U.S. Committee for) UNICEF. After reading it through, you correctly believe that, unless you soon send in a check for $100, then, instead of each living many more years, over thirty more children will die soon. But, you throw the material in your trash basket, including the convenient return envelope provided, you send nothing, and, instead of living many more years, over thirty more children soon die than would have had you sent in the requested $100.¹⁶

He observes that helping the needy in a case like this is considered good to do but not wrong to refrain from doing. "The charitable man may be praised, but the man who is not charitable is not condemned."¹⁷ This is the essence of the charity view.

The charity view is distinct from the Kantian view that we have certain "imperfect" duties, that is, that we are obliged to carry out certain duties that are neither enforceable nor owed to a particular person or group. For instance, the Kantian imperfect duty to improve oneself specifies a general type of duty, the fulfillment of which cannot be demanded by anyone in particular, but is nevertheless a moral imperative that individuals must do their best to carry out in their particular circumstances. Imperfect duties are, notably, still duties in the strict sense, meaning that people who fail to carry them out can be justly criticized. By contrast, the charity view’s supererogatory component specifies that people are not morally required to aid strangers generally. Indeed, since supererogatory just means “over and above the call of duty” it is evident that this view characterizes helping the needy as permissible and praiseworthy, but not obligatory.

Basically, the charity view protects the partial obligations created by special relationships by eliminating any potential conflicts with impartial-type obligations. The element of supererogation, which is built-in to the concept of charity, allows a person to

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live a moral life even if he can only attend to his immediate, partial duties. This fits nicely with the aforementioned notion of universal rights being almost exclusively negative in character. Indeed, the charity view makes it easier for people to be a good in the Personal World, because it eases the moral pressure on them to use their time and resources for the good of people and projects which are far removed from their daily lives. As Scheffler points out,

the principle that negative duties are stricter than positive duties serves to limit normative responsibility in such a way that individuals may, provided that they avoid certain types of proscribed behaviour, exercise considerable discretion in the way they choose to lead their lives and to allocate their resources.¹⁸

The Personal World contains limiting conceptions of responsibility and obligation, which not only mark out, but also restrict, the size of a person’s moral world.

At the same time, the charity view allows people to recognize that the suffering of the poor is a bad thing, and that it is good to help alleviate it. Thus, the charity view acknowledges our intuition that the suffering of strangers is bad, and yet makes this intuition compatible with the priority of our partial duties. In this way, the charity view follows from the Personal World conception of morality.

2.3 The Impersonal Moral World

If the Personal World encompasses all our special relationships, commitments and obligations, then what constitutes the Impersonal World? The Impersonal World is grounded in the basic intuition that all human beings are equally valuable. There have been many attempts at formalizing this intuition, which often cash out in very different prescriptions for action. The equal value of people is usually translated into moral
precepts which demand some type of equal respect or impartiality. Williams sums up the common elements of impartial views with a Kantian flavour when he says,

> the moral point of view is specially characterized by its impartiality and its indifference to any particular relations to particular persons, and moral thought requires abstraction from particular circumstances and particular characteristics of parties, including the agent except in so far as these can be treated as universal features of any morally similar situation; and ... the motivations of the moral agent, correspondingly, involve a rational application of impartial principle and are thus different in kind from the sorts of motivations that he might have for treating some particular persons (for instance, himself) differently because he happened to have some particular interest towards them.\(^{19}\)

Abstracting from personal interests and motivations in this manner is done in the name of fairness and affords people equal consideration. It is the mindset required for employing the basic principle that one ought to treat like cases alike.

Utilitarian and consequentialist perspectives capture yet another dimension of the Impersonal World. Their main claim is that “everyone is to count for one and none for more than one,” when we are calculating what course of action would maximize happiness. This is another expression of our basic intuition that people should be treated equally, only it stresses the importance of taking each person’s interests into account. Here, people are treated equally in that, for instance, my interests are not afforded more importance than those of others, and my children’s interests are not weighted more heavily than other children’s in decisions about what I ought to do. Sidgwick puts a classic utilitarian spin on the idea of equal consideration when he says that “the good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the point of view ... of the Universe than the good of any other; unless, that is, there are special grounds for believing that more good is likely to be realized in one case than in the other.\(^{20}\)
Thomas Nagel is describing this point of view when he suggests that, once we recognize that everyone starts with a particular set of interests and concerns, we need only “remove ourselves in thought from our particular position in the world ... without singling out as I the one we happen to be.” This allows us to identify which concerns simply matter, and not merely which ones matter to us.

In contrast to the Personal World (which gives pride of place to personal concerns), it is clear that in the Impersonal World we are attempting to put aside our particular interests and differences, in order to make a disinterested assessment of what would count as fair or equal treatment in particular cases. The above types of rules and conceptions of equality demonstrate how we go about reasoning in the Impersonal World, but what kind of practices or situations demand this approach?

The perspective characteristic of the Impersonal Worldview is used when we make judgments about fairness in distribution, procedures, and the application of rules, such as a mother giving fair portions of pie to her children, or allowing all parties to a dispute to put forward their views and concerns.

Additionally, the Impersonal World embraces impartial duties that we are often asked to carry out in our public life. Far from being excessively abstract, we operate quite comfortably in this world every day in our official roles as citizens, judges, teachers and businesspeople. In this moral sphere we are required to abstract from our personal relationships when making certain types of ordinary decisions and carrying out certain duties, such as hiring staff and grading assignments. We purport to be operating in the Impersonal World when we denounce someone for cheating at poker, or demand equal pay for equal work. Often, the utilitarian features of this world stand out when we are

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attempting to address the interests of many individuals within a group, such as negotiating a union agreement. This is also the moral world we are occupying when we object to discrimination in the forms of nepotism, racism and sexism.

The structure of the Impersonal World framework for obligations is such that people can hold both positive and negative rights against every other member of humankind, which have corresponding duties of equal strictness. For example, when we are taking this moral approach, we can require that someone in a position of authority make a fair judgment, rather than judging according to whom she likes better, or fulfilling her duty in some arbitrary fashion. We could also require that someone sacrifice the pleasure of owning a large gun collection if banning private gun ownership would have better consequences overall. Clearly, it is within the scope of the Impersonal Worldview to require certain actions of people in a vast array of situations and not primarily omissions.

2.4 The Impersonal World & Distributive Justice

It is easy to see why the Impersonal World fosters a distributive justice view of helping the needy. If we take seriously a concern for fairness and the intrinsic value of people, then we can see why it would not be just to let some starve for reasons that are not their fault. The distributive justice view demands action, that is, the fulfillment of people’s positive rights to a fair share of the resources that we each need equally to survive. This follows from the basic premise of all impartial theories that each person and/or their interests should be treated as equally valuable in order for a distribution to be just.
Nagel's view is that such impartiality is inherently egalitarian because concern for people must "contain a separate and equal concern for each person's good." This means keeping each individual's good conceptually separate, and then ensuring that each person gets some reasonable share of the good. Nagel also notes that "[t]he claims on our impartial concern of an individual who is badly off present themselves as having some priority over the claims of each individual who is better off; as being ahead in the queue." This is an excellent articulation of how deontological and consequentialist concerns appear when combined to create a more well-rounded view.

The very idea that there is such a thing as distributive justice takes for granted the legitimacy of negative responsibility. If someone remains unconvinced that people are responsible for the consequences of their omissions, then she will not agree with this view. That said, it seems to me that at least in some cases (such as the drowning child) our intuitions do indicate that we consider ourselves negatively responsible. Moreover, it remains an open question whether we are, in fact, negatively responsible in a wide range of instances, and simply have an easier time ignoring this because the consequences of our omissions are not as readily identifiable or obviously attributable to us as the consequences of our actions. Perhaps our failure to fulfill positive duties is veiled by explanations which attribute responsibility to social forces such as the market, without recognizing that such "forces" are constructed by and for people, who also have the capacity to alter their consequences.

The foregoing discussion is not intended to suggest that the Personal World is somehow lived or experienced separately from the Impersonal World, but rather only to specify what kinds of moral concerns are within the domain of each. The two moral

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worlds overlap considerably in practice, and we usually have no problem moving freely between them. Our moral difficulties arise in the area of overlap, where the two views demand different courses of action.

2.5 The Conflict

A description of the two Moral Worlds makes it apparent that they not only contain conflicting notions of obligation, but also that neither one on its own is entirely satisfactory when judged according to our moral intuitions and common practices. We seem to need both in order to make moral judgments in a broad array of contexts, but when we are considering some questions, the set of obligations embedded in the Personal World seems too partial, and those in the Impersonal World seem too demanding.

In exactly what way does the Personal Worldview seem too partial? Scheffler draws this out well when he explains what happens when I make a new friend. "[T]hree changes in my responsibilities have taken place: (1) I now have duties to that person which I did not have before, (2) my duties to her may cause me not to do things for strangers that I otherwise would have done and (3) my duties to her now take priority over those I have to others simply as human beings. This means that I am required to help her if I cannot help both her and a stranger. I am now permitted to do things which allow the friendship to flourish in place of things that help others, and I benefit from the duties she now has towards me.

Scheffler asks, why "should our friendship give rise to a distribution of responsibilities that is favorable to us and unfavorable to other people?"24 Providing advantages that work to the detriment of others in this way seems unjustifiable, if we take

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the equal value of people seriously. Finally, in the Personal Moral World obligations can either take the form of non-interference (with people at large), or positive actions taken as a result of an obligation to a specific person. Few obligations to people generally take a positive form. This conception of obligation fits a little too closely with self-interest (loosely-construed), and so is somewhat suspect. It seems too comfortable to say that the only positive obligations I have are to people who play a central role in my life, because this leaves me so much room to pursue things that I enjoy, without ever-having to ask if these pursuits should take precedence over the welfare of other human beings. It allows me to cut myself off morally from other human beings in an artificial fashion.

While the partial view may seem too easy, the impartial view seems too demanding. In its most extreme forms it seems to require abandonment of the commitments to particular persons and projects that enrich our lives and are central to the formation of individual character. A good example of this is Peter Singer's prescription that "we ought to give [to charities] until we reach the level of marginal utility - that is, at which, by giving more, I would cause as much suffering to myself or my dependents as I would relieve by my gift."26

Given the current economic situation of the worst-off people in the world, this type of extreme recommendation runs up against two main lines of objection, related to demandingness. The first is that there are so many people who need help that the individual sacrifice required would be both immense and permanent. The temporal and financial indeterminacy of the obligation makes it seem to demand heroic efforts on the part of everyone, and so is prima facie too burdensome. The second type of objection
characterizes the demandingness of the Impersonal Worldview as positively pernicious. Moral requirements this strenuous and extensive effectively “empty out” a person’s life and identity. A human element in both morality and life in general is thereby lost. All people come to be seen as generic “others” to whom we owe obligations, rather than singling out some for special affection and meaningful interaction. My own children and friends come to be seen from the perspective of the Universe, and so the tangible, everyday nature of our love is diminished or eliminated. Finally, if moral obligations are this demanding, then they would require us to give up all other aspects of life, and so turn us into moral automatons. We would live solely in order to be moral, rather than being moral as part of a larger vision of the good life. We would become faceless functionaries who carry out moral obligations but are otherwise indistinguishable. As such, we would be subject to a kind of moral tyranny. The argument is that there is a substantial loss here of liberty, individuality, and valuable human undertakings.

The significance of this dilemma should not be underestimated. People encounter this conflict many times throughout the course of their lives, and it is a central problem for governments when drafting poverty-related policy. If we care about being moral, then we ought to undertake the task of identifying and justifying a coherent view of some kind. That way we can be sure that we are not acting in a manner that goes against our most fundamental moral conceptions.

What would it take for us to make our moral notions coherent, and thus, both more satisfying and practically viable? It is clear that we must either (1) assign priority to the Personal World over the Impersonal, (2) assign priority to the Impersonal World over the Personal, or (3) opt for an Integrated World view, which affords them roughly
equal weight. The third strategy will be adopted in this thesis, since to put a premium on one view or the other would be to give short shrift to some serious moral considerations. This amounts to making moral decisions without adequately weighing the relevant data.
Notes

4 Ibid., p. 7.
6 Ibid., p. 189.
7 Ibid., p. 197.
p. 365.
10 Bernard Williams, “Persons, Character and Morality,” in Oksenberg Rorty (ed.)
11 Ibid., p. 209.
14 Ibid., p. 223.
p. 229.
17 Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence and Morality, in H. La Follette ed., *Ethics in Practice*. Oxford:
19 Bernard Williams, “Persons, Character and Morality,” p. 198.
22 Ibid., p. 66.
23 Ibid., p. 68.
25 Ibid., p. 194.

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Chapter Three: The Problem with Charity

We saw in Chapter Two that there are three alternatives for resolving the conflict between the Worlds. The aim of this chapter is to show why we should seek an integration of the two views, rather than simply assigning priority to one or the other. The short answer is that both views reflect a concern for genuine moral goods, the value of which obligates us to pursue them. The long answer, which will be developed in this chapter, is that the Charity View is insufficiently demanding and needs to be supplemented with the concern for fairness that is characteristic of the Impersonal Worldview.

Several related arguments will be made, in order to show that the Personal World/Charity View is missing something fundamental to morality. Since the commonly accepted view (in North America at least) is that obligations are partial and charity can be praised but not blamed, then the onus is on me to demonstrate why this is an inadequate account of appropriate moral concern. First, I'll discuss why the Personal World contains genuine moral goods. Then, I'll argue that the Charity View of appropriate concern for the less fortunate is both objectionable and suspiciously convenient. The proper way in which to understand our relationship to the less fortunate is to see ourselves as having full-fledged obligations to aid them, rather than seeing aid as supererogatory in nature.

The basis for this obligation is the concern for fairness and equality integral to the Impersonal Worldview. The fact that people are equally valuable and that they equally require that their basic needs be met, is the main intuition driving the switch from supererogatory to obligatory status for aiding the needy. However, there is powerful standard objection to this change in moral status, namely, that the poor are responsible for
their own plight and so do not deserve to be helped. This will be addressed at the end of the chapter.

3.1 The Personal World Evaluated

An elaborate argument is not required in order to demonstrate that the Personal Worldview embraces concern for moral goods. It is sufficient to point out that adopting a predominantly Impersonal Worldview would require us to abandon the attachments that make our lives worth living. If we emphasized the importance of the Impersonal World strongly enough in our assessment of moral conduct, then the demands of this World would arrange our conduct such that real attachments would be unsustainable. Considering our attachments from an impartial perspective would (more often then not) require that the kind of special attention constitutive of these commitments be subordinated to universal concerns. This emphasis on impartiality would make it impossible to act on any special concerns, and thus, to have any commitments at all.

As noted in Chapter Two, our lives would be so overwhelmed by the extent of our impartial obligations, that special commitments and relationships would be squeezed out. Moreover, we would end up regarding our own children and parents as merely one of many people making claims on us, interchangeable with strangers from far afield. This seems both unrealistic and sinister, in that we are being stripped of all the things that have meaning and value for us, outside of being a moral person. It seems that when we take seriously the priority of the Impersonal World, it collapses the Personal World into itself.

Since relationships and personal goals are the types of commitments which make life worth living, then we can accept as given that the Personal World includes some

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undeniably moral goods. Thus, the option of giving exclusive priority to the Impersonal World is ruled out.

3.2 The Charity View Evaluated

I will begin by admitting that in a very superficial sense, the Personal World (and the Charity View which follows from it), address how we ought to behave toward both intimates and strangers. A critic may well ask: “What is the problem then? Aren’t our ‘moral bases’ covered by this worldview? Why do we need the Impersonal World?” It is the point of this section to establish why the Personal World on its own is unsatisfactory, and so to clear the way for a thicker, better understanding of our moral obligations.

The Personal World/Charity View does not take seriously enough the value of each individual person’s welfare and dignity, since it designates actions which ensure them as merely supererogatory and not as obligatory. To relegate promoting equality of basic human needs to the realm of things which are “good to do but not bad not to do,” is to grossly misrepresent their critical place in our lives. Still, one could grant that welfare and dignity are central goods in our lives and still wonder why their goodness generates an obligation for us to provide them.

To treat the security, subsistence and other necessaries (basic needs) of people in poverty as objects of supererogatory concern is equivalent to treating them as personal preferences. We can praise the kind of character a particular preference displays (i.e. a generous one), but its lack is not taken to be a moral defect. The problem with this is that needs are distinct from preferences, precisely because of their close connection to the survival, overall welfare and dignity of people. Basic needs are also more urgent than

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preferences, and so demand greater moral attention.

Why is this the case? Take the case of a child drowning in a swimming pool. His survival and welfare depend on my saving him, and quickly. His need for saving is urgent and directly connected to his survival and overall welfare, since if I save him very late, irreparable damage may have already been done to his nervous system. This type of situation places a positive obligation on me to try to save him. It is not considered appropriate for me to weigh my preference for going to get an ice-cream cone against what is at stake for the drowning child. Saving him falls into the category of obligation, and not into the category of preference. It would be objectionable if my reasoning in this situation were to go as follows: “Well, I have a preference of strength X to go get an ice-cream cone, and a preference of strength Y to see the drowning child survive, but, since X is stronger than Y, I think I’ll go to the ice-cream stand.”

On the face of it, this example may seem very different from our views on charity generally, but it isn’t. Everyday (or at least on the days where giving to charity occurs to them) most people either consciously or unconsciously, weigh their preferences for dinners out, movies, new cars and added conveniences against the basic needs of people who live in poverty. Most times, people choose their preference for more goods and services over their “preference” for knowing that some people, somewhere, will not die soon.

But thinking about the choice in this way is a category mistake. Needs are not the same types of things as preferences, and so should not be weighed against them in this fashion. The primary difference is that needs are intimately connected to human welfare, and when they remain unfulfilled, the consequences are extremely dire. By contrast,
preferences are the types of things which, when we choose one over the other, there is not usually a substantial difference in the gravity of the consequences, and these consequences are not typically tied to our very survival. Sure, it is possible to utter statements such as “I prefer heroin over milk,” but (a) usually our preferences are not so extreme in their contrast, and (b) such extreme examples trade on a unconventional use of “prefer,” which masks the underlying need for say, good psychological health.

Further strengthening the case against the Charity View is the fact that it allows people to weigh their own preferences against someone else’s needs. Not only is this a category mistake, it allows patent selfishness to go undetected and uncriticized. Moreover, it is objectionable that someone else’s survival, welfare and dignity should be treated as the kinds of things that may depend on my whims. The consequences of the non-fulfillment of need demands that I consider the situation more seriously than my preference for chocolate rather than vanilla.

In addition, it seems wrong that someone else’s survival should depend on decisions for which I cannot be criticized no matter how I choose. This reflects a profound disrespect for the people whose most vital interests are on the line. I do not receive so much as a slap on the wrist for disregarding them, and yet I am subject to severe moral condemnation for not saving the drowning child. It is inconsistent and bizarre for me to be required to care about the welfare and basic needs of some strangers, and not others, when there is no relevant difference between them. The drowning boy may be closer, but saving him is not easier than writing a cheque to OXFAM, and is more dangerous for me.

If the welfare and dignity (indeed, the very survival) of the poorest people is to be

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made independent of others’ preferences, then we must treat it as a duty, and not just as an option. For if aiding the needy were to be a considered a duty, then people’s survival would no longer be dependent on the whims of others, but rather on their decisions to behave morally, which seems more appropriate. What is more, people who do not fulfill their obligations could be justly criticized.

What, exactly, is the difference between an act which is supererogatory and one which is obligatory? The distinction lies in the fact that although we ought to do a supererogatory act, we are bound to do obligatory acts. Alan Wertheimer comments,

We say that an act is obligatory, only when failure to perform it constitutes sufficient grounds for moral condemnation, and not when performance would result only in praise. Our moral vocabulary reflects the important social practice of distinguishing acts whose nonperformance subjects the individual to blame and acts which entitle the individual only to praise.

People have obligations when others have very strong moral reasons to expect them to perform or refrain from some act and to sanction them if they do not. Usually, this sanction takes the form of moral condemnation or criticism, and is expected to elicit feelings of shame in the person criticized. As Wertheimer points out, “in order to avoid sanction, persons under obligations must supply the relevant person(s) with good reasons why they did not or could not perform the act.” When you do not fulfill an obligation, you are required to justify your behaviour. This is why considering something an obligatory act rather than a supererogatory one demonstrates a more serious concern for what is at stake. Surely, the survival, dignity, and welfare of human beings are sufficiently morally important to justify the shift from supererogatory to obligatory status.

Evidently the Personal Moral World takes account of many genuine moral goods, but its restrictive conception of obligation is inadequate and objectionable when applied

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to how we ought to treat the less fortunate. If, indeed, we do have an obligation to help the needy, which seems to be the more appropriate approach to the problem, then where does it come from and what principles underlay it?

3.3 Needs and Fairness: The Importance of the Impersonal World

Our obligation to help the needy originates in two considerations. (1) The close connection between the fulfillment of needs and the survival and dignity of people, and (2) the equal value of people. Once we recognize that people are equally valuable and they each must have their basic needs met in order to survive and flourish, then we can see that there is a legitimate moral demand for fairness in needs-fulfillment.

The significance of fairness and equality is central to the Impersonal World. The demand that people be treated equally, or that "like cases be treated alike," is generated when we take the impartial perspective described in Chapter Two. We need to supplement the Personal World approach with these principles in order to demonstrate why helping the needy ought to be obligatory. It is not only that having their basic needs met is extremely important for people, but also that we cannot justify treating like cases differently that allows us to say an obligation of justice exists in this case. If we were to argue that we are justified in treating the less fortunate differently than ourselves, we would have to point out some relevant moral difference.

Simply saying that "I care more about me," does not count as a moral reason. Your needs look to be the same as everyone else's, from the impersonal point of view. Favouring yourself or your loved ones then, with respect to needs-fulfillment, looks illogical at best; blatantly selfish at worst. This is not to say that all forms of partiality
are unjustified, but merely to point out that deviations from equality of treatment must be based on differences between people or circumstances that are **morally relevant**.

The above conclusion depends on two main premises: (1) All people are equally valuable, or deserve equal concern, and (2) it is possible to identify such things as basic human needs, the fulfillment of which is equally necessary to all people for building good lives. Premise #1 is relatively uncontroversial from the point of view of everyone but the radical sceptic.

With respect to whether we can identify some reasonably common things which are basic needs (claim #2), the important question is not whether we can identify what constitutes a need, but whether we can identify what does not. This is because, as David Braybrooke points out, we often use the word “need” to refer to thing that we want or desire, and desires are not uniform across human beings. He remarks that we use the word “need” to refer to things which he calls “adventitious needs.” These depend on preferences, whereas, as we have already seen, needs are distinct from preferences. Braybrooke calls those needs which are genuine, and so do not depend on preferences “course-of-life needs.”

Something is a course-of-life need, if it is “indispensable to mind or body in performing the tasks assigned a given person under a combination of basic social roles,” that is, if it is necessary for carrying out the required activities of being a parent, a worker, a child, a teacher, a member of a particular religion, etc. If what is indispensable in this way is not supplied, then a person inevitably fails to carry out what is required for the role, as a result of physical incapacity or social or economic inability. Such failure is often pitied, and can lower the respect a person receives from others, and his own

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estimation of himself. Course-of-life needs are basic, and thus can be presumed to be present in the lives of all human beings. The fulfillment of course-of-life needs is required in order to build a good life, regardless of the vision of the good life to which someone is committed. Thus, basic needs are uniform enough to justify the use of the principle of “treating like cases alike” as the basis of our obligation to help the less fortunate.

A critic of impartial obligations might accept all of the foregoing arguments and nevertheless maintain that no obligation to help the needy strictly exists. Such a critic might grant that (a) fulfilling basic needs is extremely important from a moral point of view, and (b) like cases ought to be treated alike, in that everyone’s basic needs ought to be met. Still, this critic might ask, “Why is it my obligation to make sure that everyone’s needs are met equally? Can I really be legitimately blamed for not aiding the needy?”

If we merely focus on our day-to-day lives and the restricted sphere in which they take place, we are inclined to say, “No, people should not be blamed for failing to help the needy. Provided they do not actively go about trying to deprive people, then what happens to strangers is not their responsibility.” But this is too narrow a perspective.

If we look at our place in a broader context – a global context – then we begin to see that we are connected to many more people than just those who we see every day. In fact, given the present level of global, economic interdependence, there is almost no place in the world that is not somehow affected by our activities, albeit sometimes in a remote way.

Why is this important? It’s important, because if we are connected to those people, then our actions can affect what happens to them. For instance, Thomas Pogge

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points out that the citizens of affluent countries have an enormous effect on the global poor, "via investments, loans, military aid, trade, sex tourism, culture exports. ... Their very survival often depends decisively ... on our demand behaviour."5

If we can affect what happens to a group of people, then they are definitively part of our moral frame of reference. This is the case even if we do not exactly know how a given action will affect them. (Indeed, most times we don't exactly know how our actions will affect anyone.) The reason our actions can affect the global poor is that we share a set of economic institutions with them.

This shared system is "a worldwide state system based on internationally recognized territorial domains, interconnected through a global network of trade and diplomacy."6 The effect of this system is to cause some people to be born into a terribly impoverished starting position, which, on the face of it, appears to merely a result of chance, and so is no one's responsibility. But only the fact that a particular person is born into an impoverished starting position is the result of chance. Someone, under the current system, has to fill that space. The "players" are theoretically interchangeable. Pogge suggests that the misery of some participants in the system might be justifiable if "there were no superior institutional alternative under which this sort of misery would be avoided."7

But that is not the case. It is possible that a practicable institutional alternative could be created in which the worst-off people in the world could be substantively better off than they are now. The reason that we do not have such a system is that the more affluent and powerful members of the current system, as Pogge asserts, "whether intentionally or not - impose the framework upon them rather than some feasible

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institutional alternative that would not generate such severe and widespread poverty.\textsuperscript{8}

It is not luck that puts people at the bottom of a system which requires some people to be at the bottom, it's the system itself. If I am perpetuating the system, then I am, in part, also putting some people at the bottom. If the places of the "players" were switched, it would still be the case that the more powerful people at the top were partly responsible for keeping some people at the bottom.

If my actions perpetuate and strengthen a system in which some people have to occupy severely impoverished positions because \textit{that system benefits me}, then I am implicated in the poverty that those people experience. Whether or not I do it intentionally is beside the point. Those people are being causally effected by my actions, and I should take responsibility for my, admittedly limited, participation in bringing about certain effects. The obligation to help is peculiarly mine because I am part of the problem.

Evidently, the only way to take responsibility for participation in a global economic system is through positively contributing to the amelioration of poverty. Some people might choose to opt out of such a system and so refrain from perpetuating it, if that were at all possible, which it's not. The only way to lessen the effect of radical inequality that is brought about by the system is to redirect resources to the poor that now flow to people in the upper economic strata.

So, the reason there is a genuine obligation to help the less fortunate (or, to be more accurate, the \textit{economically oppressed}) is that (a) basic needs are closely connected to human welfare and dignity, and (b) each person equally requires that these needs be fulfilled. The reason that the obligation is mine, is that my affluence is made possible by

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the poverty of others, and so I am implicated in the arbitrary and unequal distribution of global resources that allows some people to have their needs fulfilled while systematically depriving others.

3.4 Objection Concerning Moral Desert

Before I end my discussion of the legitimacy of Impersonal obligations, I feel compelled to address the objection which I regard as the "first line of defence" for those who disagree with duties to redistribute wealth. Antony Flew puts it nicely. He admits that people's suffering from acute poverty is a "bad business" but thinks,

that is by no means sufficient to show that what is wrong constitutes a defection from justice. In order to establish that more specific conclusion, it becomes necessary to stipulate in addition: not only that poverty is not deserved and ought to be relieved; but also that the victims are, as of moral right, entitled to the relief which they have not in fact received.\(^9\)

He is challenging us to think about what is people’s due, that is, “what really are the proper grounds of desert and undeserved entitlement.”\(^10\) If we cannot show that the obligation to relieve poverty is a matter of justice, then it slips back into its supererogatory status. Flew has already pointed out what it is necessary to prove in order to prevent this slippage: (1) that the poverty is undeserved, (2) that it ought to be relieved, and (3) that people are entitled to poverty relief.

This is quite a common objection, since most people think that if someone has had a chance to do well and squandered it through laziness or apathy, then he has effectively forfeited any claim he might have had to help from others. This is a version of the old proverb that “you reap what you sow.” This harsh (though common) idea is
that if you don’t try very hard, then you deserve very little reward. On the other hand, if people are not responsible for their poverty, then they are generally thought to have a much stronger claim to aid. We can see this in the case of victims of natural disasters.

With respect to requirement #2 – that poverty ought to be relieved – we have already seen that having one’s basic needs fulfilled is intimately connected to one’s survival, welfare and dignity as a person. This constitutes sufficient reason to claim that, all things being equal, poverty ought to be relieved, because poverty is the main reason people’s needs go unfulfilled. However, it has not yet been fully demonstrated that (1) poverty is undeserved, and (3) people are entitled to poverty relief. I will attempt to do this now, and so directly fulfill the requirements set out by Flew.

Just to be clear, I wholeheartedly agree with Joseph Fletcher when he says: “I am willing to share food with the undisciplined and the undeserving ... whether they be individuals or whole nations.” Nevertheless, Flew has a valid point with respect to the role of moral desert in matters of justice, and so it ought to be addressed. (1) So, how can we tell if poverty is generally undeserved?

Thomas Nagel has this question in mind when he identifies four causes of economic inequality: discrimination, class, talent and effort. He points out that these four causes correspond to three separate attributions of responsibility: (1) “causes for which others are responsible (discrimination), (2) causes for which no one specifically is responsible, only ‘the system’ (class and talent) and (3) causes for which the individual himself is responsible (effort).” The first three causes of inequality are clearly not the responsibility of the person who suffers from poverty. Only someone who is poor because of his own lack of effort could be said to be responsible for it, and so to
"deserve" it.

The problem with this distinction is that effort, innate talent, and the effects of systemic class and other types of discrimination are virtually impossible to pull apart empirically. Particularly so with innate talent and effort. How can we tell that someone is able to provide for herself when she evidently is not doing so? Is it reasonable to assume that some people would rather die a slow death from disease, malnutrition and starvation rather than exert some effort to better their position?

As unlikely as this last scenario may be, even if some people are "free riders" in this respect, it is better to err on the side of caution. It would be morally preferable to feed a few people who are responsible for their impoverished position, than not to feed anyone, or to feed many less people than need to be fed, in order to make sure those few people who "just did not work hard enough" do not receive any help. Not to mention, until all systemic barriers to substantive equality are removed, we need to recognize that all decisions are being made under a certain amount of duress, and so any responsibility people might have is severely mitigated. The ability to make free choices is prior to attributions of responsibility on the basis of merit or effort.

Thus, the only rational course of action is to treat all people who are suffering from poverty as not responsible for their predicament, and by extension, undeserving of its hardships.

(3) Moving on to Flew's third requirement - are the poor morally entitled to aid, and if so, on what basis? The poor are entitled to relief of their poverty on the basis of need. This is not simply because fulfilling needs is important, but rather because needs have a special relationship to desert. Ordinarily, someone is said to deserve something if

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she has earned it, or has achieved a very high level of merit or esteem in some activity and so is deserving of special praise, recognition, or reward. However, as William Galston explains, needs relate to desert in a fundamentally different way than rewards. He says,

In the domain of need, we begin by assuming that the individual deserves the basic human goods that constitute the ends of need. The individual does not have to earn them but may, under rare and special conditions, cease to deserve them. It is the presumption of desert that links need so tightly to the principle of equality: the moral force of need-claims is highly insensitive to differences among individuals, although the content of justified need-claims will of course reflect those differences (emphasis added).

Thus, when we are asking if a person’s poverty is undeserved, we are asking whether that person satisfies any of the special conditions that would cause him to cease deserving the content of basic needs. People have a prior entitlement to have their basic needs met which can be canceled out by certain forms of behaviour, but that entitlement itself is not something that needs to be earned. Since we have seen that poverty is generally undeserved, then we can presume that the global poor retain their prior entitlement to have their needs met.

That said, this objection is still largely beside the point. In addition to the fact that most people in need of assistance are children or obviously subject to systemic oppression of some kind, the majority of hungry people would have to have done something pretty terrible to “deserve” to starve or die from malnutrition. Lack of effort is not sufficiently bad to justify this. Maybe its time the burden of proof was shifted to those who would withhold aid, rather than those who require it.

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3.5 Summing Up

Having addressed this common objection, it seems that the need for an Integrated Worldview still stands. We need to find a better way to understand our Impersonal and Personal World obligations than the pseudo-solution offered by the Charity View. Of course, the larger implication of this is that this very widespread manner of conceiving our obligations to the less fortunate should be abandoned as unjustifiable.

In Part One it has been established that we operate within two vastly different conceptions of morality in our everyday lives, and that these conceptions have differing prescriptions for action with regard to how affluent people ought to treat the global poor. We have also seen that the Charity View which follows from the Personal World is insufficiently demanding, given what is at stake for impoverished people, and should be supplemented by a more substantial concern for fairness and equality. Finally, we have seen that unfulfilled basic needs entitle people to relief, and that this relief should come from those people who strengthen and benefit from the economic system which keeps others in poverty.

Up to this point it has been demonstrated that in order to act morally in the face of radical economic inequality, we need to come up with a single, unified theory of obligation that can handle both impartial and partial concerns. In Part Two, I take on the task of building such a theory.
Notes

2 Ibid., p. 217.
4 Ibid., p. 48. Braybrooke himself only lists the social roles of parent, citizen, householder and worker, but I think his idea can be expanded to apply to a range of other roles.
6 Ibid., p. 504.
7 Ibid., p. 507.
8 Ibid., p. 506.
10 Ibid., p. 227.
12 Thomas Nagel, Equality and Partiality, p. 103.
13 Ibid., p. 108.

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Chapter Four – Foundational Goods and Private Lives

In Part One, it was demonstrated that the task of integrating the Personal and Impersonal Worldviews must be taken on, if we do not wish to leave aside valid moral considerations in our determinations of how to live good lives. Unless we are content to systematically ignore a certain set of moral obligations and so be culpable for their non-fulfillment, then we must undertake to better understand how apparently conflicting obligations interrelate, and how they might be consistently fused.

The aim of this chapter is to develop a conception of the good that can both incorporate the obligations which arise out of special relationships and also leave room for other, more impartial considerations. This is an effort to find a view of morality that is more coherent and holistic than the dichotomy set out in Part One. The chapter focuses on individuals’ obligations in their private lives, as friends, lovers, brothers, parents, etc., but not for instance, as citizens or public officials.

Simply put, the question I want to answer in this chapter is how can we combine several “different goals or virtues or standards, which we feel we cannot repudiate but which seem to demand incompatible things of us?”¹ Charles Taylor perceptively observes that historically we “have been maneuvered into a restrictive definition of ethics, which takes account of some of the goods we seek, e.g. utility and universal respect ... while excluding others, ... largely on the grounds that [these goods] are subject to less embarrassing dispute.”² The view put forward in this chapter does not exclude certain types of partial goods, because they too, may be integral to human welfare and so should be taken into account. At the very least, the argument presented here will draw attention to the need for a more robust conception of morality than either of the two
Moral Worlds provides, and so may save the richness and complexity of our moral lives from neat oversimplification or reduction to easy principles. The fact that it is difficult to successfully combine and juggle diverse kinds of goods is exactly why they need to be examined.

To this end, the chapter will be composed of two sections. The first will be a detailed explanation of the pluralistic conception of the good which makes this reconciliation project work. I will compile what I think is an instructive (though perhaps not comprehensive) list of foundational goods and elaborate briefly on the relevant features of each. Also, the relationship of foundational goods to their conceptual counterparts - relative goods – will be made clear. Finally, Michael Walzer’s objection to this general approach will be taken up. He contends that “[t]here is no set of primary or basic goods conceivable across all moral and material worlds,” or if there is one, then its content must be “abstracted from all particular meaning - hence, for all practical purposes, rendered meaningless.”

In the second section, how personal attachments and relationships fit into this pluralistic conception of the good will be discussed. Since this justification of partiality is limited in scope, I will also undertake to delineate where one can be legitimately partial in one’s individual choices and pursuits, and where such partiality begins to be unacceptable.

Section I

4.1 Foundational Goods

If these competing conceptions of morality are to be reconciled, and the important elements of each retained, then an integrated conception of the good must be developed.
This new conception of the good needs to incorporate the key values that each of the Personal and Impersonal Worlds encapsulates, and situate these values in a framework in which they are cast as the same types of things, and are more-or-less equally weighted. This creates the possibility of adjudicating between them.

My proposal is to bring those material obligations that arise from partial relationships and those that stem from the impartial concern for human welfare into the same, pluralistic framework. This framework consists of several distinct, though general, equally-weighted, valued ends and activities. The idea is that there are some human abilities and states of being which, given that human beings are the kind of creatures they are, make up a set of goods that are the foundation of good lives. These will be called "foundational goods."

Foundational goods are things which people need as material prerequisites for living good lives. They are each made up of a web of specific functional abilities and states that have some material requirements, but are only moderately related to income (hereafter the term "functional abilities" will be used to denote the whole range of Nussbaum’s "functionings," which include abilities, activities and states of being). For the purposes of the rest of my discussion, the list of foundational goods includes: respect, education, attachments (relationships and personal projects), cultural membership and health (REACH). The idea here is that the value of foundational goods originates in their close connection with fundamental needs of human beings. As William Galston observes, "There are some needs that all or nearly all human beings have in common." \(^4\) REACH are not these common needs themselves (which belong to individual people), but rather the things which people need to fulfill them.

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Foundational goods are not benefits in the way that term is normally understood. "Benefit" connotes something added on to a pre-existing state of wholeness. Foundational goods are not benefits in this sense, but are the fulfillment of needs. Their lack is understood to be a deficit for any given individual. It is possible for someone to forgo the pursuit or continued possession of a foundational good, but any such act would be understood as a sacrifice. Anyone who rejects a foundational good, for any amount of time, can be expected to provide his reasons against pursuing or possessing them, while no reasons must be given in their favour. Not having a foundational good is missing out on something that is humanly enriching - something that presents itself as prima facie something that ought not to be absent from a human life.

All of REACH are best understood as intrinsically valuable, ultimate ends, in that generally they are sought for their own sake. They are distinct ends, worth pursuing both on their own and in conjunction with one another. They are each made up of several mutually reinforcing, concrete functional abilities, and so are not dependent on, or reducible to, mental states.

Their intrinsic value is most evident in the cases of respect, personal attachments, and culture. It is possible that education and health may be viewed as instrumentally valuable by some people, although it is clear that as building blocks for good lives, they are extremely important goals. Even if these goods are viewed as merely instrumental, they are simply not the kinds of things that one can opt out of and expect to maintain an acceptable level of welfare over the long term. Thus, they are not the kinds of instrumental goods that one undertakes to reach a specific end, but rather are the types of goods that facilitate the whole range of ends that one might pursue over the course of life.

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They are, therefore, at the very least *proximate* ends for everyone. Whether they are considered instrumentally or intrinsically valuable, there can be no doubt that they should be classed as realizations of fundamental human needs.

Following Galston, I am developing this notion of foundational goods as the basis for my further analysis of justice and public policy. Also following him, I do not claim that they provide a blueprint for the production of total moral harmony or that "morality as a whole can be traced back to them." It is possible that there may be additional foundational goods, though if the original list is accepted, then other ones must at least be compatible with them.

**4.2 Individual Characteristics of REACH**

Now that the shared conceptual features of foundational goods have been identified, their individual characteristics can be elucidated. Despite the underlying similarities that have been pointed out, they are still quite a heterogeneous group.

How health is related to the fundamental needs of human beings is obvious. It is the physical state that allows and sustains existence and unimpaired bodily functioning. Education, in its most limited sense, is what allows us to become reasonably self-sufficient and self-directing adults. We are educated by our parents in the activities of walking, talking, bathing, eating and (sometimes) working. These are all basic life skills that are needed for effective survival and personal development. Since the complexity and number of requirements for being a self-sufficient adult have increased greatly over the last 300 years, then it is reasonable to say that the extent of education that can be classed as a foundational good has extended also.
There is a problem here of how to establish standards of "necessary" education and health care. If we do not set such standards, then we cannot distinguish between what is a foundational good and what is an added benefit or luxury. Nonetheless, we can set reasonable standards by looking at the amount and variety of nourishment that can protect people from an early death, at what preventive medical treatment is easily distributed and effective against commonplace threats, and what amount of education allows people to contribute to society and be part of the economy. These standards might be different depending on the place and time they are set, but the fact that they can change over time does not mean that they are hopelessly vague. In Chapter Six we will see that providing a detailed account of which functional abilities constitute each foundational good eliminates much of this ambiguity.

The claim that cultural membership is a foundational good might seem strange at first. It isn’t usually thought of as something that fulfills a need, since it is rarely lacking. We can see that it really is a basic element of good lives when we think about what culture is - it is, first and foremost, "a context of choice." Cultures are the wide contexts within which we shape ourselves, are shaped, and come to understand the meanings of things. Our culture partially constitutes our identities, and through our belonging to it, becomes the context of meaning for our lives. Even though cultures are changing and developing to some extent, they are still concrete entities, and so are not reducible to the mental states of their members. Will Kymlicka comments:

The decision about how to lead out lives must ultimately be ours alone, but this decision is always a matter of selecting what we believe to be the most valuable from the options available, selecting from a context of choice which provides us with different ways of life. ... This is important because the range of options is determined by our cultural heritage. ... We decide how to lead our lives by

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situating ourselves in these cultural narratives, by adopting roles that have struck us as worthwhile ones. ... Our language and history are the media through which we come to an awareness of the options available to us, and their significance; and this is a precondition of making intelligent judgments about how to lead our lives.\footnote{7}

Additionally, it is membership in particular cultures that fulfill human needs and not culture generally, as demonstrated by the distress certain groups have felt when theirs has been forcibly suppressed, such as those belonging to Canada’s First Nations peoples. Indeed, only when a given culture has been taken away from a group can we see with real clarity the need that it fulfills. Again, Kymlicka provides a valuable insight:

The connection between personal identity and cultural membership is suggested by a number of considerations. Sociologists of language note that our language is not just a neutral medium for identifying the content of certain activities, but itself is content, a reference for loyalties and animosities, a ‘marker of the societal goals, the large-scale value-laden arenas of interaction.’ ... Likewise cultural heritage, the sense of belonging to a cultural structure and history, is often cited as a source of emotional security and personal strength. ... In these and other ways, cultural membership seems crucial to personal agency and development: when the individual is stripped of her cultural heritage, her development becomes stunted.\footnote{8}

Thus, it is the fact that the people of a particular culture have fostered others in a particular way that makes cultural membership valuable - and although in theory any one is as good as any other, in practice they will never all be identical and are not interchangeable. This means that the foundational good of cultural membership must refer to a given individuals membership in her actual, historical, cultural community and not merely to membership in any culture. (This rules out the possibility of this good being provided through forceful assimilation of particular groups or allowing them to be overwhelmed by the dominant culture in the society.)

Respect for oneself and respect from others are human needs because they are
closely connected to a person’s sense of dignity and worth. Judith Lichtenberg observes that respect is only achievable if (1) people can avoid shame, and (2) people can demonstrate their talents and value. She notes that “the need to avoid shame is basic and universal. But what it takes to satisfy that need varies widely from time to time and place to place.” Certain goods are required in order to avoid being shamed or humiliated by one’s neediness in front of others. Below a certain level of functioning people are unable to fulfill the expectations of others and effectively carry out their role-related duties, such as caring for children. A person’s inability to do what is socially and ethically expected can lower her estimation of oneself, and damage the respect others have for her. It is important to be free from shame so as to avoid the pity of others and participate fully in the community. If a person lacks self-respect, then she may accept life conditions that are substandard, thus lowering her overall welfare further.

In addition, Lichtenberg points out that certain material goods perform the function of ability signaling. Certain goods tend be representative of levels of ability, such as expensive cars and suits for lawyers. If a lawyer looks poor, then people assume that he is a bad lawyer, because good lawyers usually make a lot of money and spend it on nice suits and cars. People use these types of consumption signs to gather quick information about others. The signs are not deliberately created by people, but emerge in society as norms. If a person wishes to convey the right message about his abilities, and thus take advantage of opportunities for bettering his circumstances, then he must have the right material goods to obtain the respect and attention of those people doing the evaluating. Thus in order to succeed and be valued in the wider community for one’s abilities, first one must command the respect of others. The fulfillment of this need,
socially speaking, is the springboard for achievement.

Since the foundational good of attachments will be treated extensively in Section II of this chapter, we now turn to contrasting foundational goods with relative goods.

**4.3 Relative Goods**

Relative goods are things that correspond to preferences rather than needs. When something is classed as “good” in the relative sense, it is understood as directly related to desire-fulfillment, whereas foundational goods may be desired but need not be. Foundational goods are good for us as human beings regardless of whether or not we desire them. Indeed, as Galston points out, “practices that thwart our subjective preferences may nevertheless promote our welfare.”

Relative goods are considered good by the individuals who seek them, but those individuals are not subject to moral censure or asked for explanations should they give them up or change their minds about pursuing them. They are accurately described as benefits. Relative goods are the kinds of things that we are asked to give reasons for seeking, that is, they are not self-evidently worth seeking because they originate in each person’s individual tastes, preferences and temperament.

Critics may well ask where happiness fits in to this scheme of foundational and relative goods. Happiness is a relative good since it is itself a heterogeneous concept. Certain foundational goods are clearly made up of diverse components, such as ways in which to ingest the required nutrients for survival. But these are merely diverse means to the same end, whereas happiness is, in effect, a heterogeneous *end*. It is doubtful that even the subjective feeling of happiness is the same across individuals - never mind the
concrete state of being that is made up by its various components.

The reason that happiness cannot be classed as a foundational good is that the distribution of desirable mental states is problematic for an analysis of justice. An effective analysis of justice (particularly economic justice) must be cast in terms of goods which are redistributable, because its goal is to paint a picture of what substantive equality would look like. Although subjective feelings of happiness may be part of a person's overall well-being, they are not the type of things which are amenable to redistribution, except indirectly, by being the result of other changes in welfare. Not to mention that an account of welfare need not take account of subjective feelings of happiness because adequate functioning can be present without a person being aware of it or happy about it. Happiness properly belongs in a larger account of the good life of which welfare is only a part.

All this means is that happiness will not be included as one of the goods to be distributed in my analysis of justice. However, it also means that happiness is going to be a lower priority than all foundational goods, in the sense that it would be unjust to sacrifice the latter for the former.

4.4 Walzer's Objection

Michael Walzer objects, at the most fundamental level, to my general approach. He insists that it does not take account of the variability and variety of social meanings that attach to goods. He claims that there is no basic set of primary goods that makes sense across all "moral and material worlds," or that "such a set would have to be conceived in terms so abstract that they would be of little use in thinking about particular
He uses the example of bread to prove his point in the following passage:

A single necessary good, and one that is always necessary - food, for example - carries different meanings in different places. Bread is the staff of life, the body of Christ, the symbol of the Sabbath, the means of hospitality, etc. Conceivably, there is a limited sense in which the first of these is primary, so that if there were twenty people in the world and just enough bread to feed the twenty, the primacy of bread-as-staff-of-life would yield a sufficient distributive principle. But that is the only circumstance in which it would do so; and even there, we can't be sure. If the religious uses of bread were to conflict with its nutritional uses ... it is by no means clear which would be primary.\(^\text{12}\)

Walzer has a good point when he emphasizes that social meanings are relevant to the just distribution of goods. Nevertheless, this does not invalidate the approach of trying to establish a list of basic or foundational goods that might apply generally in a global context. Firstly, it is important to note that he is really making two claims: (1) that there is no single set of basic goods that are applicable across all different social contexts, and (2) if there were, it would be useless as a tool to help determine the just distribution of particular goods, because its content would be excessively abstract. Since the first claim actually contradicts the second claim, and since a list of foundational goods has already been laid down, then it seems clear that the proper way in which to address Walzer's objection is to show why such a list is not useless.

Walzer's example of how bread has many meanings and so is susceptible to many just distributions demonstrates that any list of basic goods must contain items more abstract than in his example. "Food" would be a better choice than "bread," or "adequate nutrition to ensure basic functioning" would be better still. It is not practically useless to include the latter in a list of basic goods, even though it allows for a number of distinct,
culturally specific instantiations

In fact, this is precisely the right way to go about characterizing this type of good - exactly because it takes into account the social meaning attached to different foods. It also allows for changes in the availability of specific foods over time and across societies. This type of abstraction is fully appropriate when addressing the question of distribution of wealth across societies.

Take health as an example. Health is the thing to which people are entitled on the basis of need, and it can be defined in a cross-culturally applicable manner. For instance, Caroline Whitbeck defines it as "a person’s ability to act or respond appropriately (in a way that is supportive of the person’s goals, projects, and aspirations) in a wide variety of situations." So, people are entitled, on the basis of need, to possess those functional abilities that allow them to act appropriately in many circumstances within their culture. They are not entitled to this piece of bread or that bag of rice on this basis. However, once we have recognized their entitlement to health, and institutions are put in place to make it possible, then Person A will be able to say that he is entitled to medical care at this hospital, or food from this grocery store because those will be the locations where he is able to exercise his functional abilities. Social meanings may be decisive at this level, but they can be accommodated by my approach.

There is also a danger in being too particular which Walzer seems to gloss over, namely, that justice across societies or spheres seems to be ruled out by his view, which is both unhelpful and overly presumptuous. He explains that different goods are dominant in different societies and so there are many standards of justice. Dominant goods are ones where having them allows one to “command a wide range of other

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goods," and he thinks that people who hold a monopoly of these dominant goods can exploit others and so this distribution is unjust. While this may be true, it leaves aside the crucial question of whether these dominant goods are themselves good for people, simply a means to some other goods, or not really goods at all except in the sense that some people desire them. Until we know this, we cannot begin to talk about international justice, because we are trapped by relativism.

If the dominant good in a society is the freedom to kill people without repercussions, then it not a more just distribution of this freedom that we want, but a discontinuation of this practice and the institution of a different way for people to obtain entitlements to other goods. Here we see exactly why we need a list of basic goods. Such a list excludes morally objectionable “dominant goods” from being considered relevant from the point of view of justice. The ability to bribe important functionaries may be a dominant good in some societies, in the sense that it is a means to other goods, but the practice itself is unjust. We want to know what goods people ought to have and how they can be ethically distributed, not merely what goods people want and how it is easiest to procure them in their society.

Finally, Walzer’s example does not prove his point about particularity, because it does not address the right situation. Sure, in a situation of extreme scarcity, we cannot necessarily determine which use of the bread would predominate. Some people might offer it up to the gods, and others might eat it. This does not mean that we cannot make judgments about what counts as a just distribution of nutritional resources and the capability to engage in religious practices when the items necessary for both of these are not scarce in the world. Walzer’s example is one of conflict between which foundational
or basic good people will use the only available bread to fulfill, so in a sense, he is presenting a situation in which these people have to choose between mutually exclusive, valued activities. But this is a problem of ranking internal to a set of predetermined goods, under the special circumstances of scarcity, and not a problem which demonstrates that there can be no such set.

Moreover, Walzer's discussion of how dominant goods help people command a wide range of goods itself points to a more specific definition of welfare. What goods are people principally seeking and why? When we ask these questions we see that goods that fulfill basic needs will probably be on the list. There will also very likely be considerable cross-cultural convergence on many of the needs which people are trying to fulfill. As Sen comments, "[v]aluing better nourishment, less illness, and longer life tends to be fairly universal."

The means that people use to achieve and sustain particular functional abilities and states of being will vary according to society, but the abilities themselves will be similar. As such, his objection only applies to people who try to establish a list of universally needed, specific commodities, rather than a list of "goods" understood as valuable contributions to basic welfare.

Thus, Walzer has not shown my overall approach to be inherently flawed, although others may still have legitimate criticisms of my specific account of foundational goods.

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In this section, it will be argued that relationships and ground projects are foundational goods and so may be justifiably pursued. Building relationships and ground projects into the framework of foundational goods leaves room for these types of partial considerations to be weighed alongside more universal considerations such as respect, without contradiction. This is an attractive theoretical move because we want to include the attachments to people and projects that make life worth living in our moral framework, as well as acknowledge that these have a real connection to our most basic needs as human beings.

The chapter closes with a discussion of what our partial obligations definitely require of us, and how far partiality may justifiably extend on the basis of the argument presented here. Appropriate limits for partiality can be worked out by considering a few arguments about particularism and embeddedness. For instance, if a particular good has partiality built-in to it, then the partiality is justified, as long as it is a foundational good and not simply a disguise for selfishness. The idea here is that we need to look at the relationships, lives, and needs of particular people in order to determine appropriate limits, but that partiality is not unlimited - it is justified by the other goods of which it is a central part.

4.5 Relationships as Foundational Goods

Special relationships with others are at the same time both foundational goods, and partial goods. We saw in Chapter Two why they are necessarily partial in nature,

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namely, that these types of relationships are characterized by a special concern for the welfare of the other. A person has to demonstrate more concern for the people with whom she has special relationships, or else the relationships cease to exist. One cannot simply decide each day who to display special concern towards, and call this practice “having relationships.” Rather, a person must institute an ongoing practice of demonstrating care and attention to a particular person’s hopes, emotions and general welfare. Since it is impossible to sustain this kind of ongoing concern with everyone, it follows that such relationships are inherently partial to their participants.

In addition, this ongoing history of mutual care creates additional obligations between the participants in a given relationship. Over time, shared history and the intermingling of people’s lives begin to shape special expectations for help and comfort between the parties. These expectations are obligatory because the value of the relationship demands that certain actions be performed, or else the relationship will be weakened or possibly destroyed (by lack of trust, for example). Mutual care must be kept up, and such care makes special demands on one’s time, energy and resources.

Relationships are also a foundational good. Clearly they are irreducible to mental states, although mutual feelings do play a role. Acts of care and expressions of concern are concrete, as are the plans, time and activities shared by the participants. In order to fully appreciate how fundamental they are for good lives, we need only try to imagine a life that contained absolutely no close relationships at all - if such a thing is even possible.

Moreover, partial relationships are intrinsically valuable. Donaldson maintains that close relationships are “value-intrinsic,” in the sense that the ends of family and
friendship are logically unattainable without the existence of those particular institutions. Can you imagine if some other arrangement that was put in place to "do the job" of your family and friends? How would this work? Further, isn't it the point that we do not accrue "benefits" from family and friends that are susceptible to being delivered by some other source? A state institution might provide some material aspects of help and nurturance, but this would not be a substitute for relationships in any reasonable sense. This is because relationships are not merely delivery systems for help - they are intrinsically valuable personal connections with particular individuals. We care about these people and the relationships we have with them for their own sake, not for the sake of the benefits we receive from them. This is why they are so central to the creation of meaning in our lives.

The other line of argument which demonstrates why we need relationships concerns the social nature of the self. Marilyn Friedman observes that "in its identity, character, interests and preferences, [the self] is constituted by, and in the course of, relationships with particular others, including ... relationships that locate it as a member of certain communities." Who we are can only be really understood in terms of the people to whom we are related. We are someone's friend, someone's lover, someone's student, or her sister. Our projects, professions, leisure activities and beliefs are shaped by the people to whom we are special, and those who are special to us. We inform and transform the experiences and character of one another by being in relationships with them and caring about them. Thus, if the self is constituted at least in part by relationships, then we can see that they correspond to the human needs for individuality, identity, and belonging.

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4.6 Ground Projects as Foundational Goods

Personal commitments and projects are specific to individuals. I may be committed to community theatre, and you may be committed to volunteering to help the elderly. People have different professions and passions. Commitments may bring me happiness, or they may be tiring or saddening and yet still be worthwhile in my eyes. Although not all projects further things which are intrinsically valuable (say, stamp-collecting) they each play a significant role in shaping our identities. Our chosen professions, hobbies and volunteer pursuits provide us with context and meaning in our lives, and are the arenas in which we learn and grow. Through doing, we become who we are. Therefore, having the freedom to choose our commitments and stick with them is an inherent part of choosing who we are and who we will become. Although ground projects may be specific to us, since they are pursuits that help define us and provide important meanings for us as individuals, they are distinct from mere preferences. They are the projects that provide structure to our lives, and so are more serious and ongoing than preferences or tastes for particular foods or colours. Being forced to abandon them or go against them can cause grave suffering and identity-crisis. This is because our commitments are constitutive of who we are – if I cannot distinguish between myself and my ends then I am likely to be very confused and disillusioned if I am prevented from pursuing them.

Given this, any approach that reduces all choices to a matter of determining the one, single morally right thing to do is seriously flawed. If I have to determine the most utility-maximizing thing to do every time I act, then I will be nothing but a moral automaton. If everything I do is from the motive of duty (and not just compatible with
duty), then I will never have a chance to express my individuality. My story will be one of following a rule - not creating a life. Morality is important to us, but it should not consume our characters and futures in this dictatorial manner. We need to incorporate personal attachments and aims into moral lives. This means that some limits need to be put on the kinds of commitments we can make and the extent of resources we can spend on them, but we still need to have plenty of choice leftover in order to develop rich characters and lives.

The guidelines we need to heed are as follows: (1) we need to have ground projects that are compatible with the pursuit of other foundational goods, (2) our pursuit of relative goods should not be so extensive as to leave no resources to devote to the provision of foundational goods that others lack. Guideline #1 rules out “commitments” such as belonging to racist organizations or having serial adulterous affairs, since racist organizations deliberately curtail freedom, and adultery is incompatible with sustaining caring relationships. Guideline #2 makes explicit the rank-ordering of foundational over relative goods.

It is wrong to commit all of oneself and one’s resources to a relative good (say, extremely expensive cars and houses) so long as others lack foundational goods. To do so is to let one’s commitments to preference X override one’s commitment to leading a moral life. Not only is it obviously wrong that my preferences are more important than someone else’s needs, it is also inherently disrespectful to behave as if they are. This is because needs are so closely connected to human survival and dignity. To allow relative goods for myself to carry equal or greater weight than foundational goods for others is to treat those people like objects, rather than subjects who have interests and lives of their

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4.7 The Limits to Partial Concern

What are reasonable limits to the partial concern that is a necessary component of our relationships and ground projects? Three considerations stand out as bearing on this question: (i) relationships themselves are justifiable, foundational, goods, which (ii) demand some partial allocation of time and resources in order to sustain them, and (iii) each person has a *prima facie* claim to promoting the other foundational goods for him or herself, given their status as foundational elements of good lives. The strategy here is to attempt to identify the demands these three factors place on us, and by doing so, show what counts as legitimate partial concern. By extension, partiality which falls outside of these boundaries is illegitimate and unjustified. Hence, we will have a kind of blueprint for discerning where Impersonal World demands become predominant.

(i) If relationships are foundational goods, and their partiality is justifiable by virtue of being a necessary element of them, then we are not behaving immorally when we pursue and sustain them. Since we have seen that they allow people with whom we are in special relationships of friendship, love, family or mentorship to make special claims on us (and to make special claims ourselves), then we are justified in fulfilling the claims *that make the relationships possible*. Without honouring any of these claims, we do not have a relationship, but what exactly is the reach of the claims?

(ii) Certainly, my loved ones are entitled to the time and energy I put into expressing my affection, getting to know them and keeping up with what is going on in their lives. This type of interaction is also intrinsic to relationships, and since we cannot
love everyone, the only way to have this type of affection is to have it in a partial manner.

In terms of resources, different relationships demand different amounts, as do different people. For instance, children, parents, spouses or anyone else who depends on me for physical care and sustenance should be provided with the content of foundational goods either (a) as far as it is possible for me to do so, or (b) until these foundational goods are possessed in such a capacity that they can no longer be said to be fulfilling needs. If I do not fulfill the basic human needs of the people that depend on me for them (as far as I am able) then I have failed as a participant in that relationship. However, as much as I may want to bestow riches and extra benefits on these people, these types of luxuries do not provide me with the foundational good by which the partial allocation of these other resources are justified - the relationship itself.

I can legitimately supply my loved ones with the time, energy and resources required to fulfill their basic needs (the content of foundational goods) and I can also provide them with the love and help that are necessary to sustaining the relationship. These are the things that relationships need to work, and so to be goods at all. There is room for flexibility here too. If my daughter is severely disabled and needs continuous, expensive medical care to bring her up to a minimum standard of health, then I am morally permitted to provide that, and not some set amount which would provide a “standard” person with a reasonable chance at survival without physical debilitation. Each person’s needs are going to be different, and any reasonable theory of welfare has to account for this fact.

(iii) A parallel argument can be made for why it is morally acceptable to provide myself with the content of foundational goods, since I am a participant in the
relationships, and without me, the other people would be without them. But what if nothing is left over once someone has attempted to fulfill the basic needs of herself and her loved ones? She need not put herself (or anyone) else back into a state wherein she is lacking or missing out on foundational goods. Doing so could potentially eliminate a foundational good (the relationship), and would go against everything that we are trying to do when we are trying to be moral, on this account.

Justice, when we take account of the universal need for foundational goods, is everyone having them, guaranteed, and not simply a splitting up of resources so that nobody has anything of substantial value, but has an equal share of things that have no value in terms of sustaining basic welfare. A person may voluntarily deprive himself of a foundational good or some part thereof, but need not do so in order to be moral. This is because, when we are concerned about those less fortunate than us, we are concerned, first and foremost, with creating a situation in which everyone has what he or she needs. Substituting oneself for someone else who has unfulfilled needs does not get us any closer to equality of needs-fulfillment, which is the goal we have in view.

Now for the hardest question. How much are people who have more than enough to provide foundational goods for themselves and their loved ones permitted to use for the purposes of pursuing ground projects? It seems clear to me that if someone’s personal commitments are themselves oriented towards pursuing foundational goods (for anyone), then they can use more of their surplus resources (those over and above what they need to provide foundational goods for themselves and their loved ones) for those pursuits. Sadly, this is not generally the case, or maybe world poverty would not be as severe as it is.

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In the case of the person whose commitments are primarily constituted of leisure activities and making use of luxury items (say, hanging around at an expensive cottage or going out for upscale dinners), it is not permissible to use up all of one's income on these types of pursuits. Even if you are a wine or food aficionado and it is the one love of your life to savour expensive delicacies, spending every penny on your one true love may cause you to become an immoral person.

However, given what was said earlier about how commitments contribute to identity, it does not seem reasonable to rule out them out entirely. These are the activities and experiences that make you who you are, and allow you to shape your own character and define your horizons of meaning. At the same time, most people (I hope) make it one of their commitments to be a moral person. Clearly then, a compromise is in order here.

Although it is hard to break down this type of argument to specific numbers (due to the heterogeneity of people), there are still a few things we can say about the distribution of surplus wealth in people's private lives. Firstly, it is worthwhile reiterating that in general, needs outweigh preferences. This does not mean that people have no choice in their pursuits or even in the commodities that they use to fulfill their needs, but rather that additional resources should not be used for the satisfaction of preferences when other commodities would serve the purpose just as well. (Remember too that there are plenty of "lateral moves" that can be made – different choices that do not require additional resources).

Further, it is worth noting that projects and commitments can be adjusted to fit with other moral requirements, in a manner that the moral requirements themselves often
cannot. Ground projects are sustained and shaped by people. Thus, they can be either conceived or adjusted in light of the fact that they occupy only some of the moral space in our lives. Although in terms of everyday living, relationships and ground projects may preoccupy us almost exclusively, from a moral point of view, they are only half the story. Partial concerns are only some of the moral concerns we need to take into account. Keeping this in mind, commitments and ground projects need to be designed and carried out such that they do not require all of one's resources.

Once someone has provided the other foundational goods for herself and her loved ones, she can undertake ground projects that she finds meaningful and important. However, she must take account of the fact that she also has impartial obligations to fulfill with the resources that remain. This is how Impersonal World concerns can act as constraints on us, without denying us rich and meaningful lives.

Moreover, when designing and pursuing ground projects, resources should not needlessly be used up in for preference-satisfaction that is not integral to the project. For example, it may be reasonable for me to spend more on an airplane ticket to Nepal when a ticket to Toronto is cheaper, if one of my ground projects is to experience a variety of different cultures. However, it would not be permissible for me to spend extra on a first-class ticket to Nepal simply because the seats are roomier and I will be provided with complimentary champagne. My ground project requires that I go to Nepal (or some other place where the culture is very different from my own), but not that I drink champagne en route. Indeed, I have chosen the more expensive trip to Nepal rather than Toronto, but that choice is based on what is valuable about my commitment to this project. It would be possible to say, with reference to my project, that it is more important for me to go to

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Nepal than to Toronto, while the same thing cannot be said about flying first-class without appearing ridiculous.

Proportionally speaking, ground projects and personal commitments are only a small part of the moral sphere. If Personal and Impersonal World concerns are to be afforded roughly equal weight, then of the resources left over after foundational goods are fulfilled, the bulk should go to impartial obligations to the less fortunate. If we consider that a person’s needs for relationships, health, respect and cultural membership are already met, we can see that there is only room in a person’s life for a few, ongoing serious projects. (People need to work, they need to spend time with loved ones, go to school, etc.). My ground projects might take up a quarter to half of the remaining moral space, but certainly not more, since all the other Personal World concerns have already been addressed. Thus, my impartial obligations to put the provision of foundational goods for others ahead of the provision of relative goods for myself does not overwhelm me such that my personal life is impoverished, but it does constrain both what goals are permissible, and how I may go about pursuing them.

Of course, there are going to be some relative goods present in people’s lives. The limits of the will when considering certain options are going to make it such that in the final analysis, sometimes we have, perhaps inadvertently, put our own preferences over someone else’s needs. The main point is to recognize the difference, and to understand that in principle it is an unjustifiable way to proceed, and to structure one’s life-plans, goals and habitual behaviour in a manner consistent with the principle.

The upshot of the combined arguments in this chapter is that partiality to one’s loved ones and ground projects is justifiable to a point. Since providing time and

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resources is part of what it means to be in relationships and to honour the claims that come with them, then people must provide foundational goods to themselves and their loved one’s before considering others, or else the foundational good of relationships would be lost entirely. In a similar manner, people should be able to shape their identities because it is objectionable to have one’s life stripped of individuality and meaning as a result of impersonal moral demands. Therefore, some resources can be put in this direction, as long as the limited role that these play in the overall framework of morality is recognized.

4.8 Summing Up

Before concluding, it should be pointed out why no rank-order for foundational goods has been specified. Mainly, it is because they are mutually reinforcing, and so are better provided as a package than one at a time. (To see this, one need only think of how important it is to be healthy in order to make use of opportunities for education, etc.) Also, the situation of justice advocated here has everyone possessing a relatively complete set of foundational goods, because it is not the situation in the world at this time that resources are too scarce to accommodate this goal. A rank-ordering would only be required if scarcity was the main issue. It is a central part of the overall framework that all foundational goods are of comparable weight, since they are the same types of things. This is why the project is a reconciliation of Impersonal and Personal World concerns, because when we consider the provision of foundational goods, we are at least adjudicating between concerns that fit inside the same framework, with similar natures, and similar value.

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In this chapter, the general scheme for integrating Personal and Impersonal World concerns has been presented. In addition, I began to draw out how this scheme can provide prescriptions for the just distribution of private wealth. Naturally many questions remain, not the least of which is, “What is the amount of education or health care that counts as a ‘foundational good’?” The key question of what are adequate standards for the fulfillment of needs will be addressed in Chapter Six, which is exclusively concerned with the practical implications of my position.
Notes


2. Ibid., p. 140.


7. Ibid., pp. 164 - 165.


12. Ibid., p. 8.


16. I am not here denying that one’s own good is worthy of partial concern. Rather, I am merely pointing out that I am not always justified in being partial to myself simply because I have some unsatisfied desires.


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Chapter Five – Foundational Goods and the Political Sphere

Having sketched out the implications of the notion of foundational goods for private life, it is time to apply it to the special circumstances and problems faced by citizens and nation-states. The strategy in this chapter is very like the one employed in Section II of the previous chapter - to argue for why and how much national partiality is justified, and then go on to spell out what this means for the extent of impersonal obligations. This chapter is concerned with both the obligations of citizens and with those of states acting as agents domestically and internationally.

Admittedly, there are many different types of national groupings, from small self-identifying communities characteristic of most First Nations peoples, to large and complex multination states such as Canada. Although their differences may call for some variation in the justification of partiality toward their members, some useful points can still be made which are generally applicable. For the purposes of this chapter, “co-nationals” should be understood to mean members of my nation, when “nation” denotes a self-identifying ethno-cultural group which is rooted in a shared homeland and heritage, such as the Québécois, Kurds and Catalans. By contrast, “fellow-citizens” should be understood to refer to all members of my nation-state including landed immigrants, when “nation-state” is understood to refer to both uni- and multination states. Where the distinction is important, “multination-state” will be specified.

There are two types of national partiality at issue in the political sphere. The first is fellow citizens’ partiality towards one another, which is largely embodied in their cooperation with one another, and not with outsiders, for the purposes of mutual gain.
The second type of partiality is the priority nation-states place on the interests of their members when acting in the arena of international affairs.

Both varieties of partiality are justified to a limited extent, because they contribute either intrinsically or instrumentally to the creation of foundational goods. Limited partiality is required for the existence of some foundational goods, and is part of the effective delivery of others. This is because some foundational goods are participatory in nature, such as cultural membership. This means that their existence requires the kind of institutionalized grouping of people and resources that the nation-state currently provides. Other foundational goods are not participatory since they are not collectively held, (health, relationships), but nevertheless are best delivered and protected on a large scale by state apparatus.

5.1 Priority, Cooperation and Our Fellow Citizens

We enjoy many benefits, and carry some burdens, as a result of our status as citizens of a particular nation-state. By virtue of being attached to a certain group of people as a fellow citizen, we find ourselves cooperating and coexisting with them, usually from the time of our birth. Like a friendship, the fact of this cooperation and coexistence seems to shape our moral relation to one another. Intuitively, my relationship to my fellow citizens seems to allow me to assign priority to their interests, as well as our joint interests, thus reducing the likelihood that I will have time or resources to devote to promoting the interests of strangers. Likewise, my fellow citizens are legitimately able to place my interests ahead of those of non-citizens.
The central question addressed here is whether or not the benefits which we receive from this cooperation can be justified, given that by assigning priority to the interests of our fellow citizens, we are using up resources that might be expended promoting the interests of equally (if not more) deserving people of other nation-states. Is singling out fellow citizens for priority treatment morally acceptable? Or is our intuition simply based on an unjustifiable custom? Are deserving people being deprived of their due?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to describe the benefits that are derived from the priority treatment of fellow citizens. As we saw in Chapter Four, it may be the case that some or all of these benefits have partiality as a requirement of their existence, and so are not transferable in the sense implied above. These benefits appear to come in two forms – those that are intrinsically valuable, and those that are instrumentally valuable. What we need to know in order to assess the moral correctness of partiality in this context, is: “What are the benefits that fellow citizens confer on one another, and what is the relationship of these benefits to foundational goods?

5.2 Culture, Co-nationals and Intrinsic Value

It was pointed out in Chapter Four that identities are constituted by our relations to others (at least in part) and so to the extent that partiality is required for the formation of identities, it is justified by the intrinsic value of the people whose identities it helps form. Thomas Hurka argues that in at least one respect, nations are like families, and so partiality to one’s co-nationals is sometimes justified for similar reasons to those mentioned in the earlier discussion of private life. Since it is not immediately obvious
how our relationship to our fellow citizens resembles our relation to family members or close friends, he provides the following argument.

Hurka admits that nations are not like families in the degree of interaction which they involve. However, he demonstrates their important similarity with an analogy. He asserts that he loves his wife both for certain qualities she has, and as an individual. This means he loves her for morally relevant qualities like her trustworthiness, and also for "certain historical qualities only she possesses." These historical qualities derive from her participation in their shared history of good times, suffering, and of realizing goals together. Her historical qualities explain why he loves her more than other people, but if her general qualities were to alter so much that she became a completely bad person, then he would have good reason to repudiate the relationship and so would cease to have special obligations to her.

Hurka thinks that this is the type of relation co-nationals have to one another. They believe that their culture and the activities which define it are good, and they also participate in a shared history with one another. They are thus attached both to their nation and to their co-nationals by shared historical experiences of being shaped by, participating in, and sustaining their culture. These shared experiences vary widely among nations, and can include some or all of the following: participation in religious and civic holiday festivities, contribution to the war effort, pride in national athletic teams and entertainers, shared memories, values, experiences of the natural environment, local entertainment, language, and schooling. He asserts that having a shared history of such experiences justifies partiality toward one's co-nationals, provided that the general qualities of one's nation are good.

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Hurka’s argument is persuasive for two reasons. First, the idea of our shared history and continued participation in a particular nation explains nicely what our relation to our co-nationals is, and why it is necessarily partial. It is this shared history that constitutes the relation, while at the same time forming our own understanding of ourselves as members of a certain nation, and what that means. Also, it is important that the general qualities of a nation be good ones, because partiality to relations that harm oneself cannot be justified. Of course, one has to take the long view of harm here, since relations of all kinds have their difficult moments. This identity argument provides one reason why limited partiality to ones co-nationals can be justified. Since identities are part of persons, and it is the relation to this particular group of people that partly constitutes, and provides continuity in, those identities and not some other group, then maintaining the relation and the cooperation it entails is important because people are intrinsically valuable.

However, this argument does not go far enough, because our relation to our co-nationals is much weaker than our relations to our family and friends. Being a Canadian certainly contributes to the fabric of my life, but provides only a few of many threads. More justification for national partiality is necessary, if we are sincere about the importance of foundational goods for everyone, including non-members of our nation.

The other intrinsic justification of partiality to one’s co-nationals is that their activities as a group make up the foundational good of cultural membership. Culture is both a participatory and a foundational good. Denise Reaumé characterizes a participatory good as follows:
[A] participatory good cannot be individually enjoyed. Its value is partly constituted by a particular kind of participation. Such goods involve activities that not only require many in order to produce the good, but also are valuable only because of the joint involvement of many. ... [T]he good is the participation.⁴

Cultural membership is just such a good. It is made up of many people living their lives, using language, making music, operating businesses, passing along history, etc. It is made up of the many interactions that people have everyday. The combined effort of my co-nationals effectively constitutes my context of choice. The good of culture is participation in it, in the sense that what is good about it is that one lives one’s life as an active member of it. As Reaumé points out, one cannot enjoy a culture in isolation from others, because even if this could somehow be attempted, there would be no culture to enjoy.

A critic might argue that since the group that constitutes my co-nationals is not necessarily identical to the group that is my fellow citizens, then arguments from identity-building and the value of culture do not justify partiality to the latter. However, this view is too narrow. Kymlicka describes our relation to our fellow citizens as one of belonging to the same “societal culture.” A societal culture “provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both the public and private spheres. These cultures tend to be territorially concentrated, and based on a shared language.”⁵ Societal cultures, in contrast with the culture characteristic of ethnic groups, “involve not just shared memories or values, but also common institutions and practices.”⁶

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Especially with respect to government policies - shaped by and for my fellow citizens both near and far - my opportunities and responsibilities are substantially formed by people who are related to me *only* as fellow citizens. Our shared political institutions mean that my opportunities for social support and education, for example, are structured with the needs and input of all my fellow citizens, and not merely a small group. For instance, many Anglophone Canadians have learned a substantial amount of French as a result of Quebec's inclusion in Canada, and the agreement in our political institutions to be an officially bilingual country. This knowledge of French, in turn, opens up possibilities that are not available to non-French speakers, when traveling or applying for jobs. These types of contributions and/or demands by my fellow citizens significantly contribute to building my specific context of choice and meaning. This means that at least to some extent, even my fellow citizens contribute to the intrinsic value of culture, though perhaps not as much as co-nationals who share my ethnicity.

The fact that the good of cultural membership is participatory means that we cannot have it unless we have it with others. Therefore, we have a special interest in looking after our co-nationals and fellow citizens so that the good of culture does not disappear. Like friendships, without active participation by, and care for, the welfare of the people whose contribution constitutes the good, the good ceases to exist. Only by keeping the interaction going (and so looking after the interactors) can we have this good. As a result, cultural membership can be understood as both a partial, and a foundational, good. Thus, this built-in feature of the good justifies a certain amount of partiality.

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5.3 The Nation-State as Instrumentally Valuable

Admittedly, the intrinsic justifications for partiality to fellow citizens does not get us very far when we are considering very large, extremely diverse, multinational states. However, there also several arguments for how the instrumental value of the state justifies limited partiality, and these apply more broadly, to all nation-states, regardless of their ethno-cultural make up. Most importantly, nation-states have the responsibility of protecting their citizens from external threats to their liberty or existence. Stephen Nathanson claims that a nation-state can often justify its partiality to its own members because “the alternative for members of that group is exposure to the risk of destruction by other groups.” In addition, when a hostile group threatens my flourishing or survival, my ability to flourish or survive may well come to depend on how well members of my group can band together to protect our interests. This gives me a reason to be concerned about their welfare more than the welfare of non-citizens, even in times of peace, because if we are going to be targeted as a group, then we need to protect ourselves as a group. No one else can be depended upon to take the risk of defending my survival, unless they are equally threatened.

Finally, it is worth noting that nation-states are currently the most effective means we have of delivering collective goods to people. Collective goods are different from participatory goods, in that they can be individually enjoyed, but are nonetheless most successfully provided on a large scale. Health care, policing and education are good examples, even though it is possible for them to be provided privately. “There are several reasons for providing goods publicly (or collectively): economies of scale;
convenience; and most important, there are many goods which if not provided publicly, would not be provided at all,” such as environmental clean up and protection.  

It might well be argued that the free market can provide us with large-scale collective goods. This may be true to a limited extent. The free market can provide us with some collective goods as long as there is sufficient demand for it. If the demand for certain health care services decreases for a few years, then those services may well be made unavailable. What the market cannot provide is the stable provision of collective goods, through good economic times and bad. Of course, this stability is what we want, given that some collective goods are closely tied to foundational goods.

There is also one collective good that cannot be delivered by the free market - a legal system. The services of this system (such as prisons and the appointment of judges) must not be bought and sold, or else the integrity of the whole institution breaks down. Given that we need a legal system to secure and protect our freedom (from discrimination, from bodily interference, etc.), it is clear that the state does something important which no private corporation could do. It is also the legal system that ensures the provision of services and the compliance with laws so that the number of free-riders can be kept to a minimum. Other plain-vanilla factors that make the nation-state an effective unit for providing vital collective goods are the physical proximity of its citizens, their shared language(s), their shared needs that relate to location (such as viable types of employment, types of dwellings and medical care that are commonly required), relative autonomy in the delivery of services, and the simple fact of being limited in size.

Perhaps something other than the nation-state as we know it may be able to deliver most collective goods in a stable, effective and fair manner, but if a foundational

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good is being secured for myself and my fellow citizens by our current institution of cooperation (the nation-state), then we have good reason to protect *that particular* form of cooperation. Foundational goods are not the kinds of things that we should willingly put at risk. The claim that nation-states are (or can be) effective delivery systems of collective goods which greatly contribute to guaranteeing foundational goods is not a claim about the theoretical superiority of the state-structure; rather, it is a claim about how the world is currently organized, and how, and when, the partiality built-in to this organization can be seen as justifiable to a limited extent. Moreover, nation-states do not appear to be going anywhere, so it is imperative to see how they may justifiably make provisions for the well-being of their citizens.

Nation-states may be primarily valuable as (somewhat arbitrary) instruments for the delivery of collective goods, but they evidently provide goods to their particular members in ways that other institutions do not and often could not. Collective goods have to be administered in a particular language, within particular geographic communities, and must be supported by a given historical and cultural community. That this particular group of people has sustained and continues to sustain the particular collective goods from which I benefit gives me a reason to be partial to their welfare, even if another group could have performed the same function. The point is that I am tied to this group by virtue of my involvement in their culture and the joint production of collective goods, and so am justified in being somewhat partial to my fellow citizens. Like families, nation-states are normative networks of commitments — rights, duties and responsibilities.
5.4 The Limits of Partiality between Fellow Citizens

In general, the same type of argument made for the limits on partiality in private life applies to fellow citizens. The only important difference in the application of theory seems to be that we have moved from the personal to the institutional level. The main implication of this is that each citizen is not entitled to secure foundational goods for each other citizen, before considering the welfare of non-citizens. Rather, each citizen is entitled to endorse and contribute to governmental programs and political parties which ensure the ongoing existence of the nation-state, the collective goods its citizens share, and the participatory good of cultural membership, before directing their funds and concern toward less fortunate non-citizens. Of course, the justification for citizens endorsing and contributing to these programs is that they guarantee the availability of foundational goods to most of their fellow-citizens – should the programs fail to do this then citizens should endorse changing them into programs that are more effective.

In terms of leaving room for the cultivation of national identity, as in the individual case, some resources may be allocated to this so long as room is left in the budget for the fulfillment of impartial obligations. Identity-forming projects such as the funding of museums, art galleries, the construction and upkeep of public monuments or the maintenance of athletic teams and the performing arts can be undertaken, but would likely proceed much more slowly on this model then they currently do in many countries, because foreign aid funding would consume more public resources.

It is important to keep in mind that at the national level, it is the maintenance of programs and institutions (collective goods) that is at issue, and not securing the state-of-affairs in which every citizen has access to the content of all foundational goods at all
times. It is obviously unreasonable to suggest that only once a nation-state’s “fact-finders” have reported to the government that every single person possesses all of the foundational goods may it legitimately begin implementing foreign aid programs. Rather, a government must set a standard for its programs that requires very good but not perfect delivery of foundational goods, and have review processes which make revisions and changes as needed to continue reasonably effective delivery.

There is little need to add that the more effective the programs are, the better, and citizens have every right to demand that they continually be improved. However, it is simply too much to ask of any system that it operate perfectly all of the time, and lack of perfect operation is too often used as an excuse for not channelling funds to the many much worse off non-citizens around the world. (As in the individual case, what constitutes “good enough” operation will be discussed in Chapter Six). Since the justification of partiality among fellow citizens relies chiefly on the value of collective and participatory goods, it is appropriate that the creation or continued existence of those goods, and not the perfect delivery of all foundational goods to all fellow-citizens, be acknowledged as the limit on legitimate citizen partiality.

5.5 Governments, Agency and Partiality

The amount of partiality that a state is morally permitted to display towards its citizens depends heavily on how the state itself is justified. In this section, I will argue against two very common justifications of the nation-state, (1) the “Trustee/Adversary Theory of Government,” and the “Will of the People” model of government. An alternative theory will then be presented, which both coheres better with the experience
of belonging to nation-states, and fits nicely with the earlier discussion of partiality among fellow citizens.

Henry Shue characterizes the Trustee/Adversary Theory of Government as follows:

[T]he proper role of every national government is primarily or exclusively to represent and advance the interests of its own nation. ... Various formulations of the trustee/adversary theory of government ... differ in the precise basis offered for [this] role of the national government. Rarely in print but frequently in political rhetoric one finds taxation presented as the basis: the government is spending our money so the government ought to be serving our interests. ... [A] more strictly political basis would be an account of representative government, maintaining, roughly, that in a representative form of government individuals are entrusted with executive and legal office precisely and explicitly in order to act on behalf of those whom they represent. A decision to sacrifice the interests of constituents, or anyhow the basic interests of the nation of which the constituency is a part, would according to this view, quite literally be a betrayal of trust.¹¹

This view has two features worth emphasizing. Firstly, the assumption is that partiality to citizens and their interests is the express purpose of the state, and secondly, that this purpose is justified by the agreement between citizens and their representatives (via elections) that those representatives will act as their agents. As the citizens’ agents then, representatives are only morally permitted to act in the interest of their constituents. “Interests” in this theory are normally construed as either prudential or economic, although they might occasionally also be moral. The “Will of the People” model has the political representative carrying out the collective will of her constituents rather than acting as a trustee or surrogate decision-maker. The difference is that in the Trustee model the representative may decide what is in the interests of her constituents, while in...
the Will model only the people may decide that. This means that a representative can only forward the moral interests of the community if she is instructed to do so.

These models are justifications of the state because they specify that people have consented to be governed, and so have legitimized the existence of an institutional body that has a monopoly on coercive force. This is a typical social contract model that cashes out in a representative democracy and is considered justifiable because people elect, and so consent to, the representatives who are to govern them and look out for their interests.

It is certainly the case that the social contract model highlights one of the central features of political legitimacy. It is, however, important from the point of view of discerning obligations that no real or hypothetical contract be posited as overriding all obligations of the state to the larger world. The state is not betraying anyone’s trust when it acts in the international arena to uphold principles or to fulfill obligations to other states, even if these (a) have not been directly authorized by the people or (b) do not forward their immediate economic or prudential interest (though states ought not to go against their citizens primary interests in securing foundational goods). States have duties of their own to fulfill, such as the duty to avoid depriving non-citizens of their basic rights,12 and to fulfill contracts and uphold treaties with other states. As moral agents capable of making contracts, undertaking actions, and allowing omissions which profoundly affect the well-being of other states and their citizens, nation-states are subject to moral constraints similar to those of individuals. They cannot make binding contracts with others that demand one party to disregard the legitimate interests of those who are not parties to the contract; they are responsible for the foreseeable consequences of their actions; they must fulfill their obligations to specific others (allies with whom

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they have treaties or trade agreements, their citizens) but are not exempt from impartial obligations which originate in a concern for fairness and equality; they must refrain from deliberately harming, exploiting or deceiving others, except in self-defence.

It simply does not make sense to say that nation-states are moral agents insofar as they can have an obligation to look after the interests of their citizens, but are exempt from all other moral constraints typical of moral agency. Particularly on the Will of the People model, it looks like citizens may elect people as government representatives so that the government may do what they themselves may not do as private individuals constrained by morality. Surely one cannot get out of moral constraints as easily as passing on the dirty work to an institution more powerful than you are! Therefore, nation-states do not exist solely to press the interests (or carry out the will) of their citizens against all others, and cannot be justified simply by the consent of citizens to individual representatives in government. We can see that both the Trustee/Adversary theory and the Will of the People models fail to account for the full range of states' duties and so both their validity, and their implication of unlimited partiality, are in question.

It was pointed out earlier that the nation-state is primarily valuable to its citizens as a means for the effective delivery and maintenance of participatory and collective (sometimes called public) goods. Following that line of argument, it seems to me that the justification of the nation-state and its powers is exactly as a means to protecting and making possible collective and participatory goods provided that (1) these goods are crucial to guaranteeing foundational goods, and (2) they are instituted and maintained by elected representatives in a manner to which the majority of people do not have strong objections. Accordingly, the sense in which the nation-state is responsible to look after

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the interests of its citizens is: it is required to provide citizens with foundational goods by running the institutional machinery which makes the collective elements of these possible. The reason the state is justified in holding the kind of power it does, is, in part, to maintain those public goods which are central to the delivery of foundational goods, and that would not be maintained by individuals acting on their own, or not nearly as well.\textsuperscript{13} The significant power that states have can only be justified by the use of that power in the provision and protection of something equally significant: fulfilling people’s basic needs.

Deepening the analysis further allows us to see that the justification of the state must rely on the value of foundational goods. If the state were merely a means to the fulfillment of trivial interests, then it could not have a reasonable claim to a monopoly on coercive force. This is similar to contemporary communitarian justifications in which it is argued that the good of the state must be tied up with the good of the citizens in order for the state to be legitimate. The reason that a nation-state is justified in being partial to its own citizens, is that it is the mechanism by which certain collective goods are maintained. As with relationships, if the nation-state did not dedicate itself first to the promotion and maintenance of programs which deliver collective or participatory foundational goods, then these foundational goods would not exist.

Perhaps more weakly, some institutional mechanism must be in place that organizes a given group of people such that they can have access to the foundational goods that have a participatory or collective aspect. The institutional mechanism does not have to be a nation-state, and the group does not have to be its citizens, but given that right now in the world only nation-states have the power to do this, limited partiality

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towards citizens is justified. In addition, the fact that some nation-states are already
doing this (maybe not to the extent that we would like) provides a reason to support the
continuance of this method of organization. There is good reason to leave those systems
in place that already work, even if they are not perfect.

Of course, if the nation-state is justified in this manner, then some partiality to
citizens will be permitted, but unlimited partiality will not. Moreover, there is plenty of
room for the fulfillment of other sorts of obligations. Acceptable partiality would take
the form of using resources and energy first to implement and maintain those programs
which deliver foundational goods collectively, such as sewers, policing, environmental
protection programs, hospitals, social security and the legal system. It would also mean
using national resources for the provision of realistic measures to ensure national
security, since the existence of the nation-state protects its members from conquest.

Unacceptable partiality would be spending state resources on luxurious national
monuments, giving tax breaks to thriving corporations (subject to economic efficiency
constraints) or funding inessential medical services such as cosmetic surgery.

Unacceptable partiality would also be exemplified by, for instance, a policy of treating
Canadian soldiers as more valuable than those of another state when both groups are
undertaking a joint military operation, and then refusing to allow Canadians to share the
most risky jobs. Another example would be allowing corporations to operate in my own
nation-state who do not respect human rights when they are operating in other countries.
The reason these types of partiality are unjustified is that they do not contribute to the
delivery or maintenance of foundational goods for citizens. Rather, they are intended to
either exempt citizens from certain costs of maintaining foundational goods (such as the

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soldiers) or press their economic interests well beyond the realm of what is needed to provide foundational goods.

It is not permissible for a nation-state to deprive non-citizens of the content of foundational goods in order for citizens to have them. It is also not permissible for a nation-state to make it more difficult for another state to provide foundational goods for its citizens, either because it wishes to influence the policies of that state or because it hopes to gain more advantages for its own citizens. If what we are trying to do is see to it that everyone (ideally) has access to foundational goods, then such political moves are immoral. In fact, the theory of foundational goods implies that states have certain positive obligations to the citizens of other states. Since nation-states are generally effective (or have the potential to be) delivery mechanisms for foundational goods, it seems that once these are secured for their own citizens, states should be required to lend their expertise and resources to the foundational goods of outsiders. Although nation-states must take care not to instigate a war or use excessive force in the implementation of foreign aid programs, it is thoroughly possible for a nation-state to peaceably provide expertise, influence, and resources in many cases, even where the governments involved do not see eye-to eye on all issues.

Indeed, it is morally required that nation-states do so, for the same reasons that individuals are required to give up some wealth that would otherwise be spent on relative goods. Foundational goods, for anyone, are just more important than the provision of relative goods. Additionally, if nation-states are indeed justified by being effective delivery systems for foundational goods, then they are no doubt effective in this delivery both domestically and internationally. Obviously, they have to maintain themselves and

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the foundational goods which they provide to their particular collective (their citizens) first, (because each government needs to take on a particular collective), but this does not mean that they need not help other governments with the same project elsewhere. It is, after all, why they exist. As Shue notes, it is fine to divide up the duty of guaranteeing resources to people as a means of making the enterprise manageable, but this does not mean that no state or group need take responsibility for the people's whose national governments fail them in this respect.\textsuperscript{14} The obligation of states to provide an adequate quality of life remains, and when the arrangement fails, this obligation arguably falls back on the rest of the international community. We should not let the particular form of the means obscure the value of the end it is supposed to serve.

5.6 Summing Up

Obviously nation-states that are not prosperous enough to provide their citizens with public institutions and services that can provide REACH are not required to give any resources away. However, neither can a government accept such resources and use them for purposes that do not support the fulfilment of its citizens' basic needs. Perhaps the United Nations or some other international regulating body would have to be set-up in order to determine when a government should be relieved (or reinstated) of the duty of administering the resources allocated for its people. Human rights abuses or extensive corruption would be typical grounds for disqualification, but NGO's or other internationally-sponsored third-party humanitarian organizations could administer the funds instead.
In order to qualify for aid all societies must not conform to Western values, but must be able to demonstrate that they are working towards fulfilling their citizen's basic needs in an equitable, though culturally specific way. For instance, the conditions of self-respect might be very different in New York City and the mountains of Nepal, and so the government of Nepal need not provide everyone with the commodities or resources that support this in New York. Local cultural understandings and standards can be used in the interpretation of the list of functional abilities outlined in Chapter Six, but some progress towards the achievement of those functional abilities still must be evident.

We have seen that the large-scale cooperation which fellow citizens have with one another and which is facilitated by the institution of the nation-state is crucial to the delivery of many foundational goods. Also, national groupings have created a shared history for their citizens that contribute to their identity, and so the trauma of eliminating it would be a positive harm to them. Finally, nation-states themselves foster a societal culture and so contribute to the intrinsic value of cultural membership as the context of choice for a given group of people. In light of this, some partiality of fellow citizens towards one another, and of nation-states toward their citizens, can be justified by the value of the foundational goods that this partiality makes possible. Beyond the provision of foundational goods though, national partiality begins to be unjustifiable. There is no real or hypothetical contract that requires governments to ignore the interests of non-citizens in favour of their citizens’ interests. Citizens’ interests in relative goods cannot compete with non-citizens interests in foundational goods.
Notes

2 Ibid., p. 150.
3 Ibid., p. 151.
6 Ibid., p. 76.
10 Ibid., pp. 48 - 49.
12 Henry Shue, Basic Rights, p. 139.
13 Henry Shue, Basic Rights, p. 151.
14 I am paraphrasing Wertheimer here, “Political Coercion and Political Obligation,” p. 233. The nation-state solves problems of trust and cooperation (akin to both the prisoner’s dilemma and the tragedy of the commons) and so actually allows for goods that could not be provided on an individual basis.
15 Henry Shue, Basic Rights, pp. 141-142.
Chapter Six: Practical Problems and Implications

The previous section addressed some central problems surrounding the foundation and legitimacy of partial obligations, and the importance and scope of impartial ones. It also laid out a framework for identifying the point where partiality ceases to be justifiable, and the point at which the demands of impartiality become overriding. This chapter is concerned with practical issues surrounding the application of the theory elucidated so far. Taken in a liberal, democratic context, what implications does the foregoing argument have for practical action? Given the limits of justified partiality for which I have argued, what kinds of individual partiality are allowed? Disallowed? What kind of practical action is mandated by the domain of impartial morality that has been sketched out?

This chapter begins to provide answers to these types of questions. In addition, it addresses some problems associated with ascertaining the threshold at which foundational goods can be understood as fulfilled. Finally, it will also address the practical difficulties in choosing how to properly make one's limited contribution to an extensive social problem, and will demonstrate how doing so with the foundational goods framework in mind does not result in an objectionable, overall leveling-down of well-being.

6.1 Minimum and Maximum Thresholds

There are two dominant strategies for addressing the issue of appropriate thresholds for consumption and well-being. The first is to determine the minimum thresholds for a good or decent life, and the second is to specify a cap on ethically
acceptable consumption. Taking a foundational goods approach requires both, since specifying an acceptable level of welfare on this conception includes consideration of what kinds of ground projects and preference-satisfaction are morally permissible.

In any case, neither strategy cashes out in terms of an absolute, universally applicable dollar value, because "an absolute approach in the space of [functional abilities] translates into a relative approach in the space of commodities, resources and incomes."\(^1\) This is because, as Sen points out, the connection between income and level of functioning is "not that tight."\(^2\) Differences in wages, local currency values, commodity pricing, location and personal characteristics are only a few of the factors which make it impossible to determine a universally appropriate number. How, then, are we to proceed? Is the very notion of a cap on consumption doomed to be so elastic that it loses all its practical force?

Certainly, all possible disputes about caps will not be eliminated here, but there are some factors which can point us in the right direction. In the end, the limits of ethical consumption will depend greatly on individual circumstances. It may seem thus far that foundational goods are the kind of things that do not admit of a satiation point. Indeed, interpreted as worthwhile goals or important aspects of human life they are open-ended. Someone may derive real benefits from the ongoing pursuit of culture or education up to a very high level, which, no doubt, would require a very significant amount of time and resources. One worry is that there is no way in which to determine how much is enough, and so the notion of foundational goods has no redistributive power in practice.

However, we saw in Chapter Four that the provision of foundational goods is best construed as the elimination of a deficit rather than a benefit. It would be a mistake to

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interpret this as a perfectionistic argument, at least in the sense of being committed to the unlimited development of certain excellences or ends which make up the good life, regardless of the consequences this has for consumption and social justice. (It is, however, an Aristotelian view in the sense that it is based on a few things which are good for people because of the kinds of beings they happen to be.) Foundational goods are not meant to be sufficient for the good life. Instead, foundational goods are meant to pick out ends which must be represented to a certain degree in order to provide a solid foundation for a good life. It is, of course, possible to build a good life on a shaky foundation, but it is much less likely.

Once the threshold for foundational goods has been reached, the additional pursuit of these (and other) goods falls into the categories of desire-fulfillment or preference satisfaction. Admittedly, these are also important components of good lives, but are not very useful for determining either a just economic distribution or a standard of ethical consumption because they are highly subjective and open-ended.

The distinction between needs and preferences, or foundational and relative goods, fits well with our general intuitions about how people’s lives are going. We often describe some people’s lives as materially deprived. However, others are not so described, and yet are characterized as capable of being “better” or “more fulfilling” or “happier” in the subjective sense. This evokes an implicit threshold where a life ceases to be deprived and yet can still be substantially improved, largely in ways that relate to subjective well-being. Once we know when the threshold has been reached, then we can discuss whether consumption patterns and choices over an above that threshold are morally legitimate or not.
For each foundational good, there is a particular set of material or economic functional abilities without which one could not be said to possess the good. These functional abilities are "material" in the sense that they both impact, and are impacted on, by consumption patterns, commodity entitlements, social infrastructure, and local and international economic systems. Certain material functional abilities are essential components of each foundational good, and so it is these with which we are concerned when we ask questions about social justice.

There is good reason to focus on functional abilities rather than capabilities when we are thinking about economic inequality, although this may not be true if we are concerned with overall quality of life. Capabilities, or people's freedom to achieve valuable functional abilities, are the focus of Sen's analysis, because he emphasizes freedom over and above all other goods. By contrast, Jerome Segal comments that, "[m]erely having the capability to live well materially speaking ... is not the same as actually doing so. To have a high standard of living is to actually live well economically." Segal is right to point out that although freedom is worthy of our concern, we also need to be concerned about people's actual achievements with respect to material well-being. Even Sen admits that "[g]iven the close connection with actual living," it is often reasonable to focus on functional abilities rather than capabilities when evaluating the living standard. That said, what are the economic and material functional abilities which make up foundational goods?
**Respect - Self and Other:** Ability to purchase clothing, transport and other goods that allow one to appear in public and interact with others without shame. These other goods could include a telephone, a typed resume, or proper tools of a trade, for instance.

**Bodily Health and Integrity:** Security from bodily attack and unwanted sexual activity; freedom from pain and preventable or remediable illnesses; the ability to move from place to place, and to utilize mobility aids if they are required; sufficient caloric intake to perform one’s daily activities while remaining at a steady weight; ingestion of sufficiently nourishing foodstuffs to ward off diseases of malnourishment; living in housing free of infestations which is in good repair; living in a place with sanitation systems and drinking water which do not spread or induce disease.

**Education:** Access to education at both the primary and secondary levels or their equivalent; a means of safe transportation to educational facilities; ability to purchase such materials as may be required, ranging from pencils to uniforms.

**Cultural Membership:** Knowledge of the history, language and geography of one’s nation and/or state of origin; some knowledge of the nature of various religions and the art of various ethnic groups; access to, and interaction with, other members of one’s nation.

**Attachments:** Ability to provide for those who are dependent on one; ability to successfully participate in expected material aspects of relationships, such as contributing to holiday and family festivities or attending functions such as weddings and funerals; ability to keep in touch with distant relatives; time to provide emotional support to loved ones; ability to sustain ongoing commitments to a few ground projects.

### 6.3 Tools for Evaluation

In terms of collecting hard data, it is much easier to measure functional abilities than capabilities because they reflect actual achievement, and so do not contain any counterfactual component. Obviously, quantitative income information alone will not suffice to tell us whether or not people have achieved the threshold for foundational
goods. There are three qualitative factors which both individuals and state researchers can use to determine the appropriate threshold for a particular time and place.

The first test was formulated by Adam Smith two centuries ago (as noted by Sen and others) and still retains its force. The need to avoid shame when interacting both with strangers and those close to one, is an informative intersubjective standard of when the threshold has been reached. As noted earlier, it applies to clothing, transport and other respect-related functional abilities, but it also applies more broadly to the other functional abilities listed. Below a certain level of functioning people begin to be ashamed of their neediness and resultant inability to carry out what is expected of them.

This standard will definitely be relative to the society. It has an intersubjective nature, because it depends upon the norms that people have internalized with regard to what is an adequate level of functioning (and the income that supports it). If members of affluent societies ask themselves what food, shelter, clothing, transport, etc., would suffice for them to live their lives without shame, they will see how greatly their standard of living exceeds what would be sufficient. Asking this question gives us a great deal of information about what constitutes a relative good in our lives. If clothing item A would be sufficient according to the shame-test, and instead I purchase item B, the difference in price amounts to the portion of the item that is based on preference satisfaction and not on need. This helps people calculate when they have reached the threshold for foundational goods.

The second test rests on the notion of “standard threats,” introduced by Henry Shue in his book Basic Rights. He uses it to define and limit the scope of social
guarantees for the protection of rights, but it is also more widely applicable. We can employ the notion of standard threats to identify the threshold for foundational goods.

The threshold for foundational goods has been reached when the above-listed functional abilities are protected from standard threats. It does not matter if they are protected by social programs or infrastructure, by systematically low unemployment and high wages, or by aid programs run by NGO’s. What matters is that people can retain those functional abilities in the face of foreseeable, preventable and remediable (standard) threats. For instance, with regard to bodily integrity and health, people cannot be protected from currently ineradicable threats such as some serious illnesses, accident or death. However, they can be protected from ongoing threats of physical and sexual violence (by police forces), extreme risk of death or accident in the workplace (by government-enforced safety codes), or starvation as a result of job loss (by unemployment programs which provide food rations or access to food banks). The essence of the idea of standard threats is that they are both foreseeable and manageable. This means that preventative measures can be taken which will ensure that people have an alternative means of sustaining a given ability should their primary means come into jeopardy.

Shue comments on the evolving nature of standard threats,

What is, for example, eradicable changes, of course, over time. Today, we have very little excuse for allowing so many poor people to die of malaria and more excuse probably for allowing people to die of cancer. ... In any case, the measure is a realistic, not a utopian, one, and what is realistic can change.
There is bound to be some disagreement about whether some things are standard or non-standard threats, but empirical research is likely to resolve most of these disputes. The important point is that the bulk of standard threats will be generally recognized as such.

We need a combination of intersubjective and more objective tests, such as this one, because for some groups the intersubjective standard will be set artificially low. Sen explains why oppressed groups might set their standards of social acceptability too low when he comments that for oppressed people,

mental reactions often reflect defeatist compromises with harsh reality induced by hopelessness. The insecure sharecropper, the exploited landless laborer, the overworked domestic servant, the subordinate housewife may all come to terms with their respective predicaments in such a way that grievance and discontent are submerged in cheerful endurance by the necessity of uneventful survival. The hopeless underdog loses the courage to desire a better deal and learns to take pleasure in small mercies.\(^9\)

This is why the subjective and even the intersubjective standards of small groups with respect to happiness and desire satisfaction cannot be taken on their own as measures of how well people’s lives are going.

Nonetheless, the intersubjectivity of the shame test is very context-sensitive, and so extremely useful for cross-cultural analysis of the living standard.\(^10\) For the most part, any such problems arising from the shame-test can be corrected by the notion of protection from standard threats, when “standard-ness” is defined more widely, such as on the basis of the whole society (and not merely its oppressed groups).

The final factor in determining the threshold for foundational goods is non-uniformity of misfortune. Despite the obvious connection between income and the functional abilities which make up foundational goods, people’s consumption choices do not always best facilitate these functional abilities. As Segal points out, “[n]ot only must
the money be spent for specific commodities but also the commodities must be utilized in a particular way. ... What then becomes clear is that, on the individual level, the translation of income into a high standard of living is itself an art form."\textsuperscript{11}

This is a difficulty which prevents the perfect administration of any program in a given population. No matter how many alternative entitlements to income or services are available, not every participant in the programs will either (a) choose to avail themselves of them, (b) continue to do so over time, or (c) use what they offer to facilitate the intended functioning. Income-providing programs are most susceptible to non-intended uses, but health-care services and educational services are also susceptible.

One way we can test whether a given service is doing the intended job, and so whether a given community has the substance of foundational goods, is to aim for a high degree of achievement and then do research on the social characteristics of the non-achieving population. If the population of those not achieving a given functional ability approximates a random sample with respect to age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, geographical area and income, then it can be reasonably assumed that the failure to achieve is at least in part caused by individual choice.

However, if there are particular groups that are statistically deprived of a particular ability, then this may indicate that there is something wrong with the delivery-service. For instance, food aid rations have been known to be provided to the women of some households last and in unfairly small amounts, because the primary income earner (usually the man) is deemed the most important in terms of food distribution within the family. Clearly, in this case, simply handing over food to a family or household does not

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facilitate the functioning of good nutrition for the women in them. Often, employment projects for women work better.

Testing for the non-uniformity of misfortune (that is, failures to achieve a particular functional ability) can help in discerning whether specific people's failures to achieve are based on a flaw in the system, or are a result of their own judgments. Given the importance of the functional abilities, we would not expect most people to reject them altogether, and so it is not unreasonable to aim for an achievement rate of 80-85%. Thus, by focusing on the intersubjective standard of interacting with others without shame, and the more concrete conceptions of standard threats and non-uniformity of misfortune, we can identify where the threshold for foundational goods lays in a particular society.

Indeed, identifying it is no simple task. Nevertheless, the threshold itself is not so vague or unrestricted as to undermine the practical value of the foundational goods approach.

6.4 Collective Action

It is both possible and beneficial to lower the intersubjective and relational requirements of consumption in affluent societies. We have already seen how norms of decency operate to place some levels of neediness (represented by the failure of certain functional abilities) below the level at which one can be both self-respecting and respected by others. Clearly these are not fixed, and if they were to be altered such that the norms of decency required less income in order to meet them, many people would be better off. Certain regularities in consumption of consumer goods serve to make them almost indispensable, when they need not be. This is a result of the entrenchment of new consumer items within a society. Judith Lichtenberg points out,
Acquisition of a good by many people can render it more necessary in an absolute sense, even if it is not always a 'necessity.' In some cases - public versus private transportation - this is a question of infrastructure: where others take buses, there will be buses, and I will have less need for a car. In other cases, such as electronic mail and on-line databases, we have what economists call networking effects: one lacking the service is made worse off by being cut off from the flow of information.\(^\text{12}\)

As noted briefly in Chapter Four, there are also material or consumption expectations associated with being considered “good enough” within a particular reference group. People are sending signals when they consume, and to some extent, these are dictated by the kinds of signals others send. As superficial and limited as these assessments may seem, Lichtenberg is correct to emphasize them, because it is often impossible or inefficient to acquire such information directly. People generally take the signs to be an established and reasonably useful way of estimating ability.\(^\text{13}\)

The point of touching upon the relational elements of consumption norms is to show, as Lichtenberg does, that “to the extent that people’s desires to consume depend on what others around them consume, collective reductions in consumption will be less painful to individuals than reductions individuals effect in isolation.”\(^\text{14}\) This means that the sacrifice of well-being required by impartial obligations may be exaggerated by norms which themselves are arbitrary. It also suggests that schemes which produce reduced consumption throughout a large population do not require individuals to sacrifice more, but rather require them to sacrifice less, in absolute terms, then they would in the absence of such programs. Without inducements, less people are likely to contribute to foreign aid, making the sacrifice larger for the people who do.

These considerations indicate that implementing large-scale, minimally coercive schemes for foreign aid are a practical way for people in affluent societies to reduce the

\(^\text{PART III: PROBLEMS IN PRACTICE}\)
tension between partial and impartial obligations. Reducing consumption norms and intersubjective standards of material decency en masse reduces the weight of the economic elements of our partial obligations, and so by association, makes it easier to fulfill our impartial ones.

6.5 Duties of the State

As we saw in Chapter Five, states' obligations are in some ways analogous to those of individuals. Since states have histories, can make contracts, have allies, cause harm, compensate others and be compensated for wrongdoing – then they need to be taken seriously as moral entities, and not merely as machinery for pressing the rational interests of their citizens. Certainly, states have obligations to look after the interests of their citizens, with whom they have a kind of special relationship, but this is not the full extent of their obligations. States do not exist in a vacuum, and so, as moral entities, they have other, impartial obligations as well.

Shue argues that the general duty to protect and promote people's well-being is best understood as three distinct types of duties. They are: duties to avoid depriving, duties to protect from deprivation, and duties to aid the deprived.\textsuperscript{15} I will make use of his analysis of duties here, and combine it with my arguments about foundational goods. It is important to do this because aid which is not combined with protection from deprivation and a commitment to refrain from deprivation practically defeats the purpose. If equality in needs-fulfillment is the objective we have in view, then all three types of duties must be carried out, or else the aid component will be much less effective.

States have all three types of duties to citizens of other nations, with respect to all foundational goods except the one in which partiality is inherent (relationships).
However, if these three duties were diligently carried out with respect to the other foundational goods, then people would be more able to fulfill the special obligations that partially constitute relationships.

The state’s duty to avoid depriving non-citizens of health, cultural membership, respect and education translates into a particular kind of foreign policy. States would have to refrain from excessively hard bargaining in trade situations (in which the poorer country is generally at a disadvantage) that might result in cutbacks to essential social programs. In a similar manner, states could not do what they have done in the past, which is to buy so-called “excess” foodstuffs from developing countries that are experiencing an economic slump, when buying those food products takes away any chance of them being made available to the people of that country. In the past, trade with states that are insensitive to this possibility has greatly contributed to the phenomenon of terrible famines co-existing with plentiful food.\textsuperscript{16} Further, this duty would require states to refrain from imposing their culture on other states over which they have power, and require them to take special pains to allow less powerful nations substantial input into the structure of any international agreements.

The duty to protect non-citizens from deprivation of foundational goods is primarily the duty to use criticism and sanctions wisely in the international arena. Since these, plus the added force of United Nations agreements and treaties, are the only enforcement mechanisms available internationally, then they need to be used consistently against states that deprive their citizens of foundational goods. Protection might also take the form of sending in peacekeepers when the security of the people of two states is being sacrificed to the ideology of their respective warring governments. In some cases

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protection can also take the form of the provision of training and technology, so that people possess the skills necessary to sustain an acceptable level of functioning for themselves under changing or unstable economic conditions.

A state's duty to aid non-citizens who are deprived of foundational goods is tempered only by its prior commitment to providing foundational goods for its citizens. It includes the duty to make aid efficient and effective for individual citizens, since we saw that reducing consumption and contributing collectively is in their interest. Moreover, the fulfillment of the duties to aid should not be weighted heavily towards a particular foundational good – since all foundational goods are valuable ends, all of them should receive some attention.

Lastly, paying off national debt, unless it is so large as to be a major cause of deprivation, is not included under the acceptable-partiality umbrella. This is because debt is voluntarily incurred, and so it is the equivalent of making a contract. As we have already seen, one cannot make a contract with some individual or organization which prohibits the carrying out of other obligations. Thus, it is not permissible for a state to incur a lot of debt (which they typically do on an ongoing basis) and then use it as an excuse for failing to fulfill their other, partial or impartial obligations. The result is not that the debt should not be dealt with, but rather that it is should be eliminated at a slower pace. Additionally, as a part of their duty to avoid depriving, affluent states have a duty to either postpone repayment, or entirely forgive, loans that they have made to acutely impoverished countries. This is because it is unjustifiable for money that could be used for the fulfillment of people's basic needs to be spent on loan repayment and especially, interest payments.

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It may well be argued that paying off national debt as quickly as possible would allow nation-states to contribute more to foreign aid in the long run. Indeed, this is only one particularly striking instance of how efficiency and equity issues can come into conflict. There is no simple, universally desirable way in which to negotiate this tension. In each particular context, the costs and benefits need to be examined. However, it is worth remembering that political institutions are not static, and so no plans for the distant future can be heavily relied upon. With this in mind, it is probably best for nation-states to strike a balance between sacrificing some measure of economic efficiency in order to fulfill immediate impartial obligations, and vice versa. Striking this balance would be possible within even relatively short-term plans, say, over the 3-5 year term of many elected governments. Since the political equivalent of a “life-plan” is really only the duration a particular government will foreseeably remain in power, then the fulfillment of impartial obligations should be built-in to a government’s mandate for that period of time. While the trade-off between less aid and more immediate aid is a real one, it should not be used as an excuse to neglect impartial obligations for long periods of time.

6.6 Where Personal Meets Political: Duties of the Individual

Individuals have duties to foreigners very much like those they have to co-nationals. We are required to refrain from depriving people of foundational goods, to protect people from that deprivation, and to aid those who are deprived. In terms of refraining from deprivation, individuals are required to be ethical consumers, and so should not knowingly patronize businesses that exploit their workers. Likewise with investments, although this is made easier by the existence of ethical investment
companies who do the research for their customers. People should also refrain from exploiting foreigners who have recently come to a new country, say, by paying them less than the minimum wage.

Protecting people from deprivation is hard as an individual, and is largely a matter of taking opportunities to argue strongly for courses of action which do not harm people’s access to foundational goods. For instance, in a corporation, someone with authority should not regard it as unproblematic when he has to lay off workers. Given a choice between a slower-growth model and one which requires lay offs, someone who takes seriously his duty to protect people from deprivation, would stress the attractiveness of the second option. (Instances such as these highlight the ongoing tension between compassion and efficiency. Again, efficiency is always going to be an important factor in these types of decisions, but it should not be considered the “trumping” consideration in all cases.) Many opportunities to protect people from deprivation can arise in both national and international contexts. People should also support politicians and governments who are committed to human rights protection and international redistribution.

The duty to aid has been discussed already at some length. In Chapter Four it was argued that a person may legitimately give priority to her family members and loved ones. In Chapter Five, it was noted that we may provide for social programs within our state which create and maintain the collective goods which are central to guaranteeing foundational goods for ourselves and our co-nationals, because we need to support the collective in order to have those goods. All of this may reasonably be done before we direct our resources to foreign aid. Nevertheless, for some people, some funds will be
leftover for the fulfillment of wider impartial obligations, and these should go to the residents of foreign countries, if one is a resident of an affluent country, at least. The duty to aid extends to all people who are deprived of foundational goods, and given that those in need inside of one’s nation-state should be reasonably well taken care of at this point, at least some of the excess, logically, should be directed elsewhere. With respect to personal debt, the same arguments apply at the individual level as at the state level.

If an impoverished or struggling person or state wishes to donate something to aiding others, (even if the donation is mostly symbolic) this is certainly permitted, but it does not seem reasonable to require this. Indeed, to make such a donation would reflect a recognition that we exist within a larger moral order, and that impartial obligations are a vital part of that order. Nonetheless, while such actions may be virtuous, they are not requirements of social justice, since a person or state can value justice without making such donations.

It is certainly the case that the options for integrating partial and impartial obligations on the individual level are as varied as conceptions of the good life. It is worth noting that some of the conflict between them can be reduced by living a morally outreaching life. Some people clearly reduce or even resolve the tension by making it a lifetime project to involve themselves with helping others who are less well off than them. For instance, if Sandra volunteers to work at a food bank, then the people she is helping are originally strangers to her, and so this kind of project should definitely be seen as fulfilling her impartial-type obligations. However, in the process of providing help, the people she helps become part of her concrete web of personal relations, and so enrich her private life. This enrichment makes people happier and so the struggle

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between partial and impartial obligations is virtually eliminated. In a great many cases, this may be a preferable approach (in terms of reducing conflict) to just writing a cheque every month to a charity, but both life-models would fulfill impartial obligations sufficiently, and both would avoid any serious moral dilemmas.

Moreover, a life-plan which does not include extreme affluence as a goal can still make a significant contribution to foundational goods. Someone might dedicate months, years, or decades to promoting foundational goods where achievement is low, by working on a volunteer basis or devoting time to political activism. In such a life, someone's donated time can easily substitute for money and so count as adequately fulfilling her impartial obligations. There are also myriad ways in which people can protect others from deprivation by speaking up at opportune times, and being mindful of their duty to refrain from depriving on an ongoing basis. These are both part of what it means to fulfill one's impartial obligations.

Although partial obligations tend to require ongoing attention due to the nature of relationships, it is also the case that many of our obligations do not extend for the entire duration of the relationship. Also, some foundational goods may simply not be attainable for oneself or ones loved ones unless all resources for a period of time are devoted to them, but this does not mean that we do not owe anything to unrelated others. It simply means that living a moral life can be a surprisingly flexible endeavour. Despite this flexibility, it is not good enough to put off fulfilling impartial obligations indefinitely. Care and thought need to be put into living a moral life in both the short and the long term. It does not simply happen on its own.

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6.7 Doing Our Share: Who Do We Help?

Once states and individuals have ascertained what share of their resources ought to be allocated to impartial obligations, then they are faced with a further difficulty. Who should be the recipient? There is no doubt that recipients abound. One consideration is whether or not a given program, be it for infrastructure-development or direct financial or food aid, is actually effective in improving functional abilities. As Peter Singer notes, we definitely cannot have an obligation to provide resources where they are of no benefit. At the international level, this rules out government-to-government transfers where it is known that most money ends up in the hands of corrupt officials and not in the hands of the needy citizens. Governments could, if they so desired, support NGO's that may be more effective in those types of places. At the personal level, this means that one should favour programs which have a history of, and a mandate for, effective delivery of services with a low administration cost.

Urgency is another factor. If there is a natural or social disaster (such as a war) going on at the time of donation, then this would be a reasonable target for some of the resources. It is important to recognize though, that most famines which occur as the result of natural disasters occur in places where persistent poverty already existed. Therefore, one should try to direct one’s resources to both the cause and its effects. As noted earlier, it is also worthwhile to distribute one’s resources across the range of functional abilities, since they are mutually reinforcing.

Still, these guidelines are very broad. Many groups of people and aid projects fit the requirements. To make matters even more complex, in places where government infrastructure to support foundational goods is either atrociously ineffective or non-
existent, a curious thing happens at the individual level. The line between one's partial obligations to fellow citizens and impartial obligations to people in general begins to blur. This is because in many places the identity argument which justifies national partiality is not very strong, since there is only a thin societal culture. In that case, the argument for national partiality is purely instrumental, and so if there are very few public goods which need maintaining, then the amount of justified national partiality is correspondingly reduced. When national infrastructure is ineffective or does not exist in one's home country, the partial obligation for the individual is to support its introduction or improvement. Beyond that, the only practical difference between fulfilling partial and impartial obligations is that a very limited amount of priority may be placed on the welfare of fellow citizens, because they support the collective good of security.

In effect, if one is not participating in the support and maintenance of many national, collective goods, then individual obligations to others who are not family or friends start to even out. If the fulfillment of both partial and impartial obligations can only be brought about by private donations or volunteering at private organizations (NGO's, churches, etc.) then probably a slightly larger percentage should go to the needy at home, (because it would be a rare case where no public goods existed) and the rest abroad. Unfortunately, the reason for this flexibility is the pervasiveness of the problem.

6.8 Two Objections: Indeterminate Obligations and Leveling-Down

Two common objections to arguments for redistribution of wealth are (a) that it puts a temporally indeterminate, and excessively financially demanding, burden on the affluent of the world, and (b) that it would result in the global quality of life being
reduced to an unacceptably low level. The foundational goods approach, while designed to reduce the tension between partial and impartial obligations, also does a good job of reducing the force of these objections.

(a) It is often argued that the flexibility of the impartial obligation to help the needy, coupled with the pervasiveness of the problem, places too heavy a burden on affluent individuals (or states) that desire to be moral. Firstly, it is noted that the obligation has no foreseeable end-point. A person could be required to redistribute his or her wealth indefinitely. This seems like an accurate assessment, because there will always be some people in the world who cannot provide for themselves, whether they are the sick, the elderly, the mentally infirm, or simply the unfortunate. However, this is not any different from other types of moral obligation. People have to be honest indefinitely and often pledge to be faithful to their spouses "'til death do us part." Being moral appears to be a lifetime commitment, although probably no one can be expected to be perfectly moral every moment of her life.

The other element of this objection is that impartial obligations are financially unlimited, that is, there is no point at which we can be said to have done our share and so are free to use our resources in the pursuit of other things. Impartial obligations are often conceived in this manner because they stress the need of the recipients, and so it is generally assumed that as long as my dollar could be used to feed hungry children, then I am never justified in spending it on the Sunday-morning newspaper. Clearly the foundational goods approach goes a fair way to reducing the force of this objection. The central idea behind the foundational goods approach is a rejection of the notion that either partial or impartial obligations dominate the whole moral space. Built-into this approach
is the idea that both partial and impartial obligations are limited in scope. More specifically, the scope of impartial obligations is limited by the scope of justifiable partiality, which includes leaving some room for people to develop their own identities and life-plans.

Moreover, the time-frame in which we are conceived of as honouring these obligations is extended to a period of years instead of being viewed as the time involved in performing a single action. This is a theory about how to be a moral person, or a moral state, and not a prescription for evaluating individual acts. Nevertheless, individual actions, when viewed in the larger context of a person’s life circumstances, can be sensibly praised or blamed according to whether or not they are consistent with the theory.

(b) Finally, if one takes a utilitarian view of world poverty such as Peter Singer’s, then it can be plausibly argued that redistributive proposals, if carried out, would result in an unacceptable leveling-down of life quality worldwide. He argues that we should give until we reach the level of marginal utility, that is, until we are only slightly better off than the formerly starving people we have helped. Given the 6-billion-plus population of the world, many objectors claim that income per capita would be so low as to place everyone in poverty, instead of just some people. Fairness, it is thought, will result in wholesale misery. Whether or not this objection rests on firm empirical grounds is beside the point. This objection is based on the assumption that the world’s total wealth will be simply distributed equally, and everything else will remain the same. But this is not a situation that the foundational goods approach advocates. Rather, it explicitly says that these goods require a certain amount of income (which is relative to the society) and

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taking that away from everyone just so that the distribution of income would be equal is morally repugnant. This approach stresses that people are equally entitled to achieve certain valued functional abilities. Taking them away from one person to give them to another is a fruitless enterprise. Taking them away from everyone would be downright immoral.

Still, my argument does support a certain amount of leveling-down for affluent societies and individuals. However, the dominant trend in the model is to bring people up to a given acceptable threshold. The amount of leveling-down required to fulfill one’s obligations is not so large as to be excessively demanding. More importantly, it does not require people to ignore other, partial obligations that they may have, or deny them the value of a unique and autonomously structured life, complete with deep attachments and personal commitments. Lives with these characteristics are not of a morally objectionable quality.

6.9 Summing Up

If states or individuals seek to do their share with respect to alleviating global poverty, then they have to recognize that their share may be a proverbial “drop in the bucket.” This fact is not an excuse to ignore obligations. That “drop” can do a lot of good for specific people, and support functional abilities in their lives that are extremely valuable. Further, it does not make sense to say that the sheer size of the problem eliminates the responsibility to be moral. One would that think that the bigger the problem, the greater would be the importance of individuals’ taking responsibility for doing their (justly-determined) share.
It is important to remember that we are not talking about some huge, monolithic “problem of poverty.” What we are really facing are many, many individuals who each have their own problems that arise from poverty. This means that the so-called “problem of poverty” is amenable to partial solutions. Therefore, it is possible for me to do real good, and in so doing fulfill my impartial obligations, in a manner which does not require me either to abandon my partial obligations or give up the pursuits that make my life meaningful. Our individual efforts are capable of ameliorating the poverty-related problems of some people.
Notes

7 Henry Shue, *Basic Rights*, p. 32.
8 Ibid., p. 33.
10 The cross-cultural applicability of this test is widely accepted, see, for instance, Jerome Segal, “Living at a High Economic Standard,” p. 354.
13 Ibid., p. 167.
14 Ibid., p. 170.
17 I am indebted to Michael McDonald for suggesting this real-life resolution.
19 Ibid., p. 591.

PART III: PROBLEMS IN PRACTICE
Chapter Seven: Responsibility and Global Citizenship

One of the most important claims in this dissertation is that the broad framework within which we should understand our moral responsibilities and aims is a global one. Although many of our moral responsibilities remain close to home, the complex interaction of economics, politics and communication on a global scale mean that we are related to people around the globe in important ways. We can affect, and be affected, by their choices and those of their governments. We have access to information about their circumstances and have avenues through which we can help people far away make positive changes. As a result of increasing globalization, our moral sphere has widened to include the whole world.

This is a particularly daunting fact. However, denying our global interdependence by cutting ourselves off morally from the rest of the world increases the risk of creating more suffering. As complicated as the interrelations are, it is imperative that we admit their existence and attempt to grapple with them. This means that new ways of thinking about the responsibilities of states and individuals ought to be developed and adopted.

7.1 Responsibility for Foreign Aid: Personal or Institutional?

Who, exactly, is responsible for aiding foreigners in need, individuals or states? My claim, following the proceeding discussion, is that both states and individuals have a responsibility to aid foreigners in need. In his book, Justice as Impartiality, Brian Barry asserts that "principles of justice designed for the basic structure of society cannot be deployed directly to address other moral questions." He thinks that impartiality is one of
these principles, and so on any plausible interpretation of what morality requires, individuals cannot be expected to use impartiality as a guide for conduct in their personal lives. He claims that the organization of societies and relations between societies are the only appropriate context in which concerns about justice are properly discussed. For him, the question of who is responsible for the provision of aid to foreigners should never arise. If anyone is responsible, it is the state.

The reason this question does not arise for Barry is that "contemporary liberalism - like many political philosophies - tends to treat the individual society as the appropriate unit for justification, while tacitly assuming a one-to-one correspondence between individual societies and sovereign states." Furthermore, traditional liberal thought tends to assume that "the justice or injustice of a society will depend entirely on the way in which it adjudicates among the interests of its own citizens." Clearly then, adopting a traditional liberal framework of justification may cause us to ignore significant moral and factual relations. Indeed, as Scheffler notes, it is natural to wonder whether one can in fact produce an adequate justification for the institutions of a given society by treating it as a closed system. ... Perhaps societies are so economically interdependent that the justification of the basic structure of any one of them depends on the nature of its political and economic relations to the others.

Treating states as if they exist in a vacuum ignores the fact that they exist within a community of interdependent states, and so can be either just or unjust in their relations to them.

Once we make the conceptual leap out of the context of isolated states and into a global framework, we begin to see that both peoples' lives and the structure of the state
are relevant to questions of global justice. There can be no single, "correct" unit of justification. Which practices, actions and outcomes require justification depends on which ones we are evaluating, and in what context. Depending on the situation under consideration, individuals, corporations, sovereign states, non-governmental organizations and international institutional bodies may all need to justify their policies and conduct in a global framework. Each has a set of obligations, responsibilities, circumstances and limitations which need to be considered when we are evaluating their courses of action, but these actions may have implications for the wider world, and so justification may need to be made to the people of that world.

It is certainly the case that moral evaluation and decision-making are more difficult when we broaden their scope beyond the nation-state. Further, such evaluations are less satisfying theoretically because they are not set in a context that is itself fairly and uniformly governed. When I consider giving money to foreign aid organizations, I am not hypothetically entering into some global collective in which everyone is going to have a say about how it will be governed. I am concerned about the justice of my own life, in light of the fact that I have abundant resources and many people have almost none.

Individuals' single decisions are made more challenging exactly by the fact that they are not decisions about rules – there is no subsequent enforcement and often no way to predict what other people around the globe will do. I have to determine how I can act justly with respect to creating good outcomes when I cannot necessarily guarantee equally good outcomes for everyone, everywhere. The only way I can do this is to contribute, piecemeal, to bringing about a global situation in which foundational goods are more equally distributed. They provide a blueprint of morally significant ends, and so

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when we combine that with information about particular agents or groups, then we can begin to assign priority to some ends over others – for ourselves, for our loved ones, and for the less fortunate.

But can individuals, with their limited resources, knowledge and power over institutions, really be expected to evaluate their actions at the global level? Or is this only feasible for nation-states? Some people argue against attributing individual responsibility for foreign aid on purely practical grounds. For instance, Scheffler observes that “[t]he effects to which principles of individual responsibility are paradigmatically responsive are those produced solely or primarily by the individuals own actions.”

Given that each agent is involved in global processes of production and consumption, has little or no knowledge of how his involvement in the processes relates to various widespread effects, and cannot realistically opt out of participation in these processes, Scheffler asserts that it is inappropriate to hold him responsible for rectifying certain undesirable outcomes.

Scheffler’s worry here is that individuals are not in a position to alter their behaviour such that they can alter the outcomes of these institutional processes, so they cannot be held responsible for the states of affairs that these processes produce. He suggests that if agents are helpless to fix the problem by changing their behaviour, then responsibility must lay at the feet of some institution that is not so constrained.

This objection assumes that responsibility can only be attributed on the basis of actions, and not omissions. Individuals are responsible for failing to prevent some of the damage done as the result of some people’s lack of access to foundational goods. People can be held negatively responsible – that is, they can be held responsible for their
omissions as well as their actions. We see this in cases where people are held responsible for failing to save the drowning child or failing to take adequate care while driving.

Individual people may not be able to opt out of the global economic market or redesign it such that deprived people receive a different share, but they do not need to in order to prevent some of the damage that they cause. It is easy enough to find an NGO that is dedicated to reducing this damage, and write them a cheque. Of course, our negative responsibility is not entirely open-ended, because we have many competing responsibilities that limit our ability to reduce the damaging consequences of our omissions. Usually though, there is some room left over for us to repair some damage. When such room exists and we fail to do so, then we share in the responsibility for the unnecessary suffering that results.

7.2 Service Duties and States’ Duties

Citizens may or may not authorize their government to take on some of their duties with respect to foundational goods. They may give their government a mandate to impose taxes for the purpose of directing that money to foreign aid and to protection from deprivation. It is important to note though, that this is an instance in which individuals have given their government the authority to fulfill their obligations on their behalf. It does not mean that these people cease to have these obligations. Should their government refuse, or simply fail to institute effective measures, then they are required to find some other means of fulfilling it. Shue mentions that obligations sometimes travel upwards from individuals to institutions, in that some duties belong to a government’s constituents, but nevertheless ought to be fulfilled by their government. He calls these
“service duties.” It makes sense that if duties can travel up, then they can also travel back down to their original bearers, when the designated agent is clearly not fulfilling them.

Having the state carry out one’s responsibilities is one way of insuring that something gets done. However, in the face of political failure it is simply not good enough to suggest that individualizing the responsibility is an unworkable solution. This is especially the case since widespread political failure is a real possibility, and moreover, is the predominant state of affairs in affluent nations today with respect to foreign aid. Poverty relief is not high on many government agendas for allocation of tax dollars. This does not mean that a few individuals must solve the whole problem. Rather, 

"[individualization means seeking to discover one’s proper share of large problems." Each of us acting on our own may not be as effective as our government would be when acting on our behalf, but we are not thereby excused from honouring our impartial obligations.

Just to be clear, a state’s duty to provide aid to the citizens of other nations is conceptually distinct from an individual’s duty to provide aid to them. This is because states are themselves agents in the international arena, both economically and politically. The citizens of affluent nation-states, through the actions of their government, are collectively responsible for the participation of their state in an economic system, which keeps some people badly off. Therefore, as the representative of the collective, the government of an affluent nation is responsible to repair some of the damage done by the perpetuation of that system. It may seem odd that individuals owe aid to non-citizens and their governments also owe foreign aid, but once we consider that individuals participate
in the global economic/political system as individuals, and as members of their collective, then we can see why they owe aid as individuals and their governments also owe aid on their collective behalf. I think a similar argument from collective responsibility could be made with regard to multinational corporations, but that connection will not be further developed here.

7.3 A Few Practical Notes

Before concluding, a few more observations of a practical nature ought to be mentioned. It has been stressed many times in this paper that income does not directly correlate with well-being. Indeed, functional abilities were chosen as the content of foundational goods, rather than commodities or income levels, for exactly this reason. Why then, has the emphasis all along been on the importance of redistributing wealth? "Redistribution" has been used here as a synonym for "aid" and so should be understood to refer to many different sorts of aid, not merely direct income redistribution such as welfare programs. Money is also needed badly to develop and sustain educational, medical and agricultural infrastructure where they are weak or nonexistent. Still, there is no doubt that some funds will go towards supplementing the income of the less fortunate, since in very poor countries the correlation remains marked. It is important to keep in view that what we want (and deserve) is equality of basic needs-fulfillment and not income level, for reasons discussed in Chapter Four. Both service and money are required in order to make progress towards this goal, and since money can buy service (but not vice versa), the provision of money has been my central focus.
Plainly, all the interesting practical issues concerning the relief of world poverty have not been resolved. There are still many open questions with respect to the best way to deliver aid, how aid can best be administered domestically and internationally, what kind of aid is most needed, and what kind of aid is most effective in improving people’s achievement of functional abilities. For instance, I have not even touched on questions such as whether aid should take the form of direct monetary transfers, direct provision of food, or loans for development. These types of issues are frankly outside the scope of this project. Nevertheless, the foundational goods approach sheds some light on the content of our obligations to aid the needy, how they are justified, and how we might begin to integrate them into the structure of our lives, which are already packed with historical and relational obligations at both the individual and state levels.

7.4 Conclusion

When we began this inquiry we were faced with two conflicting Moral Worlds – each with its own claim to legitimacy and its own conception of obligation. Next, we saw that two distinct conceptions of our duties to the less fortunate followed from these differing notions of obligation. Thus, we saw that the question of how we ought to live our lives with the knowledge that many people suffer from poverty-related problems could not be effectively answered without the help of a unified theory of obligation and the good.

The foundational goods theory has been formulated with this specific problem in mind. It is an integration of the important partial and impartial moral concerns most often stressed in the philosophical literature, as well as an attempt to specify a framework.

Part III: Problems in Practice
for discerning our obligations to others near and far, related and unrelated. The notion of foundational goods provides a framework, rather than a strict decision-procedure, for evaluating and integrating our obligations, because it is designed to be helpful in the analysis of moral behaviour over the long-term – either the course of a person’s life or the ongoing conduct of a nation-state. In this and other ways, the foundational goods approach is Aristotelian in inspiration.

No doubt, the temptation at both the individual and institutional levels will be to over-estimate the realm of justified partiality. However, even this would be a substantial improvement over the current situation in most affluent countries, where the problem is considered too big, too demanding, or too complex to be addressed at all. This assumption, at least, has been shown to be false. It is now possible for a new debate to open up around questions of the character of needs and preferences, how these are informed by culture, and how individual and state goals can share available resources with efforts to aid and protect the needy. Some tentative solutions and proposals for how we might go about shaping our goals in the future were suggested in Chapters Four and Five. I hope the fact that our obligations now appear to be susceptible to integration and combination will shift the focus of debate away from defending one side in the conflict, and towards the investigation of possible designs for well-rounded moral lives and international policies.

There can be no doubt that the moral way forward for individuals and nation-states must take account of the increasingly small and interconnected world in which we live. Moral responsibilities now have a tremendous reach – as long as the extent of our cooperation with others and as wide as the reach of our actions’ effects. The new scope
of morality has added yet another layer to our already multi-faceted identities – that of the global citizen. We have found ourselves cast in this role by circumstances and have yet to determine exactly which responsibilities, obligations, and virtues correspond to it.

It has been the purpose of this thesis to suggest that two such responsibilities are: (1) to recognize that promoting equality in the possession of foundational goods is of the utmost moral importance, and (2) to reflect that recognition in our conduct.
Notes

3 Ibid., p. 219.
5 Ibid., p. 233.
6 Ibid., p. 33.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


