On Affluence and Poverty

Morality, Motivation and Practice in a Global Age

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Abstract

This thesis looks at the failure of individual people living in affluent societies to do more to help those living in conditions of extreme poverty at the present moment. Affluent people have the capacity to assist, by contributing additional funds to aid and humanitarian organisations. Given an understanding of what is at stake, the fact that they fail to do so is both morally problematic and difficult to explain. Yet, without an understanding of the causes of inaction, it is difficult to know what measures may be taken to alleviate extreme suffering in the world today.

The thesis draws upon different philosophical accounts of practical reason to argue that the conduct of the affluent can only be understood in one of three ways: these people may lack decisive reason to assist, they may be misinformed, or they may be rationally deficient in some regard. Considering each possibility in turn, it advances two central arguments. Firstly, the normative reasons claim is sound: affluent people, who do not incur minor costs by assisting, ought to do more. Secondly, these people tend to have false beliefs about the nature of poverty, to make substantive errors of judgement, and to follow flawed patterns of reasoning when they deliberate about what to do. Taken together, these factors explain their failure to act.

Building upon this diagnosis, the thesis then considers how to respond to the problem of inaction, advancing a solution that is institutional in character. It argues for the construction of a division of labour between state and citizen, at the national level, which would see political institutions take on responsibility for poverty eradication, thereby leaving individuals freer to pursue their own personal goals and objectives. In order to perform this function effectively, wealthy nations would have to improve the quantity and quality of assistance that they provide to low-income countries. They would also have to cease partaking in practices that harm the global poor. This approach has a number of advantages over reliance on private philanthropy alone: it forms part of a fair and effective solution to the problem of motivating assistance, the arrangement it proposes is both stable and legitimate, and it is also something that could be achieved in practice. Therefore, it represents part of the best possible way in which to proceed.

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Introduction: Beyond the Impasse, Ethics and Motivation in a Divided World

I. The Problem of Inaction

The world in which we live is not, yet, a good place. At the present moment in time, over one billion people live in a condition of extreme poverty and many millions of people die each year from poverty-related causes. Meanwhile, those of us with the capacity to assist do not act. This thesis is about the problem of inaction. It is about the failure of affluent people to do more to assist those living in extreme poverty. In this work, I develop an account of the phenomenon itself, and of the forces that sustain it. I also try to map out the ways in which a problem of this type and scale might ultimately be addressed. Broadly speaking, I argue that the common notion that affluent people ought to do more than they do at present is correct. In virtue of this fact, inaction is both morally problematic and difficult to explain. Yet the failure of affluent people to take action in this area urgently needs to be explained. Inaction has very serious consequences for people living in extreme poverty. It also has important consequences for the lives of those who do not act. Only by understanding where things go wrong can we hope to make progress on this front.

II. Our World

Before we turn to look at these matters in greater detail, something more needs to be said about the facts. According to recent studies, over 1.4 billion people, or one-fifth of the world's population, currently live in a condition of *extreme poverty* on less than $1.25 per day.[1] Poverty of this kind is absolute and comprises a crushing burden for those whose lives it afflicts. At this level of material deprivation, basic needs go unmet, basic desires are unfulfilled and basic capabilities are underdeveloped or lost altogether. Families living in this condition often cannot afford enough food to live on, are unable to access healthcare, and lack shelter or basic articles of clothing such as

[1] In 2005, there were 1.4 billion people living below the $1.25 per day poverty line (in 2005 PPP dollars); this group comprised one quarter of the population of the developing world. The mean consumption for this group was 87 cents per day. Over half the population of sub-Saharan Africa – 390 million people – live in a condition of extreme poverty (Chen and Ravallion, 2008, 22, 27).

shoes.[2] As a result of this, those who live in extreme poverty often express fear for their own future and for the future of their children. Their fear is well-placed given the propensity of disease, dehydration and malnutrition to destroy normal bodily functions. Among other things, these ailments lead to cognitive impairment, anaemia and blindness and, often, death.[3] Today, one-third of all human deaths (those of around 18 million people each year) are caused by poverty-related factors.[4] Furthermore, half of those who lose their lives as a result of extreme poverty are children under the age of five.[5] These people die because they, or their parents, lack the resources that are needed in order for them to stay alive. Taken together, the prevalence of extreme poverty is a human catastrophe of a vast magnitude.

At the same time, the world we live in is *not a poor place*. Many people are better off than they have ever been before. Those living in affluent nations are now many times richer than those who were alive in their parents' and grandparents' generations.[6] They are also many times wealthier than people living in other parts of the world today. Recent estimates suggest that, even when we adjust for price differentials between countries, the ratio between the income of the richest and poorest ten per cent of humankind stands at a staggering 271 to 1.[7] The gap in wealth is greater still. While the bottom *half* of the world's population currently own 1.1 per cent of the world's valuable assets, the top 10 per cent own 85.3 per cent of this value.[8] The practical consequence of such extreme inequality is that, while some people live in a condition of very serious need, others live lives that are untouched by need altogether. For those who live in affluent countries, the major challenge is now to acquire the commodities that they desire and to develop new tastes that they can then try to satiate. The redundancy of need, for many (though not all) who live in societies of this type, is underscored by the ever-rising consumption of luxury goods.[9]

Importantly for this study, these people, the affluent, currently have the *capacity* to provide life-saving assistance to those living in extreme poverty, at little cost to themselves. By contributing

[2] In the period 2010-201, around 870 million people were chronically undernourished (Food and Agriculture Organization and World Food Programme, 2012, 8, 55). In sub-Saharan Africa, 70 per cent of the population live in a condition of hunger (Hill *et al.*, 2007, 35).
[3] Over 40 million people in the developing world currently live with the condition of blinding trachoma. This disease is readily treatable (World Health Organization, 2012).
[4] Pogge, 2010, 11.
[5] According to United Nations, 18,000 children under the age of five lose their lives each day due to poverty-related causes (United Nations Inter-Agency Group on Child Mortality, 2013).
[6] People living in North America and Europe are nearly three times as rich in real terms as they were in the 1950s (Offer, 2006, 1).
[7] Pogge, 2010, 12; Milanovic, 2005, 107, 126-133.
[8] Pogge, 2010, 13.
[9] Frank, 1999, 15.

money and resources to aid or development organisations, they can ensure that essential goods and services are provided to the people who need them most. Furthermore, the affluent can do these things without significantly diminishing their own standard of living. In many cases, they would be no worse-off at all. Nonetheless, they do not act. A great many people do *nothing at all* in terms of private giving to assist those living in extreme poverty; and, among those who do assist, few do a great deal in service of these ends.[10] Information provided by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) supports this conclusion, showing that inhabitants of the United States, for example, currently contribute around 7 cents to overseas aid and development for every $100 of income earned.[11] According to a study undertaken by the Centre for Global Prosperity, which defines personal contributions in a more expansive way, private philanthropy directed at goals of this type amounts to some $12 billion each year.[12] If this is correct, then it follows that the average personal contribution of each American citizen to global causes is around $50 per annum.[13] This sum comprises around *one-thousandth* of the average person's annual income.[14] As a result of inaction, many more people die than would otherwise be the case.

III. The Moral Problem

This state of affairs is extremely troubling. Reflecting upon this situation, many people will conclude that affluent people (and, perhaps, they themselves) 'ought' to do more by way of assistance than is presently the case. The question then arises of how to make sense of this thought. In the first instance, it can be understood as a claim about morality: namely, that the affluent ought morally to do more to help those living in extreme poverty, and perhaps also that failure to assist is morally wrong (at least when the cost of assisting is very small). This observation leads, in turn, to the difficult question of how best to understand and evaluate moral claims.

[10] When asked to report on their own giving patterns, only 15% of the British public claimed to donate to organisations that address global poverty. 21% report giving to humanitarian causes. Assuming a degree of overlap between these two categories, it seems likely that only *one third* of people give to causes of either type (TNS, 2010).
[11] Singer, 2010, 24.
[12] Around one third of this money goes to sub-Saharan Africa where it is needed most (P. Miller, 2011, 9, 12).
[13] In 2009, the year for which the size of private giving is calculated, the working-age population of the United States was 236 million people.
[14] In that year, Gross National Income was $40,309 per capita.

The understanding of morality that I want to introduce here is broadly rationalist in character. I shall assume that morality is concerned with reasons for action of a certain kind, and that moral requirements provide one with reason to act, or elucidate already existing reasons to conduct oneself in certain ways. A normative reason is a consideration that can be said to 'count in favour' of some course of action or belief. In the practical domain, considerations of this type are often given by the value that an action would serve to protect, further, or realise if it was successfully performed. Viewed in this way, morality starts with the realisation that human life and well-being has impartial value. The central insight of moral theory is that people have value not just *for* themselves but also *in* themselves.[15] This claim can be grounded in different ways. Human beings are capable of autonomous choice, have basic needs, and are able to flourish in important ways. All of these things can be said to count in favour of treatment that manifests an appropriate level of concern and respect for them. These are the reasons with which morality is concerned. Furthermore, it is this notion of concern or respect that appears to be missing from the conduct of the affluent. The conspicuous neglect of people living in extreme poverty, by those with the capacity to aid them, does not seem to be consistent with the idea that these people are the bearers of equal and ultimate value. It is not consistent with the idea that they, too, are people whose lives and well-being matter at a fundamental level.

The notion that there is a moral requirement to assist those living in extreme poverty can be made more determinate in a number of ways. Indeed, its content and stringency will vary according to the precise form of concern or respect that we believe is owed to our fellow human beings. According to consequentialist accounts of morality, an agent is morally required to perform the action, or follow the rule, that would produce the best state of affairs when judged from an impartial point of view. From this vantage point, the well-being of each person counts equally in determining the value of a given outcome. Proceeding in this way, conclusions are reached either directly or indirectly about the action that an agent is morally required to perform. In the present context, it seems extremely likely that both Act Consequentialism and Rule Consequentialism mandate the provision of assistance to people living in extreme poverty. Even if we allow for uncertainty about outcomes (a matter to which we shall return shortly), it is difficult to think of a more productive impartial use to which the money of the affluent could be put, given the scale of the suffering that

[15] Nagel, 1997, 124.

stands to be alleviated by this kind of action.[16] Equally, a principle that requires people to prevent very bad outcomes, when this could be done at little cost to oneself, is widely thought to be one that would contribute to an impartially better state of affairs.

Support for the notion that there is a moral duty of assistance can also be found in the work of Immanuel Kant. According to Kantian theorists, morality is comprised of a set of principles or maxims that one can uniquely, rationally, will to be universal law. In order to know whether a given principle passes this test, we first need to establish whether a world in which it applies to the actions of all is conceivable. If this condition is met, we then need to establish whether the resulting world is one that we would or could rationally will into existence. According to Kant, a maxim of universal egoism fails the second test.[17] While the resulting world is conceivable, it is not one that we would wish to create given that we would thereby be compelled to abandon hope of assistance in the face of adversity.[18] This situation is clearly inferior to one in which assistance is, within certain parameters, both required and forthcoming. In light of this, egoism would be rejected in favour of a principle that enshrined the latter conduct as moral practice. To say that this is the case is not yet to tell us much about the stringency of such a requirement. However, if the duty of assistance is to be more than a mere formality, it must mandate some measure of assistance for those whose agency is eroded, and whose dignity is undermined, by the situation of extreme poverty that they now inhabit. Modern contractualist accounts of interpersonal morality generate similar conclusions in this area.[19]

Finally, the idea that affluent people are morally required to do more for those living in extreme poverty gains support from the notion that human beings are the bearers of moral rights, which they hold in virtue of their equal and ultimate value. These rights, which are human rights,

[16] Measures to tackle anthropogenic climate change are also an important priority and one that is heavily implicated in efforts to combat extreme poverty. However, there is great uncertainty about the effectiveness of different contributions that individuals are able to make in this area. For this reason, the present investigation focuses primarily upon public health interventions and the good that they can do for the global poor.

[17] Considering a maxim which enjoins only egoism or self-help, Kant writes that, 'even though it is possible that a universal law of nature could subsist in accordance with that maxim, still it is impossible to will that such a principle should hold everywhere as a law of nature. For a will that resolved in this way would contradict itself, inasmuch as cases might often arise in which one would have need of the love and sympathy of others and in which he would deprive himself, by such a law of nature springing from his own will, of all hope of the aid he wants for himself' (Kant, 1993 [1785], 32).

[18] Commenting on this aspect of Kant's theory, Onora O'Neill suggests that adoption of a principle of self-centred indifference would necessarily be less than universal because it threatens the very capacity of certain actors to adopt such principles in the first place. She writes that, 'if rational and needy beings are only to act on principles that they can all act on… they must… reject self-centred indifference to others needs insofar as this indifference threatens others' agency.' Reasoning in this way, she concludes that 'among rational and needy beings, charity, in the old sense of concern for the needs of others, is an obligation' (O. O'Neill, 1989, 230).

[19] Scanlon, 1998, 224.

serve as the grounds of duties in others and are possessed by all in equal measure.[20] Rights theorists disagree about the aspect of personhood that human rights accord protection to. This disagreement is not important here. Extreme poverty harms interest, destroys autonomy and creates suffering all in significant measure. More important, for the matter in hand, is the disagreement over the nature of the person or entity that is duty-bound to uphold human rights when their object is threatened or undermined. According to those who endorse an institutional account of human rights, the duties that are commensurate to rights fall first and foremost on the apparatus of the state.[21] Understood in this way, human rights impose requirements on states with regard to those who reside within their territorial jurisdiction. Others dispute this institutional focus. However, even if we accept the account sketched out so far, we still need to know what happens when states fail, either through ill-will, incapacity, or both, to secure the substance of rights for the people in question. The way in which we answer this question has important ramifications for many of the people who now live in extreme poverty. They are the direct or indirect victims of state failure. In this context, it has struck many as implausible that the force of human rights simply dissipates or disappears altogether. When the primary duty-holder fails to give people what they are due, it seems more likely that, 'any agent, individual or collective who is able to help protect them may in principle bear remedial responsibilities.'[22] In this way, human rights are often thought to create successive waves of duties.[23] These duties include, for many, the duty of individuals to assist those whose rights are threatened or compromised by extreme poverty.

To defend a position of this type, on any of the grounds advanced so far, is not necessarily to make the further claim that *justice* requires assistance on the part of affluent people. Although many find this additional claim plausible – asserting that morally urgent claims are those of justice, that redistribution is required in order to adjust for misfortune, or that assistance should be rendered in order to compensate for on-going harm or past injustice – the claim about justice tends to be problematic for Kantians, who believe that only perfect duties have this status, and also for those

[20] The human right to life and to a basic level of subsistence is recognised by international law. Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that: 'Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person'; Article 25 Part One states that: 'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.'

[21] For example, Thomas Pogge writes that 'we should conceive human rights primarily as claims on social institutions and secondarily as claims on those who uphold such institutions' (Pogge, 2002, 46).

[22] D. Miller, 2007, 163-164.

[23] On this point *see* Waldron, 1993, 212-213. For an account of what the taxonomy of duties might look like *see* Shue, 1996, 60.

who adopt an institutional account of distributive justice but remain sceptical about the existence of a global basic structure.[24] What the present arguments support is the more fundamental claim that some form of 'humane assistance from the well-off to those in extremis is clearly called for quite apart from any demand of justice'.[25] Among those who start with the idea that human life has inherent value, there is an overlapping consensus on this point. The provision of assistance, insofar as it is mandated by quantum of concern that all owe to one another, comprises a 'moral minimum', 'moral bedrock' or 'morality of the depths'.[26]

We shall have recourse to consider the scope and character of this consensus in due course. At this point, it should serve only to give us pause for thought, lending support to the view that many affluent people (although we are not yet in a position to say precisely who) have morally decisive reason to assist those living in extreme poverty. These people, I suggest, lack sufficient moral reason to act in other ways. From this, it follows that some affluent people ought morally to do more than they do at present. It also follows that it is morally wrongful that they fail to do so. I shall refer to the possibility that inaction is deeply immoral as the *Moral Problem*. It, in turn, justifies a degree of discomfort about the present state of affairs. Indeed, following theorists such as Peter Unger and Thomas Pogge, we may wonder whether, in failing to assist, individual people living in wealthy nations are party to a disastrous failure of moral judgement of the type that has so often blighted the course of human history.[27] We might also wonder whether they exhibit a degree of bad faith when reflecting upon the moral character of their present conduct. If what has been said so far is correct, then it is far from clear that everything is all right, morally speaking.

IV. The Explanatory Problem

The moral point of view is not the only standpoint from which it makes sense to evaluate the conduct of an agent. We can also ask what action would make things go best from the prudential point of view of the person in question, or which action is most productive from an aesthetic point of view. Beyond this, we are also able to ask what the person has sufficient or decisive reason to do, all things considered. Judgements of this type concern the standpoint of all-things-considered practical reason. They bear upon what one has reason to do, and upon what it is rational to do, if a

[24] Meckled-Garcia, 2008; Nagel, 2005.
[25] Nagel, 2005, 118.
[26] Walzer, 1994, 10; D. Miller, 2007, 180; Shue, 1996, 18.
[27] Unger, 1996, 20; Pogge, 2010, 1-7.

person is suitably informed about the facts. The question of whether affluent people have conclusive reason to assist people living in extreme poverty has important ramifications the way in which we understand their present conduct.

On some understandings of the relationship between morality and normative reason, what morality requires wholly determines what one has reason to do. This will be the case if the scope of moral judgement is *pervasive* (insofar as morality always provides guidance for those faced with a choice between different actions) and if its claims *override* (or subsume) those that issue from other standpoints. Those who believe that this is the case maintain that one always has decisive reason to do what morality requires and that one never has sufficient reason to do what morality forbids.[28] Some people take issue with the first claim about the scope and character of moral judgement. However, even if we cede ground on this front, the second claim about the overridingness of morality still strikes many as too strong. In practice, it is far from clear that morally wrongful action is necessarily contrary to reason (or that it is always irrational given an appropriate understanding of the facts that obtain). To see how this is the case, we need only to think about immoral action undertaken for self-interested reasons in the cold light of day. If action of this type is not always contrary to reason, if it is not necessarily irrational to cheat in a test or jump the queue (even when one is informed and reasoning clearly), then we must conclude that the claims of morality and the claims of practical reason may come apart in practice. And, if this is the case, it makes sense to ask whether the reasons to assist people living in extreme poverty, which proved so weighty in the moral context, also prove to be decisive in this latter practical context as well.

We have already said that a normative reason for an action is a consideration that 'counts in favour' of that action being performed. In this way, the fact that some action could save a person's life is (usually held to be) a strong reason to act in that way. These are reasons to assist. However, they are not the only considerations that bear upon the agent's choice of conduct in this instance. The most obvious countervailing considerations are provided by the cost of assisting whoever it is who stands in need of help. In the present case, the goods that the person in question would forgo by assisting count against this action and in favour of some other option, which would allow these things to be pursued or retained. Understood in this way, both types of consideration, benefit and cost, are *pro tanto* reasons for action only. They count in favour of some option, but do not necessarily provide a sufficient or decisive reason to act in any one way. In order to reach a

[28] It follows from this that it can never be rational knowingly to do what morality forbids (Scheffler, 1992, 53).

conclusion about what a person has good reason to do, all things considered, we must weigh and combine these *pro tanto* considerations in an appropriate manner. A key characteristic of normative reasons is their dimension of weight or strength. When reasons come into conflict, the standard response is to weigh the force of competing considerations against one another. In many cases, the stronger reason, or coalition of reasons, can be said to 'tip the balance' of practical judgement in favour of one course of action and against the other.[29] When this is the case, that action is the one that the agent has most reason to perform. In other cases, neither set of considerations is decisive. In these cases, the agent in question has sufficient reason to act in one or more ways.[30]

In the present case, we need to establish whether the good that would result from assisting people living in a condition of extreme poverty outweighs the cost that affluent people stand to incur by so acting, or whether, to the contrary, affluent people have sufficient (and perhaps even decisive) reason to act in other ways. The answer to this question is not straightforward. On one hand, it is difficult to compare different types of reason against each other. It is not clear, for example, how the impartial value of assistance ranks alongside the more personal value of the projects and relationships that might be diminished by acting in that way.[31] On the other hand, reasons can combine and countervail one another in complicated ways.[32] We shall return to consider these matters in great detail in later chapters. However, what I would like to suggest here is that it is plausibly the case that many affluent people have decisive, all things considered, reason to do more than they do at present by way of assistance. When the benefit of so acting is very great indeed (as is often the case) and the personal cost of doing so is minor or non-existent (which is also sometimes true of affluent people), then there are times when *it simply does not make sense* not to help those living in extreme poverty. Agents who fail to assist, in circumstances of this type, do not respond properly to salient aspects of the world in which they live and their relationship with it.

The claim that there is conclusive reason to assist those living in extreme poverty is therefore likely to be true of at least some affluent people. It is what these people ought to do, all things considered, and their failure to assist is, in one sense at least, contrary to reason. This is the second sense in which affluent people 'ought' to do more than they do at present. In virtue of this, their conduct is problematic, albeit in a way that is quite different from that which is entailed by the existence of a moral requirement. Inaction is difficult to *explain*. In order to see why this is the case,

[29] Broome, 2013, 52.
[30] Parfit, 2011, 32.
[31] ibid. 137.
[32] Kagan, 1988; Raz, 1999b, 178-199.

it is important to take note of the way in which explanation of human behaviour is connected to an understanding of human rationality and of the capacity for reason. On most accounts of practical reason, a person who is both rational and informed will do what she has most reason to do. When this is the case, we can explain her conduct by identifying the normative reason that motivated the action in question. Conversely, when reason and motivation come apart, we can usually explain the resulting conduct by identifying false beliefs on the part of the agent or by identifying different kinds of rational error that affected her deliberation. Yet, this expectation is confounded by the present case. On the one hand, we commonly assume that affluent people are rational. We also assume that most people know the facts about world poverty in their basic form. On the other hand, it also seems true that inaction in the face of extreme poverty is sometimes contrary to all-things-considered reason. Under these conditions, the failure to assist people living in extreme poverty is difficult to explain. We cannot show it to be consistent with reason, nor can we identify the way in which reason and motivation come apart. Both avenues of explanation appear to be foreclosed to us. I shall refer to this problem as the Explanatory Problem.

It is not clear how best to proceed. Indeed, the conduct of affluent people itself remains curiously resistant to introspection in this area. Many people struggle to explain why they do not act. Yet, inaction needs to be explained. It obstructs efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Remaining unaccounted for, it also threatens the integrity of affluent people, casting doubt over the notion that they can properly be said to be authors of their own lives.

V. Revisiting the Capacity Claim

These two problems, the Moral Problem and the Explanatory Problem, form the central focus of the following investigation. They are connected in important ways. Indeed, the following chapters will consider many of the arguments laid out so far in greater detail and try to address the questions that they raise. However, before we can make progress on this front, it is important to consider the concerns of those who believe that the present study has moved too fast and failed to accurately characterise the world as it is. These people take issue with the central empirical claim that an individual person, living in an affluent society, has the capacity to save the life of someone living in extreme poverty (or to achieve some roughly equivalent good) by providing money and other resources to aid organisations. They also object to the claim that this can be done at little cost to

oneself. According to critics of what I term the Capacity Claim, once we form a correct understanding of how limited our ability to affect change in the world actually is, we will come to appreciate that both the moral claim and the all-things-considered reasons claim are mistaken. It is both rational and right to maintain the present stance of inaction (or at least not to give to aid organisations) in the face of world poverty. Therefore, the Moral Problem and the Explanatory Problem are not problematic after all.

In support of this viewpoint, critics of the Capacity Claim make a number of points. Firstly, they note that many projects that aim to help people living in extreme poverty have high administrative overheads. These expenses, which are not always publicly acknowledged, make assistance more costly than it would otherwise be. Secondly, they note that we need to be reasonably confident that the activity that we support actually makes a difference to the life of someone who is living in extreme poverty. In order for this to be the case, it must be true that no other agency would have stepped in to provide the service that we provide in the absence of action by ourselves. In order for this second condition to be met, it must also be the case that the person who is assisted stays alive long enough to benefit from the intervention in question. The good achieved by a project is significantly diminished if the beneficiary subsequently dies or is harmed by another cause shortly after it is implemented. Finally, critics note that humanitarian and development activities also often have harmful effects, and that these need to be taken into account when determining the value of philanthropic action.[33] Taken together, they argue that more complete accounting, along with the need to demonstrate impact and the need to mitigate harm, all drive up the cost of assistance and place pressure on the claim that it can be provided at little cost to oneself.

In order for the Capacity Claim to be correct, it must be true that there is *at least one* organisation, which we are able to identify, that meets the standard of effectiveness that it sets out. I believe this is the case and that there are, in fact, several organisations that meet this criterion. I will also argue that citizens of affluent countries are able to realise much larger gains in the field of poverty eradication by taking collective political action which promotes this outcome. Taken together, affluent people have the capacity to assist people living in extreme poverty, at little cost to themselves, both by acting alone and also by acting in conjunction with each other.

Attempts to substantiate or refute these claims encounter a number of epistemic hurdles. Indeed, evidence about the effectiveness of interventions, and about the performance of different

[33] Wenar, 2011.

aid agencies, is not nearly as good as it could and should be.[34] Commenting on this fact, Keith Horton notes that aid organisations have tended to do few evaluations of their own activities, to conduct reviews on an internal basis that are not open to the public, and to focus on issues that do not contribute to our understanding of their overall effectiveness.[35] Nonetheless, some independent monitoring and evaluation does take place. While these studies are not comprehensive enough to form a reliable assessment of the work undertaken by humanitarian organisations as a whole, they do show that well-targeted interventions can produce a very great amount of good.[36] In order to determine what kinds of activity have the greatest impact in the field of poverty eradication, researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology use a system of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) to compare the effect of different interventions on target and control groups.[37] In the pharmaceutical industry, the use of RCTs is held up as the 'gold standard' or proof that a drug is indeed effective. By using this methodology to evaluate different kinds of development intervention, researchers are able to address the problem of selection bias and answer the question of how individuals would have coped without the programme in question. The results of these studies are often very impressive. By way of illustration, Miguel and Kremer have shown that, by spending money on deworming projects, it is possible to provide a child in the developing world with *an additional year of education*, which would otherwise be lost to illness, for a cost of around $3.50.[38]

In order to compare the impact of different health interventions, medical professionals use the metric of Disability-Adjusted Life-Years (DALYs). This unit of measurement helps governments evaluate the cost-effectiveness of programmes which have effects that include preventing loss of life, treating illness and compensating for disability. In order to arrive at a conversion rate, which allows us to make estimates about the way in which disability and disease compare to the loss of some period of a person's life, this metric relies heavily upon the life reports of people who suffer from the conditions in question. According to these studies, preventing someone from experiencing one and a half years of blindness, averting five serious malaria episodes, or preventing someone from living with intestinal parasites for 42 years are all roughly equivalent to having prolonged the life of a person by one year.[39] The resulting measurement is far from perfect. However, even if we allow for

[34] Riddell, 266.
[35] Horton, 2011, 31-32.
[36] Riddell, 2007, 53–54.
[37] Duflo and Kremer, 2005.
[38] Miguel and Kremer, 2004.
[39] On this metric, 1.67 years spent with blindness, 5.24 significant malaria episodes or 41.67 years spent with intestinal obstruction due to parasites, all equate roughly to having saved a year of life at full health.

some imprecision in this area, cost-effectiveness research undertaken by the Disease Controls Priority Project (DCPP) indicates that there are a number of interventions that are very effective indeed.[40] By way of illustration, the DCPP calculates that a sum of $100 invested in neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), such as Schistosomiasis, may yield a gain in the well-being of those affected, which is equivalent to preserving 30 years of life at full health. On this calculation, it is possible to provide someone with the equivalent to a year of life for slightly less than $3.50. There are a number of other interventions that are similarly efficacious. Recent research suggests that, by providing parents with a second chance to get their children vaccinated against measles, it is possible to achieve this outcome for as little as $4. The distribution of insecticide-treated mosquito nets is calculated to cost around $10 for each year of life that is saved.[41]

With this kind of evidence in mind, the next challenge is to identify good organisations, with low overheads, that are working to implement projects in these areas and that also need additional funding. For this purpose, we can look at assessments provided by GiveWell, which is an independent research centre that aims to identify the most effective aid organisations by providing a robust assessment of individual candidates on a case-by-case basis. In order to be recommended by GiveWell, an organisation must meet three criteria.[42] Firstly, it must conduct detailed monitoring and evaluation of its own activities. These assessments must be made public and conform to independent standards of validity. Secondly, it must be fiscally transparent and allocate at least three-quarters of its funds to priority programmes of the type that have been discussed. Thirdly, it must pass a detailed internal assessment undertaken by professionals at GiveWell. Assessors consider whether the activities that the organisation carries out are well-targeted, whether there are specific externalities (including harms) that affect the work that they conduct, and whether these organisations have the capacity to absorb more funds and use them in a productive way. At the present moment, GiveWell's top-ranked organisation is the Against Malaria Foundation (AMF). Their assessment suggests that a sum of $2,300, when allocated to this organisation, is enough to ensure that one child (who would otherwise have died) lives a complete life and that several hundred cases of malaria are averted through the distribution of insecticide treated nets. This is not a small sum of money in absolute terms. Economists such as Jeffrey Sachs insist that the distribution of nets

[40] The DCPP uses a mixed methodology that combines RCTs with meta-data analysis in order to obtain these results.

[41] The complete dataset on cost-effective interventions can be viewed at: http://www.dcp2.org/direct/_/main/BrowseInterventions,interventionFilterForm.html

[42] GiveWell, 2012 November.

is actually far *more* cost-effective than that.[43] However, even if we stick with the GiveWell figure, it remains true that the average citizen who lives in an economically developed country could realistically expect to save the life of *hundreds of people* if they chose to allocate *one tenth* of their income to AMF on an annual basis over the course of their life. For those who are concerned with saving lives, this is a result that lends support to the Capacity Claim. For those who are concerned simply with benefiting people living in extreme poverty, efforts to tackle NTDs may represent a still more cost-effective way of doing good.

The preceding analysis helps to address concerns about the size of administrative overheads and the effectiveness of activities that are being carried out. However, it does little to address a number of more systemic concerns. One issue that is worth considering in this context relates to the impact that these projects have on population size (in cases where they are successful). According to one common line of thought, the provision of assistance is often counterproductive because it contributes to the problem of overpopulation. As a result of dwindling capital stocks and pressure on natural resources, the worry is that even well-intentioned initiatives may lead to greater loss of life, or to more people living in extreme poverty, further down the line. The impact that a specific project has on a problem like overpopulation, as well as the size of positive externalities it generates, is difficult to quantify.[44] Nonetheless, there are a number of things to be said in this context. Firstly, extreme poverty is not caused by absolute scarcity of resources at the global level. The major problem is that wealth is distributed very unevenly. The redistribution of around *one per cent* of aggregate global income, from the richest to the poorest people, would be enough to raise everyone living in extreme poverty above the poverty line.[45] In a similar vein, recent studies suggest that there are now more obese than malnourished people living in the world today.[46] There is no overall food shortage.[47] However, what is true is that population pressure can have a major negative impact on efforts to combat extreme poverty within economically developing countries. Indeed, population growth is a key dynamic driving the kind of 'poverty trap' that Jeffrey Sachs argues is so damaging to the life chances of impoverished people.[48] Therefore, it represents a kind of externality that warrants extra attention.

[43] Singer, 2010, 87.
[44] Wenar, 2011, 120.
[45] Pogge, 2002, 2; Sachs, 2005, 290-91.
[46] Knight *et al.*, 2011, 16.
[47] Sen, 1999, 205-209.
[48] Sachs, 2005, 64-66.

If localised population pressure is our major concern, then action is needed. Allowing people to die unaided is morally problematic; it has also proved to be remarkably ineffective as a form of population control. Indeed, the countries around the world with the highest birth rates are invariably those in which mortality rates are also highest. This is not a coincidence. Population growth is, in large part, a product of parents having more children to guard against economic insecurity, of female disempowerment within these societies, and of limited access to contraception. Against this backdrop, many of the interventions discussed so far have the potential to do a lot of good. The distribution of mosquito nets reduces infant mortality. This might be thought to add to population pressure. However, it also increases the chances of children living to adulthood, reducing the economic incentive for parents to have additional offspring. Female school attendance receives an important boost from deworming initiatives. This, too, has the potential to reduce birth rates significantly.[49] And, for those who are particularly concerned about the negative effects of overpopulation, the distribution of condoms and other contraceptive devices represents a highly effective way both of preventing the transmission of HIV/AIDS and also of reducing the rate of unwanted pregnancies. Furthermore, there are a number of high performing aid agencies that are conducting work in this area, with the DCPP reporting that it costs between $52 and $112 to prevent the loss of a year of life by these means. This is equivalent to $1,020-$2,240 per HIV infection averted. Given that this last intervention can be expected to have a net positive effect on population pressure, the neo-Malthusian claim that assistance is necessarily self-defeating is mistaken.

Taken together, this research indicates that, while the provision of life-saving assistance sometimes cost significantly *more* than the estimates found in fundraising materials of various organisations, the Capacity Claim is itself fairly robust. It *is* possible for affluent people to do a great deal for those living in extreme poverty at little cost to themselves. With the requisite commitment on their part, they could reasonably expect to save a number of lives. Of course, it is not possible to eliminate all uncertainty in this area. There is room to improve reporting and assessment mechanisms. There are also a number of other concerns about the provision of assistance that cannot be addressed here due to limitations of space. However, it is important to note that, unlike many of the other beliefs that people entertain about the world, and about their own relationship to it, those concerning the efficacy of certain projects are now subject to rigorous scrutiny. The use of

[49] Sen, 1999, 197.

randomisation to determine the effectiveness of a specific programme produces results that are, by everyday standards, epistemically robust. Indeed, it is important not to invoke an epistemic double standard in this context. Those who do not assist, may insist on an exceptionally high burden of proof for aid effectiveness simply in order to avoid addressing the moral claims that result from the best possible understanding of the situation.[50] Bearing this in mind, the present investigation will proceed on the assumption that what the evidence tells us is correct, and that it provides us with a reliable guide to what works well in practice.

A different but related set of concerns centre upon the extent to which efforts to combat extreme poverty could be scaled up on an international basis. Most of these questions concern the overall effectiveness of aid in tackling extreme poverty.[51] Clearly, the question of whether aid has had a net positive effect upon the number of people living in this condition is quite different from the question of whether there is an individual organisation – which affluent people are in a position to contribute to – that supports the claim that they, as individuals, are in a position to assist. However, in later chapters of this thesis, I will argue that this revenue stream has an important role to play in combatting extreme poverty, and that it can also help affluent individuals discharge their moral responsibilities successfully. In order for this to be the case, it must be true that the provision of aid could (in conjunction with other measures) have a significant and positive impact upon the lives of people who live in abject poverty. This claim encounters serious opposition from aid sceptics, who argue that the practice has achieved little over the preceding decades and that it may even have harmed the global poor.[52] There are several variations of this critique. However, the weightiest objection holds that economic growth is, or has historically been, the major driver of poverty reduction: in addition to creating new jobs and livelihood opportunities, it provides governments with the resources needed to provide services to the poorest members of their population. Against this backdrop, critics then hold that aid is bad for economic growth. The main reason for this is that aid weakens political institutions, which are needed for growth, by providing

[50] Commenting on this tendency, G.A. Cohen notes that, 'people seek in moral matters a level of precision and certainty that they would not expect to find in matters of personal preference… [they] say that you can't *know* that a given charitable donation will do any good, thereby erecting a standard for epistemic confidence which, if applied to their own self-interested concerns, would deprive them of a lot of enjoyment' (G.A. Cohen, 2008, 5-6).

[51] Overseas Development Aid (ODA) is assistance provided to people living in low and middle-income countries as grants or concessionary loans by the official sector. It is provided by governments and inter-government agencies rather than by individuals.

[52] Easterly, 2006; Moyo, 2009.

governments with a source of income that makes them unaccountable to their own population.[53] As a result of this, critics suggest that aid promotes dependency on foreign hand-outs and leads to corruption, creating a retardant effect on economic development that fully offsets any other positive effect that aid might have on poverty reduction.

Critics of aid are correct to note that the current practice of aid-giving is deeply imperfect. Indeed, it is largely because of failure at this level that individuals can achieve such a high rate of return by using their own resources to support specific projects and interventions. Critics are also correct to note that economic growth has been an important driver of poverty reduction.[54] However, they are mistaken in asserting that this is the only way in which poverty reduction occurs. Progress is also often made when reformers pursue pro-poor policies that favour a more egalitarian distribution of goods within highly unequal societies. Beyond this, there is little evidence to show that aid has proved detrimental to growth. One meta-study on the impact of aid found that it had, on average, no impact on a country's growth rates.[55] In contrast to this, Paul Collier suggests that aid has probably *added* around one per cent, per year, to the growth rate of the bottom billion people over the last thirty years.[56] Indeed, focusing upon only a subset of countries, one recent study concluded that, 'aid as it is currently allocated sustainably lifts 10 million people per year out of poverty.'[57] How we interpret this result is, in part, a matter of perspective. On the more positive assessment provided by Collier and Dollar, the average cost of poverty reduction through aid is estimated to be $2650 per person.[58] However, what is certainly the case is that there are examples where aid has been far more effective than that. In Ethiopia, in the 1990s, the increased marginal productivity from aid meant that 'the one-time cost of lifting people out of poverty [was] about $600'.[59] There is also reason to believe that aid could be made *much more* effective at addressing poverty if the process of allocating aid was changed in certain ways.

The distribution of aid has, and continues to be, determined largely by the strategic and geopolitical interests of affluent countries. Commenting on current aid allocations, Alesina and Dollar note that, 'an inefficient, economically closed, mismanaged non-democratic former colony politically friendly to its former colonizer, receives more foreign aid than another country with

[53] Remmer, 2004, 80, 88.
[54] Dollar and Kraay, 2002.
[55] Doucouliagos and Paldam, 2008.
[56] Collier, 2008, 100.
[57] Collier and Dollar, 2002, 1477.
[58] ibid. 1497.
[59] ibid. 1490, 1497.

similar levels of poverty, a superior policy stance but without a past as a colony'.[60] On the economic side of things, Javed Younas has identified a strong correlation between the quantity of manufactured goods that a country imports from donors, and the amount of bilateral aid that recipients receive from them.[61] Dollar and Levin also note that, throughout much of the 1980s, both bilateral and multilateral aid had a strong negative relationship with property rights and rule of law indicators. In short, they conclude that 'aid used to be targeted to countries with poor economic governance.'[62] According to these accounts, aid is not targeted to those who are most in need.[63] Less than half of all aid goes to low-income countries.[64] Nor is it directed to countries that are affected by extreme poverty but which have good policy environments that are conducive to growth.[65] In many cases, it could be targeted so that it better meets both criteria *simultaneously*.[66] This efficient allocation of aid would, according to recent estimates, roughly *double* the impact that the current allocation has on lifting people out of poverty.[67] In addition to this kind of reform, the impact of aid can also be improved by increasing the transparency of donor agencies, by reducing overhead costs, by addressing the tendency of aid to be fragmented among many agencies (with shared responsibilities), and by focusing on effective channels of delivery.[68] Taken in conjunction with the fulfilment of long-standing commitments to provide additional resources for this purpose, it is reasonable to think that the impact of aid could be significantly improved both in terms of economic development and also in terms of reducing human suffering.[69]

Finally, there are a number of other ways in which affluent countries could help to address world poverty. Due to limitations of space, I shall focus on two types of reform in particular: those in the field of trade, and those concerning the regulation of illicit financial flows. At the present moment, wealthy nations maintain an extensive system of tariff and non-tariff barriers that prevent producers in the developing world from selling their goods to people living in affluent countries. Protectionist measures of this type are particularly strong in areas where economically developing countries have a comparative advantage such as textiles and agriculture. The protection of domestic

[60] Alesina and Dollar, 2000, 33
[61] Younas, 2008, 668
[62] Dollar and Levin, 2006, 2036, 2044
[63] Alesina and Dollar, 2000
[64] Easterly and Williamson, 2011, 1938
[65] Burnside and Dollar, 2000, 264
[66] Collier and Dollar, 2002, 1491
[67] ibid. 1475, 1497
[68] Easterly and Williamson, 2011, 1930
[69] Collier and Dollar, 2002; Easterly, 2006, 375

markets comes at a high price for those who are unable to take advantage of opportunities that would otherwise be available to them. Indeed, for each textile job that is preserved in this way, 35 jobs are lost in low-income countries. In the absence of these constraints, poor countries would be able to realise gains in excess of $100 billion per year for members of their population.[70] This sum is roughly equivalent to the total amount allocated to low-income countries in the form of overseas aid each year and could serve as an important stimulus for poverty reduction if trade reform was implemented. In addition to this, many developing countries are subject to capital flight in the form of illicit financial transactions. These flows include the cross-border transfer of the proceeds from corruption, trade in contraband goods, criminal activities and tax evasion. Collectively, these losses often match or exceed whatever a country receives by way of development assistance. At a minimum, they cost developing countries somewhere in the region of $25 billion per year.[71] Viewed over a longer time frame, developing countries have lost somewhere between $854 billion and $1.8 trillion through illicit flows in the past 40 years.[72] On the lower estimate, this translates into a per capita loss of $1,300 per year for people living in Sub-Saharan Africa, the region where the highest rates of extreme poverty are to be found.[73] Indeed, given the scale of these transactions, some studies suggest that the African continent is likely to be a net creditor to the rest of the world.[74] In order to address this problem, affluent nations need to do more to regulate financial flows to and from poorer countries, ensuring that multinational corporations adhere to codes of best practice and improving 'the systemic change of tax information between governments on non-resident individuals and corporations'.[75] Whether or not the failure to take action in this area comprises a harm on the scale that some theorists suggest, it is hard to doubt that trade reform and tax reform would do a great deal for those who currently live in extreme poverty.[76]

The claim that affluent people are unable to assist, therefore, does not bear scrutiny. Given this, the Explanatory Problem and the Moral Problem remain to be addressed.

VI. Outline of the Investigation

[70] Pogge, 2012, 20
[71] Kar, 2011, 5
[72] Kar and Cartwright-Smith, 2010, 10
[73] ibid. 13
[74] Ndikumana and Boyce 2008, 6
[75] Kar, 2011, 25
[76] Collier, 2008, Ch.9

This investigation is structured in the following way. The first chapter of the thesis focuses on the nature of the Explanatory Problem. It looks at the problem of inaction in greater detail and considers how conduct of this kind could be explained. Of central importance to this chapter is the claim that people who are rational and informed do what they have most reason to do. In light of this, it seems that inaction is amenable to explanation only if affluent people can be shown to lack decisive reason to assist (at a level above that which currently obtains), or if they are misinformed about the facts, or if their deliberation in this area is impeded by rational error.

Focusing on the normative part of the problem first, the second chapter then looks at the claim that affluent individuals have decisive reason to assist those who live in a condition of extreme poverty. It also considers the separate claim that affluent people are morally required to do more than they normally do. To do this, I consider the widespread appeal to moral prerogatives, or thresholds, that allow people to focus disproportionately on their own projects and relationships. I maintain that these considerations do not detract significantly from the existence of a moral requirement to assist. I also argue that the wider all-things-considered reasons claim is correct. Indeed, this remains true even if we accept that it is often difficult to compare different kinds of reason against one another.

Building upon this understanding of the normative situation of affluent people, the third chapter looks at, and evaluates, the beliefs that they have about world poverty. It also analyses the way in which they deliberate about assistance. In this chapter, I argue that the most plausible explanation of inaction is compound in form, combining different forms of false belief with the effects of procedural and substantive rational error. This conclusion is supported by findings from experimental psychology, theoretical inquiry and survey data. Taken together, I suggest that most people overestimate the cost of assisting and underestimate the good that could be achieved by acting in this way. As a result of this, they judge inaction to be a reasonable response to the problem of world poverty – even though this is often not the case.

With this diagnosis in place, the fourth chapter then asks how this problem of individual motivation can be addressed. While some progress may be made by trying to shape individual deliberation directly, this chapter focuses on the role that political institutions could play in this context. More precisely, it makes the case for what I term the 'wide-scope division of labour'. This arrangement would see the state take on responsibility for discharging duties of humanity, thereby leaving individual citizens freer to focus on their own private goals and objectives. In order to

perform this function, wealthy nations would have to improve the quality and quantity of foreign aid, and also bring an end to the harmful practices that have been discussed. As an institutional ideal, this approach to the fulfilment of moral duties is desirable, legitimate and feasible. It could also lead to the establishment of more progressive international institutions further down the line.

Finally, the last chapter of this thesis looks more closely at the problem of transition between different states of affairs. More precisely, it asks how this institutional ideal could be brought about in practice, given the inadequacies of the existing aid and trade regime, the hostility of certain elites, and the public indifference that is encountered in this area. Focusing upon different possible agents of transition, this chapter aims to map out the path ahead by demonstrating the accessibility and achievability of the approach in question. Taken in conjunction with earlier chapters, I aim to have provided an explanation of why people do not do more to address the problem of extreme poverty, and also to have outlined an account of how to respond to this lack of action.

Chapter One: The Explanatory Problem

Over one billion people live in a condition of extreme poverty. Their situation is extremely serious. Those who live in this condition often lack food, basic medicines, and other essential goods that are needed to maintain a basic standard of living and to stay alive. The badness of this situation, in conjunction with the value of what is lost when life is diminished or extinguished in this way, generates weighty reasons to assist. This situation exists alongside the considerable wealth of people living in affluent countries. By giving money and other resources to the best-performing aid and development organisations, they could do much to improve the condition of people living in extreme poverty without being made significantly worse off. At the same time, the majority of these people do not act (or contribute only small amounts to causes of this type).[1] As a result of this, the problem of extreme poverty is much worse than it needs to be: children continue to lack basic primary school education, illness continues to go untreated and lives continue to be cut short. How should we respond to these facts? What has gone wrong?

The present state of affairs is troubling for a number of reasons. Firstly, it seems profoundly wrong that so many people lead lives blighted by the absence of essential goods and services. The picture that comes to mind when we think about such pervasive and extreme poverty may or may not be vivid, but we all know that this is an appalling state of affairs. Secondly, endowed with the capacity to assist, it seems that the affluent ought to do more. It is not right that they do not act. Thirdly, we are struck by the sense that the behaviour of the affluent is difficult to explain. It is not clear why they fail to do what they have such strong reason to do. Indeed, their own behaviour in this area is often not transparent to themselves. Yet, inaction urgently needs to be explained. It has very serious consequences for people living in extreme poverty and also for the affluent. Unless we can explain why they do not act, it will be difficult to know how to address this problem or even whether it can be addressed at all.

This chapter aims to identify what it is about inaction that is problematic, to show why inaction is hard to explain, and to outline the different ways in which the problem of explanation might be solved. More precisely, I argue that the conduct of the affluent is difficult to understand because we tacitly endorse incompatible notions about practical reason, about their normative situation, and about the conditions that they deliberate under. On one hand, we tend to believe that

[1] At the current moment in time, personal donations to foreign aid account for 0.07% of America's Gross National Income (GNI). This is 7 cents for every 100 dollars of income generated (Singer, 2010, 24).

a person who is both rational and informed will do what he or she has most reason to do. On the other hand, it seems likely that affluent people have decisive reason to do more for those living in extreme poverty, and also that they are rational and informed to an appropriate degree. However, if this is correct, then the initial claim is confounded and the conduct of the affluent will be difficult to explain. It will not be possible to explain inaction, either as part of a successful response to normative reasons or to identify a way in which the deliberation of affluent people is impeded. As a result of this, we encounter what I term the Explanatory Problem.

Yet, inaction must be amenable to explanation: the Explanatory Problem must, in principle, be a problem that can be solved. In order to make progress on this front, there are three ways in which we could proceed. These are: (1) revise the claim that affluent people have decisive reason to assist those living in extreme poverty at a level not yet achieved; (2) modify the claim that they have an informed understanding of the situation; or, (3) amend the claim that they are rational in this instance. However, these possibilities can themselves be understood in different ways. Which part of the trilemma we choose to focus upon, and which proposition we ultimately revise, will be influenced both by closer analysis of inaction itself and also by a more detailed understanding of the conditions under which reason and motivation coincide. This chapter focuses on two accounts of practical reason in particular. The first is comprised of a subjectivist account of normative reasons and a Humean approach to motivation. The second is made up of an objectivist account of normative reasons, and a cognitivist theory of motivation. By comparing and contrasting the different versions of the Explanatory Problem that these theories give rise to, it will be possible to cast light on inaction and to determine how best to proceed.

The chapter has seven parts. The first section addresses the claim that affluent people have decisive reason to assist those living in extreme poverty at a level not yet achieved. I argue that this claim draws support from powerful intuitions we have about the badness of extreme poverty and the value of human life. Inaction is, therefore, constituted as an omission that needs to be explained. The second section then looks at the genesis of the Explanatory Problem in greater detail. As a result of common assumptions we make about human rationality and reason, it demonstrates that an explanatory problem will always arise when a certain set of propositions are understood to obtain. The third section looks at a version of the Explanatory Problem that arises on the subjectivist account of reasons. On this view of things, it is important that normative reasons bear a certain relationship to the existing desires of an agent. The fourth section looks at the way in which this

formulation of the problem impacts upon our understanding of inaction, placing deflationary pressure on the Decisive Reasons Claim. The fifth section then argues that this account is problematic in certain ways. To address these shortcomings, the sixth section develops an alternative account of the Explanatory Problem, based upon the objectivist theory of reasons and motivation. Finally, the seventh section looks at the implications that this account has for our understanding of inaction. It identifies several new avenues of possible explanation.

I. The Decisive Reasons Claim

At the centre of the current investigation is the claim that affluent people have decisive reason to assist those living in extreme poverty, and that they do not respond to these reasons in an appropriate way. Inaction is, therefore, constituted as a type of omission. It is something that needs to be explained. In contrast to this, if the normative claim were not credible, then we would have little reason to proceed. Inaction could simply be construed as the product of sound deliberation about reasons. Bearing this in mind, it is important to consider two arguments in support of what I term the Decisive Reasons Claim. By presenting these arguments, I do not aim to prove beyond all reasonable doubt that affluent people have reasons of this type to assist people living in extreme poverty.[2] I aim to show merely that the Decisive Reasons Claim is credible, and that it is something that we might plausibly affirm.

The first argument is intuitive. It notes that there is good reason to believe that human life is of ultimate and intrinsic value, and that many people do, in fact, believe that this is the case. However, confronted by a situation in which extreme poverty is crippling and pervasive, it is also true that the majority of affluent people do nothing at all, and that many others do very little indeed. Given that the affluent have the capacity to assist people living in extreme poverty, the first argument holds that it is simply not possible that relative or total inaction on the part of these people is an appropriate response to a situation in which so many lives are foreshortened or seriously harmed. By failing to assist, the affluent fail to display an appropriate level of concern for the value of human life. Inaction on this front betrays an attitude of troubling and, often, total disregard. In support of the view, that value and conduct are not in accordance with one another in this occasion, we can consider what our response would be to someone who claimed to believe that human life is of ultimate value while also doing *nothing* to help a person who might be on the brink

[2] The precise strength and character of reasons to assist receives detailed treatment in Chapter Two.

of death. This combination of belief and inaction is not only morally problematic, but also radically inconsistent. Confronted with this situation, we would doubt whether this person really understood the value of human life at all.

The second argument develops this insight further and explains the intuitive sense that inaction cannot, in this context, be an appropriate response to the serious suffering of others. It starts by noting that normative reasons, when of a practical rather than epistemic nature, are considerations that *count in favour* of some action being performed or carried out by an agent. In addition to this, normative reasons have the characteristic of strength or weight; some reasons for action are stronger than others. When there are two reasons which favour different courses of action, this view holds that the stronger reason is the one that overrides the weaker reason, and makes it the case that there is something the agent has conclusive reason to do. If neither reason is overriding, then the agent has sufficient reason to do either thing.[3]

Now, we have already said that extreme poverty is part of a very bad state of affairs – one that might plausibly be said to be evil. Beyond this, the fact that some act would save a person's life (or achieve some good that is roughly equivalent to this) is a very weighty reason for that action to be performed: it is something that counts in favour of it being carried out to a very great extent indeed. These reasons may still not be decisive. Whether this is the case or not depends on the strength of countervailing reasons that people have to act in other ways. However, the second argument holds that the Decisive Reasons Claim is true for most people who are affluent and fortunate in the global scheme of things. While there are undoubtedly poor people trying to make ends meet, or caring for their disabled relatives, in affluent societies too, they do not comprise the focus of the current investigation. We are concerned here with people who are wealthy and who do not have exceptional commitments of this type. Given that *these* people could prevent someone from dying of disease, or could send a child to school at little or no cost to themselves, it seems extremely unlikely that they have sufficient reason not to do so.[4] What they would forgo, by doing more, is not enough to support the contrary claim. These people ought to redirect some of their private wealth

[3] Parfit, 2011, 32-33

[4] This line of argument is vulnerable to two sorts of challenge. Firstly, those who endorse a certain form of internalism about reasons often hold that the existence of a reason is tied very closely to the existing desires and pro-attitudes of an agent. If people lack the desire to help, then they may also lack weighty reason to do so. This argument receives detailed treatment in sections III, IV and V of this chapter. Secondly, those who endorse a certain form of rational egoism hold that people only ever have reason to do what promotes their own interest. In Chapter Two I examine, and reject, this claim.

towards those who are living in a condition of desperate need. The fact that they choose not to do so, therefore, needs to be explained.[5]

II. Practical Reason and the Explanatory Problem

If what has been said so far is correct, then many affluent people have decisive reason to assist people living in a condition of extreme poverty, but fail to do so. This situation is deeply troubling. Many people die as a result of inaction, and the behaviour of the affluent is objectionable insofar as it does not conduce to what would clearly be a much better state of affairs. However, cast in these terms, inaction need not be difficult to explain. It is very often the case that people are not motivated to do what they have reason to do when deliberation is obstructed in some way. They may be misinformed, make errors of judgement, or make a mistake of some other kind when deciding how to act. When this is *not* the case, we expect reasons and motivation to coincide because of further assumptions we make about the type of beings we are. I now argue that, if inaction is difficult to explain, then this is because the deliberation of the affluent seems to be suitably ideal in the relevant respects.[6]

We commonly assume that human beings have the capacity to think about and respond to reasons under certain conditions, in virtue of their rational nature. This fact is of great importance to the way in which we understand ourselves and our place in the world. If it were not possible to identify or respond to the things that provide us with reasons for action, then we would be permanently estranged or alienated from a set of truths that strike us as very important indeed. These are truths about what things are good or valuable and truths about what we do or do not have reason to do. Given that this is not the case, we should conclude that it is possible for normative reason and agent motivation to coincide in practice. Under certain conditions, it can be the case that

[5] It might be objected that this account of reasons to assist is unacceptably vague: that it is not enough to state that the affluent ought to do *more* by way of assistance, we also need to know *how much* more they ought to give. There is undoubtedly some truth in this argument. When our intention is to provide practical advice to people, we need to be as precise as we can be. Therefore, a more detailed investigation of reasons to assist is undertaken in Chapter Two. However, the purpose of this section is different. It aims only to demonstrate that current conduct is misaligned with normative reasons in a way that is problematic and needs to be explained. With this aim in mind, less fine-grained judgements about whether people ought to do *more* or *less* are enough. These judgements can be made with a degree of confidence from the vantage point we now occupy. We know that one cannot respond to a reason by doing what is *opposed* to it. We also know that doing *nothing* is not an appropriate response to a situation in which something is required. Finally, we know that doing *very little* is not an appropriate response to the great need of others.

[6] In this context, the term 'ideal' refers to a standard for sound deliberation. It is not a moral ideal.

what an agent *has reason to do* and what they *are motivated to do* are one and the same thing.[7] Indeed, co-incidence of this type is not always a matter of chance. It is important that we are able to do what we have reason to do *because* we understand that we have reason to do it, and respond appropriately.[8] When this is the case our action is *guided* by reason. In cases of this type, deliberation is successful: we are *motivated* to do what we have reason to do, and we are *moved* to do only what we have sufficient, or decisive, reason to try and bring about. When practical deliberation is successful, normative reason and agent motivation *necessarily* coincide.

These insights are important for the explanation of action. A complete account of practical reason provides us with an account of the conditions under which reason and motivation come together in this way. Under these conditions, which are commonly understood to be those of *sufficient information and rationality*, deliberation is not obstructed and a person will do what he or she has reason to do. Under these conditions it will also be possible to *explain* conduct in a certain way: showing it to be consistent with the successful exercise of their rational faculty. More precisely, we are able to show that the agent correctly identified the considerations that obtained, that they correctly assessed their normative character and weight, that they deliberated in a way that was free from rational error, and that they modified their conduct accordingly. This is an *ideal type explanation*.

Yet, the capacity of human beings to respond to reasons successfully is *defeasible*: it is not always the case that people do what they have reason to do, or that they always act for what are, in fact, good reasons. When the deliberation is obstructed in some way, and one of the preceding conditions does not obtain, it is no longer ideal. Even if, by good fortune, the agent still does what he or she has sufficient or decisive reason to do, it cannot be the case that they did this thing *because* they deliberated correctly about the situation at hand and modified their behaviour accordingly. When deliberation is affected by false belief or rational error, it is no longer true that the agent is necessarily guided by a correct appreciation of the reasons that obtain. Under these conditions, we need to explain the conduct by drawing upon a different kind of *non-ideal type explanation*.

They explain action by identifying the way, or ways, in which deliberation was obstructed. They identify the condition for successful reasoning that was not met. If we endorse the thesis that information and rationality are necessary for this purpose, then either lack of information, or rational error, or both, will be sufficient to explain failure to be motivated or moved by reasons on certain occasions. If the agent adheres to false beliefs, the relevant non-ideal explanation is *rationalising* in

[7] Williams, 1981; Parfit, 1997; Korsgaard, 1986, 11; Raz, 2011, 26-35; Giddens, 2012, 6
[8] Wallace, 2006, Ch.3

nature. It shows that the conduct of the agent was a rational response to the considerations that they mistakenly took to obtain. Alternatively, where the error is an error of rationality, the relevant explanation is *non-rationalising*. It explains agent conduct by showing it to have been the product of mistaken reasoning about the matter at hand. In practice, these two kinds of errors may coincide. When this is the case, more complicated forms of non-ideal explanation may be required. However, mistakes of either kind are sufficient to render deliberation less than ideal, and to make another form of explanation appropriate. The non-ideal form of explanation will account for any mismatch between normative reason and agent motivation if this, in fact, occurs.

In sum, when an agent reasons successfully about what to do, then that agent will necessarily do what she has sufficient or decisive reason to do. When this is the case, the situation is ideal and we can explain the conduct of the agent in a certain way. In contrast, when the operation of practical reason is obstructed, it is not successful. One consequence of this is that, what the agent has reason to do and what she actually does, may come apart. When this is the case, the situation is not ideal and we can explain the behaviour of the agent by identifying the respect in which deliberation is impeded. By specifying the conditions under which deliberation succeeds or fails, and the nature of this success or failure, we arrive at a complete explanatory taxonomy for agent conduct of this type. There will, on each account of practical reason, be one ideal type explanation of human behaviour and several non-ideal types of explanation that mark out different forms of deviation from this ideal.

No theory of practical reason that has this structure can account for cases in which deliberation is ideal, but in which normative reason and agent motivation also come apart. It simply cannot be the case that practical reason, when free from error, leads the agent to act in a way that is contrary to what he or she has reason to do. Theories of this type cannot, by their very nature, explain failure to do what one has decisive reason to do when the situation was ideal in all relevant respects. Indeed, if the misalignment of reason and motivation can only be explained by identifying the way in which deliberation was impeded, then it is clear that we cannot explain failure to respond to reasons when no obstacle of this type exists. Most accounts of practical reason do not have the explanatory resources needed to make sense of the situation. They have an explanatory blind spot. For each theory, therefore, a version of the Explanatory Problem may arise.

Confronted with this kind of problem, there are three ways in which we could make a pattern of behaviour more amenable to explanation. Firstly, we might *revise the claim that the operation of*

practical reason is not successful in a given case. We could abandon the claim that normative reason and agent conduct are discordant with one another. This might be the case if we re-interpret reasons claims so that they are less demanding, or if we form a new appreciation of the way in which the agent responds to the reasons that they already have. Secondly, we could *revise the claim that the situation is ideal* and that all the requisite conditions needed for reason to guide conduct are met. Upon closer examination, it might be the case that the situation is not ideal: that the agents are misinformed, rationally deficient, or otherwise impeded in a way that had gone previously unnoticed. The third option is to try and *revise our understanding of practical reason* in a way that makes the specific situation easier to understand. By modifying our understanding of the ideal condition (under which the operation of practical reason succeeds), we make it more or less likely that these conditions are approximated in practice. If these conditions can be made fewer, and easier to verify, then it may be possible to say with greater confidence whether deliberation is or is not obstructed on some occasion. In this way, we may be able to force the issue and determine upon what aspect of the Explanatory Problem revisionist pressure falls most heavily. Conversely, if the ideal condition is understood to be more multifaceted, then it becomes harder to certify that each of the component parts is fulfilled by the relevant situation. However, there are a correspondingly greater number of ways in which agent conduct might be explained.

Inaction on the part of affluent people is difficult to explain because there appears to be a dissonance between what they have reason to do and what they are, in fact, moved to do. However, it is also unclear that the practical deliberation of the affluent is impeded in any obvious way. On the two detailed accounts of practical reason that I will consider shortly, reason and motivation can be said to necessarily coincide when the person is sufficiently rational and informed about the facts. My conjecture is that inaction is difficult to explain because we believe that affluent people have good reason to assist those in serious need, and also that they are rational and informed to a suitable degree. This cannot in fact be the case. When these claims are all equally plausible, we are confronted with an Explanatory Problem. We do not know upon which premise revisionary pressure falls. When each of these claims appears to be robust, then the Explanatory Problem is acute.

III. The Subjectivist Theory of Reasons and the Explanatory Problem

We do not yet have a detailed understanding of the conditions under which reason and motivation necessarily coincide. As such, we cannot begin to determine whether these conditions are met in the case of affluent individuals who fail to assist people living in extreme poverty. Before we can make headway, therefore, it is important to say something more precise about the relationship between normative reasons and agent motivation. This section focuses on the subjectivist account of reasons and upon the Humean Theory of Motivation. Taken together, these two theories provide us with a more fine-grained understanding of the conditions that must obtain in order for practical reasoning to be successful. The resulting version of the Explanatory Problem proves illuminating with regard to the situation of the affluent, and creates pressure to explain their conduct in a certain way.

It has been stated that normative reasons are considerations that count in favour of certain actions, that they have a dimension of strength or weight and that they must be able to motivate agents to act under certain conditions. The subjectivist account of reasons develops this picture in a number of ways. In the first instance, the subjectivist holds that, 'reasons for acting are all provided by, or depend upon, certain facts about what would fulfil or achieve our present desires or aims.'[9] The fact that an action would satisfy one of the agent's desires is a consideration that counts in favour of its being performed. Furthermore, it counts in favour of that action only to the extent that this action serves or subserves the agent's aims or desire. Aims or desires are conceived of in this context as certain types of mental state. The subjectivist maintains that it is in virtue of the relationship that certain facts bear to this kind of mental state that they have normative force; it is in virtue of relations of this type that these facts are constituted as normative reasons for action.

In support of this view, the subjectivist draws our attention to the special relationship between normative reasons and agent motivation. We have already noted that people are endowed with the capacity to think about and respond to normative reasons under certain conditions. If this is correct, then it follows by extension that normative reasons must be the kinds of things that can motivate or move agents to action when these conditions obtain. Normative reasons must be the sorts of things that can motivate action under these conditions either in virtue of their *intrinsic* qualities, or in virtue of a *relation* that necessarily holds between reasons and the sources of

[9] Parfit, 2011, 45

motivation. What can be a normative reason is, in this way, *constrained* by our understanding of the character of *human motivation*. When combined with the Humean Theory of Motivation, this insight provides considerable support for the conception of normative reasons currently under consideration.

The Humean Theory of Motivation, articulated by Michael Smith, is composed of two parts.[10] The first part maintains that to be motivated is to be disposed to act. More precisely, it holds that, in order to be motivated, an agent must be in a 'goal-directed' mental state: one in which the agent aims to bring about some end or goal through action. For the Humean, dispositional states of this type are comprised by pro-attitudes of the agent. These pro-attitudes include aims, desires, commitments and intentions. However, what a dispositional state cannot be is a belief. According to the Humean Theory of Motivation, believing something to be the case and being motivated to act in a certain way are fundamentally distinct mental existences. They are mental states that have different properties and are characterised by different 'directions of fit'.[11] The important consequence of this is that belief cannot, in this case, motivate by itself. If an agent is to be moved to action, then it must be the case that the agent acquires, or comes to be, in a mental state that disposes him or her to act.

The second claim made by Humean theorists is that it is only possible to arrive at a motivated state of this type in certain ways. Specifically, the Humean maintains that the aims or desires that constitute the goal-directed state characteristic of motivation can be *modified* but not *caused* by belief. The disposition to act may simply arise within the agent. On other occasions, it arises in response to the belief that some end or goal would serve or contribute to something that the agent is already disposed to bring about. Belief can, in this way, lead the agent from one desire to another related dispositional state. However, *what belief cannot do is give rise to a new desire by itself*. On the Humean Theory of Motivation, it is always the case, therefore, that the psychological processes that give rise to motivation can be traced back via practical syllogism to the presence of some antecedent desire, or to some aspect of the agent's desiderative profile that was not caused by the agent's

[10] Smith, 1994, Ch.4

[11] Dispositional states, of the type involved in motivation, are understood to have a world-to-mind direction of fit. When we desire or intend something, we are disposed to bring it about (if it is not yet the case that the world conforms to our goal or end). In contrast to this, beliefs and other cognitive states do not have this goal-directed character. When perception of the world does not fit with the content of our beliefs, we modify our beliefs to take account of this fact. Beliefs do not persist in the way that motivated states necessarily do. They have a mind-to-world direction of fit. This is a product of the different function that they play in the mental process of the agent.

beliefs. R. Jay Wallace has aptly referred to this second thesis as the 'desire out, desire in' principle of agent motivation.[12]

These two claims have an important bearing on what can and cannot be a normative reason for action. If reasons are to motivate under certain conditions, it follows that they must be, or bear the correct relation to, that which is capable of motivating: namely, to the existing dispositional states and pro-attitudes of the agent. The subjectivist approach to reasons recognises this fact, and defends the more specific claim that, in order for an agent to have a reason for action, it must be the case that the action is related to a desire or aim of the agent as a *causal* means to an end.[13] Further to this, it seems plausible that the action sanctioned by reason must be one that fulfils or achieves the aim or desire in a good or efficient way. When conditions are met, and the agent is cognizant of this fact, belief in conjunction with the relevant dispositional state will motivate the agent to act accordingly.

This understanding of normative reasons has important implications for the way in which we understand practical reason, and for the way in which we understand inaction on the part of affluent people. On the current conception, there are two conditions that must be met in order for reason and motivation to coincide.

Firstly, the agent must be *sufficiently well-informed* about the relevant facts. As Bernard Williams notes, a desire will not provide an agent with a reason for action if it is the case that existence of this desire is dependent upon false belief, or if the beliefs about the relevance of the action to the satisfaction of that desire is mistaken. The mistaken belief that a glass of gasoline is a glass of water does not give the agent reason to drink the glass of gasoline, even if she desires to quench her thirst. Nor would she have reason to perform this action if she thought that gasoline has thirst-quenching properties. If the agent is misinformed in either regard she will reach mistaken conclusions about what she has reason to do. We can then explain aberrant conduct in light of this fact.

Secondly, the agent must also be *procedurally rational* to the required degree. We have already stated that what an agent has reason to do is a matter of fact. It is, the subjectivist claims, a product of the way in which different actions are related to the aims and desires of the agent. Yet, even if the agent has correct beliefs about the situation that obtains, she can still be mistaken about these relations, and hence form mistaken views about what she has reason to do. By following

[12] Wallace, 2006, 30
[13] Williams, 1981, 104

requirements of procedural rationality, the agent guards against this possibility. These requirements specify the proper ordering of mental states and processes for an agent.[14] When an agent orders her mental states in accordance with rational requirements, she is able to identify relations of the relevant type and to arrive at correct conclusions about what she ought to do.

To begin with, procedural rationality requires the agent to follow rules of sound inference and to avoid believing contradictory propositions. On the present view, it also requires the agent to weigh desires against each other correctly when they are strictly incompatible, to identify constitutive solutions to the fulfilment of desires when this is not the case, and to consider all of the worthwhile options that are open to her in any given situation.[15] Procedural rationality, thus conceived, is largely instrumental.[16] However, it also has a heuristic element: it requires the agent to think imaginatively about her desires and the way in which they might be fulfilled.[17] Only when an agent is sufficiently rational can she arrive, non-contingently, at correct conclusions about what she has reason to do. When deliberation is marred by rational error, we can explain the failure of reason and motivation to coincide in light of this fact.

Taken together, exponents of this position hold that an agent who is sufficiently rational and informed will be motivated to do what would further or realise her aims or desires. When combined with the views about motivation that have already been set out, subjectivists conclude that an agent has reason to act *only if* that agent could reason her way to the conclusion that this is something that she has reason to do by following a 'sound deliberative route' from an existing disposition or desire.[18] Indeed, according to Williams, an agent only has a reason to act if she could arrive at this conclusion when rational and informed to the necessary degree.[19] For the subjectivist, it

[14] Broome, 2013, 152
[15] Williams, 1981, 104
[16] These are similar to what Rawls terms 'counting principles of rationality' which are 'among the simplest or most basic principles. They say such things as: other things being equal, it is rational to select the most effective means to one's ends. Or: other things being equal, it is rational to select the more inclusive alternative, the one that enables us to realise all the aims that others do, as well as some additional ends' (Rawls, 1999a, 88; Rawls, 1999b, 411-415).
[17] Williams, 1981, 104
[18] Williams, 1995, 35
[19] This second claim reaches beyond the argument advanced so far. It marks Williams out as a subjectivist about reasons. Strictly speaking, the requirement that reasons motivate under certain conditions is only a necessary condition on a reason. It need not follow from this, that *every* consideration that motivates under these conditions is properly regarded as normative. However, the subjectivist about reasons holds that this is in fact the case (Williams, 1995, 35-36).

is in virtue of this counterfactual relation to the aims and desires of the agent, that something is constituted as a normative consideration of this kind.[20]

If we accept these arguments, it is possible to arrive at the concise rendition of the Explanatory Problem that we need for our purposes. On the subjectivist conception of reasons, an agent will be *motivated* to do what she has *reason* to do if she is sufficiently well-informed and procedurally rational. If the agent is not motivated to act by some consideration under these conditions, then we can infer from this that there is no dispositional state to which the consideration relates, and that it is not a reason for action for that agent. Furthermore, the subjectivist account holds that an agent will be *moved* to do what she has *decisive reason* to do under these conditions. We have already noted that the weight or strength of a reason is, in this view, a function of the degree to which that consideration motivates action under conditions of information and rationality. It follows from this that a decisive reason is a consideration that is underwritten by aims and desires that successfully override countervailing desires. If an agent is motivated, but not moved, to act by some consideration when these conditions obtain, we can conclude that the reason is not decisive for that agent.

Stated formally, the subjectivist about reasons maintains that:

If

(1) A has decisive reason to Φ;

(2) A has an informed understanding of the situation; and,

(3) A is procedurally rational;

Then

A will be moved to Φ.

Under these conditions, the agent will do what she has most reason to do because of an appreciation of those reasons, the operation of practical reason will be successful, and the resulting conduct can be explained by showing that this is the case. If the agent lacks information, or is rationality deficient

[20] In defence of this further claim, the subjectivist about reasons observes that normative reasons are considerations that can standardly be offered to other people by way of advice. They are considerations that can be expressed in the "if I were you…" mode of talking. When we identify and articulate reasons for action, we expect our interlocutor to be moved to act accordingly. The subjectivist account of reasons explains why this is the case. On this view of things, an agent has reason to do what she would be motivated to do if her deliberation was free from error. When we identify reasons for action, we correct for any errors that our interlocutor makes, and show that person that their ends are better served by acting in other ways. Secondly, it has been stated that reasons are considerations that 'count in favour' of certain actions being performed. The subjectivist account of reasons promises to make good naturalistic sense of this relation. It holds that a consideration counts in favour of an action to the extent that it would motivate the agent to perform that action under ideal conditions. The strength of a reason is commensurate to that of the aim or desire that it subserves. Other interpretations of this relationship are said by the subjectivist to be metaphysically obscure.

in one of the aforementioned respects, then reason and motivation may come apart. We can explain failure to be moved by decisive reason in light of this fact. What the subjectivist about reasons cannot account for are situations in which each premise obtains but the agent is not moved to Φ.

Nonetheless, we sometime encounter situations in which this appears to be the case: an explanatory problem arises when an agent appears to be both informed and rational but does not do something that she seems to have decisive reason to do. In order to make a situation of this type intelligible, we will have to revise one of the constitutive claims that gives rise to the problem. On the present conception of practical reason, the Explanatory Problem takes the form of a trilemma. If inaction is to be explained, it must be the case that at least one of the following disjuncts is correct:

~~(1)~~, (2), (3) A does not have decisive reason to Φ;
(1), ~~(2)~~, (3) A does not have an informed understanding of the situation;
(1), (2), ~~(3)~~ A is not sufficiently procedurally rational.

In the case of affluent people who fail to assist, the fact that an explanation of conduct is hard to come by suggests that we do not know, as of yet, upon which premise revisionary pressure falls.

IV. The Solution: False Belief and Rational Error, or Lacking the Appropriate Desire?

A detailed investigation of these options remains to be undertaken. However, it seems likely that pressure falls heavily upon the Decisive Reasons Claim within the framework that has been set out. To see why this is the case, we need to look more closely at the way in which affluent people think and deliberate about poverty and assistance. The fact that people appear to be reasonably rational and informed generates pressure to solve the Explanatory Problem in a different way.

Taking the matter of information first, the case for assistance rests upon certain factual premises that are widely known and accepted. Affluent people are already aware that there are millions of people around the world who live in a condition of extreme poverty, and they are aware that this condition causes serious suffering and loss of life on a massive scale. They also know that there are organisations that provide life-saving assistance to people who live in that condition, and they know, for the most part, that they can provide people with important goods and services at relatively little cost. Indeed, most people know these facts from a young age. They form part of a

basic understanding of the world in which we live.[21] In affluent societies, this information is disseminated widely through the education system, via media reports and by the campaigns of advocacy organisations. Taken together, the exposure of people to these matters is considerable. It does not seem possible that knowledge of the facts gets lost somewhere along the way.[22]

At the same time, affluent people seem to be procedurally rational to an ordinary degree. Human beings, of adult age, are commonly understood to possess the capacity to order their mental states in accordance with requirements of procedural rationality.[23] Affluent people appear to be no different in this regard. In order to deliberate successfully about assistance, they must also use this capacity to reason about the question at hand. They must consider whether to assist (given that this is a worthwhile option), and draw the correct conclusion about the relationship between means and ends (on this occasion). Here again, the relevant conditions appear to be met. For people living in affluent societies, it is difficult to avoid thinking about the problem of extreme poverty on at least one occasion. And, given the automatic way in which rational precepts structure thought, it is almost impossible not to realise that the allocation of money to aid organisations represents a good way in which to further this important end. It is true that people sometimes make mistakes when thinking about outcomes that occur at a distance, or that involve large numbers of people. However, it is not clear that these kinds of procedural mistakes are enough to explain inaction on the scale that we currently witness.[24] Indeed, if the affluent do have decisive reason to do more, then this is, according to the subjectivist account of reasons, something that they *strongly desire* to achieve. It is difficult to believe that people, who are disposed to pursue this outcome in this way, are prevented from doing so because they fail to draw the rational connections that have been discussed so far. In light of this, there is pressure to explain inaction in a different way.

To recap, the subjectivist about reasons holds that an agent has decisive reason to act in some way only if it moves her to action, when she is informed and deliberating correctly. If she is not moved to act, under these conditions, then it follows that the consideration does not provide her with a decisive reason to do so: it is not underwritten by a desire that has the requisite strength. This

[21] Speaking about someone who lacked this understanding, Susan Sontag writes that, 'no one after a certain age has a right to this kind of innocence, or superficiality, to this degree of ignorance or amnesia' (Sontag, 2004, 114).

[22] This is not to say that the public does not also have significant misperceptions about the matter of global poverty and assistance. People tend to significantly overestimate the amount that their governments spend on overseas aid. They also often mistrust information that is provided to them (Wenar, 2011, 107-108). *See* Chapter Three, Part I, for details.

[23] For a detailed discussion of capacity rationality *see* Raz, 1999a, Ch.4.

[24] For a detailed discussion of the role played by this kind of error *see* Chapter Three, Part III.

is important for the present case. In order to explain inaction, the subjectivist about reasons does not need to deny that affluent people have *some* reason to assist people living in abject poverty. They may be somewhat disposed to do so. However, what the subjectivist can argue is that the sympathetic or altruistic motives, which ground these reasons, are *not strong enough* to make them overriding when they come into conflict with the other ends that affluent people desire. If a person is more strongly disposed to pursue her own pleasure, personal projects, or relationships, than the goal of poverty eradication, then she will have sufficient or even decisive reason to act in other ways.

From this viewpoint, inaction can be explained by the fact that affluent people do not care *enough* about the lives of people living in abject poverty. As a result of this, they lack decisive reasons to assist. Furthermore, when they are rational and informed, they recognise this to be the case. Therefore, they do not act. This deflationary explanation is compatible with the ideal-type structure that was discussed in Section II. It explains inaction by showing that it is compatible with the successful operation of practical reason, under conditions in which it is not impeded. Failure to assist may not be particularly moral or altruistic. However, it does not, on this view, rest upon a mistake of any kind. Failure to assist people living in extreme poverty is both rational and supported by the reasons that affluent people actually have.

Conceived of in this way, the existence of the Explanatory Problem is *illusory*. It stems from an error made by philosophers (and also by advocates of assistance) who attach inflated significance to the broadly humanist category of concerns that they value. In light of this, these people embrace mistaken conclusions about what the affluent ought to do all-things-considered. The consequence of this is that they believe that reason and motivation come apart when this is not, in fact, the case. On this interpretation of the situation, the claim that the affluent have decisive reasons to assist can best be understood as an *optimistic reasons claim,* or as a 'bluff' that is directed towards them in the hope that it will resonate with a previously unknown desire or motive.[25] However, if this is the aim of such claims, they are not successful. These hitherto unknown desires or motives do not exist. And, once we attune our normative assumptions to the reasons that people actually have, we can see that there is no problem of explanation after all. While we may continue to regret the fact that affluent people are not more altruistic, and recognise that this fact has severe consequences for those who go unaided, it is simply not the case that the affluent have decisive reason to assist. Reason and conduct do not come apart in this instance.

[25] Williams, 1981, 111

It has often been thought that the fact that many millions of affluent people fail to assist people living in extreme poverty cannot count against normative case for assistance in any significant way. This view of the situation tends to be underwritten by the meta-ethical conviction that normative truths are not contingent upon the psychological make-up of the agent, and that they are definitely not reducible to it.[26] The subjectivist account of reasons challenges this claim. Indeed, the current conception of practical reason has the effect of radically reducing the distance between the empirical and the normative, or of collapsing this distinction altogether.[27] According to the subjectivist view, it *is* possible to refute claims about what an agent has decisive reason to do on the basis of psychological fact. In light of this, inaction on the part of the affluent may be very important indeed; it may tell us something both important and unorthodox about the normative world in which we live.[28]

V. Should We Accept the Subjectivist's Solution?

The claim that affluent people fail to assist those living in extreme poverty because they lack the desire to do so seems plausible. After all, if the affluent did care strongly enough about this matter, we would expect them to take action in this area. However, it is not clear that we should accept the conclusion that the subjectivist about reasons derives from this observation. Even if these facts about the motivation of the affluent are correct, it is far from clear whether they support the verdict that reasons to assist are not decisive in this instance. Nor is it obvious that inaction can be understood as part of a successful response to normative reasons on the part of affluent people. In this section, I consider a number of difficulties that arise for the account of reasons sketched out so far.

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[26] Nagel, 1997, 108

[27] Whether this distance is eliminated altogether depends upon whether the Humean version of the motivation constraint is understood to be a necessary or sufficient condition on a reason. Derek Parfit refers to Williams's theory as a 'reductive' internalist account of normative reasons; there are also non-reductive versions of internalism (Parfit, 1997, 108).

[28] If subjectivism about reason is correct, then it is still not the case, strictly speaking, that the *number* of people who act in a way bears upon the truth of a normative argument. The fact that millions of people fail to assist people living in extreme poverty, by itself, tells us nothing about the reasons for action that they do or do not have. However, in virtue of the large number of people concerned, and the differences between them, it is also very likely that some of these people are both fully informed and procedurally rational. For these people, the fact that they do not assist functions as a proof that they lack decisive reason to do so. This is also likely to be true for other people, who occupy a similar position, but for whom this type of proof is not available.

Firstly, on the subjectivist account of reasons, there are no rational constraints on what an agent could aim at, or desire. It follows from this that there are no limits upon what a person could be motivated to do when procedurally rational and informed. As a result of this, there are no limits upon what could be a reason for action. Indeed, the subjectivist theory of reasons allows that there could be a normative reason to do anything, including things that are extremely self-destructive or completely bizarre. Taken on its own, the claim that these things could be supported by reason is often held to be deeply counterintuitive.[29] In addition to this, the fact that what a person has reason to do *depends* upon their own particular character and disposition also means that, on this view of things, very few if any universal reasons claims are likely to be justified. Given the existence of considerable variation in what people want, it is unlikely that there are any considerations that could motivate everyone to respond to them in the same way, even under the ideal conditions discussed so far. Therefore, subjectivist about reasons can be understood to have 'extreme consequences for other-regarding morality.'[30] If it is correct, then we could no longer say, for example, that everyone had reason not to mistreat homeless people. This is because an immoral or apathetic person might lack the propensity to refrain from cruel treatment, even when informed and deliberating clearly.[31]

Secondly, the subjectivist account also makes it difficult for reasons to play the explanatory role that was discussed in Section II. Indeed, normative reasons are usually understood to be considerations that can rationalise an action when it was taken for that reason: they cast the action in a rational light by showing that it was something that the agent had reason to do (or would have had reason to do if her beliefs about the situation were correct).[32] However, it is difficult to see how the mere fact that an agent is disposed to act in some way could make it rational for them to do so. The fact that a person might be causally disposed to turn on radios incessantly, without the desire to hear anything or obtain *any* benefit from doing so, would not by itself be enough to make the action rationally intelligible, either to us or to the person who performed it.[33] In order for this to be the case, we also need to identify some way in which this action appeared to be good to the agent.[34] We need to know *why* they judged it to be something that they had reason to perform.

[29] Derek Parfit has made this argument forcefully (Parfit, 2011, 76-81).
[30] Nagel, 1970, 28
[31] Dancy, 2000, 17
[32] Quinn, 1993, 230
[33] ibid. 236
[34] Making this point, Quinn writes that 'the fact that I am psychologically set up to head in a certain way, cannot by itself rationalize my Will's going along with that set up' (ibid. 241-242).

Thirdly, critics such as Nagel and Wallace hold that there are a number of familiar phenomena which the subjectivist approach cannot account for. These theorists accept that to be motivated to act is to arrive at mental states that dispose one to act in that way. They also accept that dispositional states of this type are distinct from beliefs or other mental states with cognitive content. However, they take issue with the second part of the Humean Theory of Motivation. What they doubt is that dispositional states of this type can only arise, within the psychological economy of the agent, in response to some antecedent motive or desire. Specifically, they suggest that motivated states can also arise in response to the beliefs of the agent, and that they typically do arise in response to beliefs about what is good or valuable. Thomas Nagel makes this point forcefully, arguing for the possibility of both 'motivated' and 'unmotivated desires'.[35] While there may be occasions in which desires simply assail us, causing us to act in certain ways, he argues that we also have desires of another type – that we can come to be motivated by the content of our beliefs. Furthermore, he notes that desires and other motivated states often seem to track belief in practice. We usually desire what we believe to be good, and if we subsequently learn that an object does not have the property, which we previously ascribed to it, our propensity to pursue that thing rapidly fades.[36]

Finally, Wallace suggests that the subjectivist account struggles to explain the phenomenon of akrasia: it cannot account for the sense in which we are guided by normative reasons and choose whether or not to respond to them.[37] This is because, on the subjectivist view, desire, in conjunction with belief, *causes* the agent to act. When a person is rational and informed, this action will be one that she has reason to perform. However, it is not clear how an agent that is motivated and moved by reasons in this way could ever reach the conclusion that she had decisive reason to act in some way, but then fail to do so. Although many people claim to experience akrasia in practice, the subjectivist must hold that practical irrationality cannot take that form.[38]

These objections provide us with cause to consider different accounts of practical reason and alternative formulations of the Explanatory Problem. Indeed, they intersect with our understanding of inaction in salient ways. Firstly, as these critics make clear, the subjectivist challenge to the Decisive Reasons Claim, which arises in this context, forms part of a wider

[35] Nagel, 1970, 27-32
[36] In the normal case, 'if I want to have a drink because I think that it tastes good and then am convinced that this is wrong, then I no longer want to have the drink' (Raz, 1999a, 262).
[37] Wallace, 2006, Ch.3
[38] R.M. Hare famously argued to this effect *The Language of Morals* (Hare, 1952, 124-71).

challenge to the notion that there are universal reasons that are binding on all. If we do not share this more general scepticism about reasons, then we will want to look for alternative ways in which to proceed. Secondly, if we accept that it is possible to arrive at 'motivated desires', then the constraint, that the need to be able to motivate imposes upon what can be a reason, is significantly relaxed. Indeed, even if normative reasons are considerations that necessarily move human agents to action under certain conditions, it no longer follows from this that they must bear some identifiable relationship to what an agent *already* desires or is disposed to bring about. In order to motivate action, normative reasons would only need to be considerations that could form the object of beliefs that could then motivate conduct. For our purpose, this is not much of a constraint at all. Thirdly, even if an agent is not motivated to act, and lacks the desire to do so, we have seen that it may still make sense to ask her *why* this is the case. If affluent people do not desire to help those living in extreme poverty, then we still need to know *why* they do not want to do so. The absence of desire may not be sufficient to explain inaction after all. Finally, the possibility that affluent people are akratic, or that they make different mistakes of another kind, remains to be explored.

VI. The Objectivist Theory of Reasons and The Explanatory Problem

These findings present us with an opportunity to consider afresh how best to explain inaction on the part of the affluent. As we have noted, the precise form of the Explanatory Problem varies according to the theory of normative reasons and agent motivation that is endorsed. If inaction cannot be explained within the confines of a given theory, then one solution is to revise our understanding of practical reason and of the conditions under which reason and motivation necessarily coincide. The cost of undertaking this type of revision is inversely proportionate to the strength and availability of alternative approaches. Fortunately, there is a robust alternative to the subjectivist account that we have considered so far. This alternative is comprised by an objectivist theory of reasons and a cognitivist theory of human motivation. By looking at the corresponding conception of practical reason in greater detail, it will be possible to cast new light on the conduct of the affluent and to develop a more comprehensive taxonomy of the ways in which inaction could be explained.

The objectivist account of reasons holds that these considerations are, or are given by, certain sorts of fact.[39] These are facts of the sort that make an outcome worth producing (or that make something worth doing for its own sake).[40] Indeed, on this view of things, a normative reason counts in favour of some action to the extent that that action constitutes or contributes to something that is good or of value. An important result of this is that normative reasons do not have to bear any special relationship to the mental states of the agent. The normative property of 'counting in favour' cannot be reduced to the notion of motivation under certain counterfactual conditions.[41] Nonetheless, advocates of this position maintain that this is a property with which we are all already familiar. It is in this way that, the fact that an action will cause someone to be in serious pain, can be said to count against that course of action, or that an agent has promised to do something counts in favour of that action being performed.

The account of practical reason that I now consider combines this account of normative reasons with a cognitivist approach to motivation.[42] This account of human motivation holds that motivated states can arise, in the mind of the agent, in response to beliefs about reasons and about value. Furthermore, it suggests that they typically do arise in this way when the person in question is rational and thinking clearly. On this account, a reason for action must still be able to motivate conduct under the right conditions. However, the information condition and the rationality condition, set out in Section III, are no longer sufficient to guarantee that this is the case. Our understanding of the condition under which reason and motivation necessarily coincide therefore needs to be revised.

Firstly, in order for this result to be achieved, it must also be the case that the person in question has correct beliefs about the considerations that provide her with normative reasons. In order to be motivated by genuine reasons, the agent must appreciate the reason-giving force of the considerations of which she is aware. The agent must have *correct evaluative beliefs*. Yet, even if a person has an informed understanding of her situation, we cannot assume that this is the case. She may still make mistakes by overestimating the strength of certain normative considerations or

[39] Parfit, 2011, 45

[40] This description is not necessarily exhaustive. The objectivist about reasons may also believe in non-person affecting values.

[41] Indeed, most theorists who adhere to an objectivist account of reasons follow Thomas Scanlon in maintaining that the normative property of 'counting in favour' is something that cannot be adequately specified in non-normative terms (Scanlon, 1998, 17).

[42] One can, of course, be a cognitivist about motivation without being an objectivist about reasons. This is the position of many Error Theorists, who believe that moral judgements have cognitive content, and that they motivate action, but that there are no objective moral facts (Mackie, 1988).

underestimating the weight of others. The agent may also fail to appreciate the normative relevance of some factor in a more radical way: she may overlook some weighty consideration altogether, she may attribute normative weight to a consideration that does not bear upon what she ought to do, or she may mistakenly believe that some consideration counts in favour of an action when it actually counts against it.[43] In these cases, what the agent lacks is the judgement needed to discern the normative salience of the facts that she is aware of. Substantive errors of this type may cause reason and motivation to come apart. When this is the case, it will be possible to explain subsequent conduct by pointing to errors of judgement. When this is not the case, another necessary condition for the successful operation of practical reason is met. We can conceive of the ability to form correct evaluative judgements about reasons as an aspect of a person's rational capacity. When the agent avoids making substantive errors of this type, we can say that the agent is *substantively* rational.[44]

Secondly, in order for normative reason and agent motivation to necessarily coincide, the agent must make the mental transition from concluding that she ought to do something, to being motivated to do that thing. The cognitivist approach makes sense of this fact by *expanding* our understanding of *procedural rationality* in certain ways. More specifically, it holds that rational requirements specify proper relations *between* beliefs and motivated states, such as intentions or desires. John Broome has defended this view most explicitly, arguing that procedural rationality requires you to intend to do what you believe you have most reason to do.[45] This is the 'enkrasia' requirement on practical reason. Intentions are understood in this case to be a special kind of motivated state: they involve a commitment on the part of the agent to do something or to act in some way.[46] These states, then, cause the agent to act. However, we cannot assume that the mental states of the agent always conform to a requirement of this type. On occasion, people may be akratic or demonstrate weakness of will. In these cases, the agent fails to form the intention to do what she judges herself to have all-things-considered reason for: practical irrationality interferes with

[43] She may believe, for example, that the day of the week affects the reasons that she has to care for her children, or she may believe the fact that her child is perfectly healthy counts in favour of hospital visits on a regular basis.

[44] Substantive rationality does not require proper order among the mental states of the agent in the same way that procedural rationality does. However, it is plausibly taken to be an aspect of agent rationality nonetheless. Firstly, we believe that, when behaviour is predicated upon errors of this type, it warrants rational criticism. Secondly, it is often impossible to provide a rationalising explanation of conduct that is predicated on errors of this type.

[45] Broome, 2013, 88-91

[46] Broome, 2009

deliberation, reason and motivation may come apart, and we can explain subsequent conduct in light of that fact.

We are now in a position to look at the ramifications of this approach for our understanding of inaction on the part of affluent people. Taken together, we are led to endorse a new specification of the conditions under which reason and motivation necessarily coincide: an agent will do what she has decisive reason to do if it is the case that she is sufficiently well-informed and rational, in both the procedural sense (which includes the enkrasia requirement) and the substantive sense discussed above. Stated formally, the objectivist view of reasons maintains that:

If

(1) A has decisive reason to **Φ**;

(2) A has an informed understanding of the situation;

(3) A is rational **a.** procedurally; and

b. substantively;[47]

Then

A will be moved to **Φ**.

When these conditions are met, the situation is suitably ideal and we can explain agent conduct as part of a successful response to reasons. When one of these conditions is not met, we can explain any mismatch between reason and motivation in light of this fact. Finally, if the agent does not **Φ**, despite appearing to meet conditions (1) to (3), then we encounter an explanatory problem. If this problem is to be solved, it must be the case that one of the following statements is true:

~~(1)~~, (2), (3.a), (3.b) A does <u>not</u> have decisive reason to **Φ**;

(1), ~~(2)~~, (3.a), (3.b) A does <u>not</u> have an informed understanding of the situation;

(1), (2), ~~(3.a),~~ (3.b) A is <u>not</u> sufficiently procedurally rational;

(1), (2), (3.a), ~~(3.b)~~ A is <u>not</u> sufficiently substantively rational.

The objectivist version of the Explanatory Problem opens up two new avenues of explanation that were previously foreclosed to us. On one hand, reason and motivation might come apart because affluent people are not *sufficiently substantively rational*. On the other, affluent people may be affected by some form of *practical irrationality* that prevents them from forming the intention to assist, despite recognising that this is what they ought to do. Inaction could be explained in either way.

[47] Although I shall speak of an agent behaviour being 'substantively irrational' one could, with little loss, speak of this same action as being predicated on beliefs about value that contain substantive errors.

VII. The Solution: Substantive Rational Error and Procedural Rational Error (Again)?

We have already looked at the claims that affluent people have decisive reason to assist, that they are aware of the facts, and that they are procedurally rational in the narrow sense that is concerned with the correct ordering of beliefs. This section addresses the further question of whether inaction can be explained by forms of substantive error or practical irrationality that have so far been overlooked. There are plausible variations of both theses. However, I shall argue that an attempt to explain inaction in either way is problematic. There is evidence, for example, that affluent people affirm the values that the case for assistance rests upon. It is also unclear that people are akratic or weak-willed in the way that the explanation of inaction would require. As a result of this, the Explanatory Problem remains in place and we need to think hard about how to proceed.

Taking the matter of substantive rationality first, inaction could be explained by the fact that affluent people fail to recognise the value of helping people who live in extreme poverty, or by the fact that they do not accord these reasons their full weight in practical deliberation. It could also be explained by the fact that affluent people attribute greater weight than is warranted to countervailing considerations – such as to the personal cost of assistance. Reasoning in this way, they would then conclude that they have good reason not to assist and to use their money in other ways. They would not develop the intention to act and, therefore, inaction could be explained in light of this fact.

Nonetheless, an explanation of this kind encounters a number of difficulties. To begin with, most people seem to accept that death and suffering are extremely bad, that human life is of intrinsic value, and that a life free from serious suffering is a valuable thing. A large part of conventional morality is concerned with responding to this kind of value in an appropriate way; the majority of people openly affirm these values, and they are heavily implicated in the structure of everyday life. An explanation that invokes substantive error sits in tension with these claims. It suggests that affluent people ascribe to an understanding of value that is far more egocentric and particular: they believe that they have very strong reasons to focus on their own welfare (and perhaps also upon those who are related to them), but they do not believe that much is owed to persons *qua* persons at all.[48]

This is a powerful and unsettling line of argument. However, it is not obviously correct. In

[48] In support of this claim, the critic can draw upon Nietzsche's critical philosophy, Freudian psychoanalysis or the shadow cast by war and genocide in the twentieth century (Nietzsche, 2007 [1887]; Freud, 2004 [1930]; Sofsky, 1997).

order for this explanation to succeed, it must be the case that affluent people are either disingenuous or deluded when they claim to recognise the value of human life and the badness of suffering. It must be the case that they do not report their true beliefs. This in itself is strange. Furthermore, it makes many forms of ostensibly moral behaviour difficult to understand. Indeed, a number of theorists have noted that ordinary human relationships seem to be predicated upon recognition that the people we engage with have independent normative standing as persons.[49] Without this supposition, many forms of interaction that we take for granted would not be possible.[50] This is true both in relation to friends and also in relation to our fellow citizens. Relationships that do not reflect this deeper understanding would be unacceptably contingent.[51] Beyond this, recognition of universal values finds expression in the public political culture of affluent societies, in their institutional schemas and in their traditions of interpretation.[52] As a result of this, explanations that stress the role played by inflated perceptions of cost seem to be more promising. When affluent people deliberate about assistance, the cost of doing more may be what looms large in their minds. This effect might then be compounded by the problem of future uncertainty and by the worries that arise in this context.[53] However, it is still not clear that these effects are sufficient to explain inaction. In order for substantive irrationality to play this role, it would have to be true that affluent people judge reasons to assist those living in extreme poverty to be *no stronger* than the reasons that they have to do other things, like purchasing another watch, buying an expensive toy, acquiring a luxury product, or leaving the money in their bank account, even when they are informed and deliberating clearly. This judgement of *equivalence* is difficult to square with the other substantive beliefs about value that they also adhere to.[54]

Finally, inaction may be explained by the practical irrationality of the affluent. Indeed, explanations that invoke akrasia or weakness of will, on a mass scale, have seemed, to many people,

[49] Scanlon writes that, 'it is crucial to friendship that we are moved to do things for a friend by the special affection and regard that we hold for him or her… But… friendship also requires us to recognise that our friends have moral standing as persons, independent of our friendship, which also places limits on our behaviour' (Scanlon, 1998 165).

[50] Scheffler, 1992, 68-9

[51] Joseph Raz considers the case of the 'amoralist' who values his friend for the enjoyment that he or she provides, but not also as a person. This person is only capable of limited relationships (Raz, 1999a, 282, 287-88).

[52] They are found in what Rawls terms 'the shared fund of implicitly recognised basic ideas and principles' contained within a society and manifest both through institutions and traditions of interpretation (Rawls, 1985, 225, 228).

[53] Writing about this possibility, Richard Miller notes that, 'it is extremely difficult to avoid excessive anxieties about the future that make insignificant risks of self-worsening seem significant' (R. Miller, 2004, 362).

[54] For a detailed discussion of this point see Chapter Three, Part II.

to be the most promising avenue to go down. Philosophers, in particular, often draw out attention to this possibility when reporting on their own individual situation.[55] Furthermore, this prognosis fits well with the sense that there is something uncanny about inaction – some aspect of the phenomenon that makes it unintelligible to those of us who are rationally disposed. However, the claim that affluent people are, as a group, akratic, stretches the concept far beyond its usual realm of application. Far from being part of an aberrant state of affairs, this kind of practical irrationality would then be the norm. It would have to be something that affected many millions of people simultaneously, in one specific issue area, over an extended period of time.[56] In practice, stable patterns of conduct usually result from judgement based upon reasons. Indeed, if the affluent are akratic, then they are akratic in a way that is unlike types of akrasia that have conventionally been thought possible. Without further consideration of this matter, it is difficult to know whether the concept can stretch this far. Indeed, it remains to be seen whether we must revise our earlier assumption about human rationality in this radical way.

These questions receive detailed treatment in Chapter Two and Chapter Three. However, what is apparent at this juncture is that none of the explanations of inaction considered herein are wholly satisfactory when taken on their own. The claims that constitute the Explanatory Problem are all plausible to some degree: it is plausibly the case that affluent people have decisive reasons to do more by way of assistance, that they are informed about the situation, and that they are sufficiently rational in both procedural and substantive respects. However, these claims sit in tension with one another: they cannot all be correct. As a result of this, the Explanatory Problem avoids easy resolution. Nonetheless, progress has been made. We understand why the problem arises and we have mapped out the ways in which it might be solved. We have also noted the way in which different accounts of practical reason help delineate the options that are available to us in this context and create pressure to solve the problem in different ways.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the question of why affluent people fail to do more to assist people living in a condition of extreme poverty, despite having weighty reasons to do so. In trying to answer this question, we encounter the Explanatory Problem: the inaction of the affluent is

[55] Davidson, 2001, 29

[56] See Chapter Three, Part IV, for a detailed discussion of the role played by akrasia in this context.

particularly difficult to explain. This chapter argued that the Explanatory Problem arises because of certain assumptions that we make about the rational nature and capacity of human beings. Crucially, we believe that people can think about reasons and respond to them by doing what they have reason to do. Furthermore, we believe that this will actually be the case when they are rational and informed. However, this expectation is confounded in the present case. Even those who are informed and rational do not do much to help people living in extreme poverty on an individual basis. Yet, they have very good reason to do so. Viewed in this way, their conduct cannot be explained.[57]

In order to explain inaction, it is best to proceed in two steps. The first step is to adopt a conception of practical reason that allows us to explore the normative and empirical claims, which give rise to the Explanatory Problem, with a greater degree of determinacy. The second step is to undertake an investigation of this type. The next two chapters of this thesis look at the account of this problem that arises when we combine an objectivist theory of reasons with a cognitivist account of motivation. This chapter has not sought to conclusively resolve the question of whether this account is superior to its subjectivist rival. However, I believe that it allows for a fuller exploration of the different factors in play. It does not force reductive parsimony on the options that we have at our disposal. The second chapter of this thesis looks at the normative side of the equation in greater detail, and scrutinises the Decisive Reasons Claim. Judging it to be robust, in many cases, the third chapter then addresses the role played by false belief and rational error in an explanation of inaction. Ultimately, each component of the Explanatory Problem needs to be revised in certain ways.

On a final note, I believe that these two accounts of the Explanatory Problem help us to understand why it has been neglected to date – why failure to assist those in serious need has been thought of little theoretical consequence and tended to fall through the cracks between different disciplines. On each account, there are only so many ways a problem of this type might be resolved. In practice, different solutions have been thought obviously true by different groups of people. Normative theorists and moral philosophers tend to believe that contemporary inaction points decidedly to human irrationality and immorality. In contrast to this, world-weary social scientists believe that it points to the spurious, implausibly utopian, nature of reasons claims. These two

[57] A similar problem, and set of options, arises in the context of other patterns of human conduct and behaviour. This explanatory framework may be of use to those who are interested in why people continue to eat meat despite being concerned about the very great animal suffering that this practice entails, in why people who are concerned about climate change fail to do their part by taking the preventive and adaptive measures, and in why people who affirm egalitarian principles of justice are often so unwilling to redistribute their wealth on a private basis.

accounts sit in tension with one another: they cannot both be right. So long as we do not talk to one another, a problem of this type might be overlooked. We, however, need to know how to proceed.

Chapter Two: Reasons to Assist People Living in Extreme Poverty

The previous chapter argued that affluent people 'ought to do more' to assist those living in extreme poverty, and that their failure to do so was problematic. This claim regarding the normative situation of the affluent can be understood as a claim about what morality requires of them, or as part of a wider claim about what they have all-things-considered reason to do.[1] Understood in the first way, the initial statement expresses support for the Moral Claim, that the majority of affluent people have morally decisive reason to assist those living in extreme poverty at a level that has not yet been reached. If this is correct, then it follows that the people in question 'ought morally' to do more by way of assistance, and that it is morally wrong that they fail to do so. As a result of this, the Moral Problem looms large.[2] Understood in the second way, the statement in question can be understood as an affirmation of the Decisive Reasons Claim. According to this claim, many affluent people have decisive, all-things-considered, reason to do more to assist people living in extreme poverty. Assisting is what they have most reason to do and it is what they 'ought' to do in the decisive-reason implying sense.[3] Failure to act is, from this perspective, contrary to all-things-considered reason. It is this claim that constitutes inaction as an omission, and as something that needs to be explained. The present chapter considers the truth of each claim in turn. By doing so, it aims to tell us more about the morality of inaction. It also sets out to test one particular explanation of this phenomenon, namely that the Decisive Reasons claim is mistaken and that the conduct of the affluent is consistent with what they have reason to do after all.

The condition of extreme poverty leads to serious suffering and premature loss of life on a massive scale. In virtue of this fact, affluent people have pro tanto reason to assist those living in this condition whenever they are in a position to do so. These reasons are impartial. They do not depend for their force on the notion that those who stand in need of help bear some special relationship to those who are in a position to assist. At the same time, the provision of assistance also comes at a price. Those who decide to contribute additional resources to aid organisations will have to forgo acquiring access to certain things that they would otherwise possess. The goods and opportunities that they forgo also have impartial value. However, in addition to this, they have more

[1] Moral considerations are sometimes said to be overriding in practical deliberation. If this is the case, then one always has most reason to do what morality requires. Yet, in the absence of conclusive arguments in support of this proposition, we should not assume that the dictates of one standpoint are equivalent to those of another.

[2] See the Introduction, Part III.

[3] Parfit, 2011, 33

specific value *for* the people who are in a position to assist. These people have additional, partial, reasons to want to pursue their own personal projects and life goals. In order for assistance to be required, by either morality or reason, the normative considerations that support using personal resources in this way must outweigh those that count against this course of action within the appropriate evaluative context. Yet, the fact that these considerations are both impartial and partial in type complicates the picture in a number of ways, making it harder to reach stable conclusions in this area.

One approach towards this issue, characteristic of the utilitarian moral theory, is to deny that partiality towards oneself or towards the things one cares about has any intrinsic normative significance when it comes to assessing the goodness of the options that are open to an agent. Theories of this type tend to generate an extremely demanding moral requirement to assist those living in extreme poverty, albeit one that has been dismissed by some people as unreasonable or even 'absurd'.[4] An alternative approach, adopted by many, allows for the more partial valuation of goods to figure in our understanding of what morality or reason require. The claims that these theories sustain tend to appear more reasonable or 'human' when considered from the vantage point of those who are called upon to assist. However, these accounts suffer from the opposite problem. They risk becoming implausibly lax. Indeed, once we grant partiality a place within normative theory it often becomes difficult to show that reasons of one kind outweigh reasons of another kind, in either context. In the case of mixed moral theories (those that are not wholly impartial), this fact manifests itself in deep uncertainty about the weight that one can attach to a personal prerogative, or to threshold levels of cost, in a moral deliberation. In the case of practical reason, disagreement runs still deeper with many theorists endorsing a dualist position, according to which an agent always has sufficient reason either to do what would make things go best from his own personal point of view, or to do what would make things go impartially best. If this is correct, then the claim that affluent people have decisive all-things-considered reason to assist is vulnerable to wholesale disavowal.

In this chapter, I offer a defence of both of the Moral Claim and the Decisive Reasons Claim. More specifically, I suggest that there are principled limits on the role that partiality can play in both the moral and practical evaluation of conduct. I also argue that these limits bear, in a more or less determinate way, upon the conduct of affluent people with regard to those living in extreme poverty at the present moment. This chapter begins by considering impartial moral theories in

[4] Williams and Smart, 1973, 113-114

greater detail. I suggest that these theories yield a demanding moral requirement to assist, but remain vulnerable to certain forms of partiality-based critique. The second section then considers moral theories which accord greater weight to agent partiality. I demonstrate that, on these accounts, there continue to be limits on what is acceptable in the moral domain. As a result of this, both impartial and mixed moral theories support a set of common conclusions about the very least that morality requires of affluent individuals. These conclusions provide support for the Moral Claim. The third section addresses the question of practical reason. It asks whether affluent individuals have sufficient non-moral reason to act in ways that contravene morality's requirements. In this section, I reject the dualist conception of practical reason, arguing instead for loose comparability between reasons. I also suggest that there are many cases in which reasons do not conflict at all. These findings have important consequences for the truth of the Decisive Reasons Claim. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the way in which these findings bear upon our understanding of the conduct of affluent people.

II. Impartial Morality and the Requirement to Assist

The moral case for assistance begins with the recognition that extreme poverty is very bad: it leads to the premature death of many millions of people each year and is also hugely damaging on any plausible account of human well-being. Extreme poverty causes immense suffering, it frustrates people's most rudimentary desires, and it destroys their capabilities and bodily functionings. These things matter because human life and flourishing possess great intrinsic value. The loss of these things tends to bear decisively upon the way in which we evaluate different states of affairs. They are also things that can be said to matter in their own right. Their importance does not need to be explained by recourse to other, yet more basic, values. At the same time, people living in affluent countries are in a position to assist those living in extreme poverty by allocating time and money to the best-performing aid and development organisations.[5] The fact that this action could save the life of someone living in poverty, or prevent that person from incurring very serious misfortune, is a consideration that 'counts in favour' of its being performed. It is normative reason for action. Furthermore, it is a consideration of a certain type. Reasons to assist are *weighty*. Whether or not another human being is able to lead a minimally decent life, as the result of one's conduct, is

[5] See the Introduction, Part V, for a defence of this claim.

something that matters profoundly. Reasons to assist are also *impartial or agent-neutral* in type. There is reason for anyone to do, or to want, things that would alleviate the plight of people living in this wretched condition.[6] Finally, reasons to assist are paradigmatic *moral* reasons. Morality, as it is understood here, is concerned first and foremost with the regulation of conduct in a way that shows due concern for the life and well-being of other human beings. It starts with the recognition that people have value not just *for* themselves, but also *in* themselves.[7] In virtue of this, what happens to them is a fact that bears importantly upon the way in which we evaluate the conduct of other human beings.

Whether reasons to assist are morally decisive in the present case – whether and to what extent we judge it morally wrong that many people fail to assist those living in extreme poverty, or provide assistance at only a low level – will depend upon the weight of countervailing considerations, the structure of the moral theory that we endorse, and the notion of due concern that we adhere to. I would like to advance two theses in this area. The first, which I defend in this section, is that impartial moral theories place stringent demands on affluent people with regard to assisting those living in poverty. Impartial moral theories are based upon the idea that morality requires *equal concern* for the welfare of others. The second thesis, which I defend in the following section, is that mixed moral theories also give rise to a requirement to assist that most affluent people do not meet. This remains true even though the latter theories embody only the less ambitious ideal of *equal respect*, making concessions to the existence of agent-relative or partial considerations.

a. Impartial Act Consequentialism

According to impartial accounts of morality, the life and well-being of every person counts equally when determining what an agent is morally required to do. Impartial Act Consequentialism is exemplary in this regard, and has long been noted for the size of the demands that it places on complying agents in a non-ideal world such as the one that we now inhabit. On this conception of morality, every person is morally required to perform the action that would make things go impartially best relative to alternative states of affairs (that they are in a position to bring about) at all times. Any action that does not meet this strict criterion is morally wrong. Impartial Act

[6] Nagel, 1986, 152-53
[7] Nagel, 1997, 123-124

Consequentialism gives rise to an extremely demanding requirement to assist those living in extreme poverty. This is because money tends to have declining marginal utility for those who possess it. Indeed, if you are a person living in an affluent society, the money in your pocket could almost always do more for someone living in extreme poverty than it could do for you yourself. Yet, the extent to which this is true of the world in which we live bears repeating. According to recent estimates by GiveWell, it is possible to provide a person with the equivalent of a complete year's worth of healthy life by contributing around ten dollars to one of the best performing aid organisations. This is less than the price of a cinema ticket in many parts of the world, and it is what many people spend on tea or coffee every day in affluent countries. Yet, money that is used in this way could, we have reason to believe, make the different between life and death, literacy or illiteracy, health or disability for those who live in a condition of absolute need. Indeed, even if the interventions in question are markedly less effective than recent research suggest, there will rarely be anything of comparable impartial value that affluent people are in a position to secure by retaining this money and spending it on themselves.

As a result of this, impartial Act Consequentialism concludes that affluent people are required to forgo goods of this type and that it is morally wrong not to do so.[8] Furthermore, the provision of assistance is morally required up to the point at which any attempt to do more has net deleterious effects when assessed in impartial terms. This will be the case when the agent in question stands to lose more than others would gain by providing further assistance, or if the decision to allocate resources to this end compromises the agent's ability to promote impartially better states of affairs at a future point in time. That this is a demanding conclusion hardly needs to be stated. Affluent people are permitted to take steps that are necessary to avoid 'burn out'. In an ideal world, they might also have good instrumental reason to focus on the needs of their nearest and dearest.[9] However, at the present moment, the precipitous need of those living in extreme poverty entails that this is not the case. Affluent people are required to push themselves extremely hard in pursuit of the aforementioned goal. Furthermore, as Peter Unger notes, they may be morally required to forgo more than just money. The impartial Act Consequentialist account of morality will also require them to give up most of their material possessions, leisure time and choice of career when these acts would lead to a better overall state of affairs.[10] In all likelihood, only people who are themselves

[8] Kagan, 1981, 1
[9] Jackson, 1991
[10] Unger, 1996, 150-152

already very poor or engaged in activities that could be defended on consequentialist grounds would be exempt from the moral requirement to do more for those living in extreme poverty.

b. Impartial Contractualism

According to the form of contractualism developed and defended by Thomas Scanlon, morality is comprised of a set of principles that are properly identified as those that no person could reasonably reject.[11] A moral principle will pass the test of reasonable rejection if the reasons for opposing it are weaker than the reasons that anyone else has for opposing an alternative principle. Principles, justified in this way, determine what morality requires. An important feature of Scanlon's contractualism is that it is strictly non-aggregative.[12] What counts in contractualist justification is the impact that a moral principle would have on an individual person's life. On this account, someone living in extreme poverty would have strong reason to propose a principle which states that 'if you are presented with a situation in which you can prevent something very bad from happening, or alleviate someone's dire plight, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable importance, then it would be wrong not to do it.' In light of this principle, the person would stand to be assisted. Furthermore, this person could object to a less demanding alternative on the grounds that is would cause her death or force her to undergo extreme hardship.

Is anyone in a position to resist the force of this claim? In the first instance, it might seem that affluent people are well-placed to do so. After all, a principle of this type could impose very grave costs on people in this position and might require them to undergo a degree of self-pauperisation. But this impression is misleading. The impoverishment of an affluent person is objectionable, but it does not outweigh premature loss of life or the serious suffering of another person, impartially understood. Indeed, Elizabeth Ashford has noted that, for each claim that an affluent person might press against a demanding principle, there seems to be an analogous consideration that the impoverished person can press against alternatives – albeit one of greater weight.[13] Thus, while an affluent person might object to the impact that protracted assistance would have on her ability to meet the special responsibilities that she has towards her relatives and children, a person living in extreme poverty could note by way of reply that a less demanding principle would

[11] Scanlon, 1998, 189, 195-196
[12] Ibid. 229
[13] Ashford, 2003

leave her unable to help or care for her children *at all*. Impoverished people are in a position to 'appeal to a reason of the very same kind, to give their children a good start in life, but [one] which has far greater urgency' in support of a stronger duty of assistance.[14]

Another objection might be thought to stem from the insight that, in selecting moral principles, each agent would reflect upon the way in which different requirements might affect their prospects over the course of a complete life, and adjust their claims accordingly. Indeed, it is always possible that a person who stands to benefit from an extremely demanding principle of assistance in one context might find herself constrained by that same principle at a later point in time. Wanting to avoid the consequences of an extremely intrusive morality, an agent who reasons in this way may then be prepared to accept a less demanding principle from the outset. The second objection to a demanding principle of assistance holds that this is true of people living in extreme poverty. If it is correct, then an objection to moderate principles of assistance, based upon the way it impacts upon the vital needs of those living in extreme poverty, would not be forthcoming *from them*. But this also seems mistaken. Concern about one's own vital needs comes first. The prospect of being confined by morality is not a high price to pay if one's life depends upon it. It seems that impoverished people would in fact press the objection against less demanding principles of assistance.

A final objection to the demanding principle notes that the way in which a principle imposes costs on different agents can itself be considered grounds for reasonable rejection.[15] In this regard, it might seem that the principle mooted so far is unfair because it would require complying agents to shoulder the cost of non-compliance by others. On this account, people would be morally required to assist up to the point at which they would sacrifice something of comparable importance, and this remains true even when there are millionaires who stand idly by, spending vast sums of money on luxury goods. This, in turn, has been thought to be problematic. In cases of this type, we could still hold non-acting agents accountable for their moral neglect and the harm it causes. However, many have thought that, in this instance, the problem is actually with the demanding principle itself.[16] One can object to a principle that requires you to do more than your 'fair share' in realising certain goals and ends. A more reasonable principle requires us to do only what would be needed in a world where other people did likewise.

[14] ibid. 289
[15] Scanlon, 1998, 196, 211-212
[16] Murphy, 2000

Even if an argument of this type tracks a genuine concern, there is reason to doubt its revisionary force in the present context. The choice confronting agents now seems to be between a principle of assistance that requires agents to do only that which would be required of them under a fair system of full compliance, and a much more demanding moral principle that does not have this characteristic but which requires people to do all that they can do to alleviate the serious need of others. The first principle allocates responsibility more fairly insofar as no one would be required to 'pick up the slack' caused by the non-compliance of others. However, it would lead to the foreseeable and avoidable death and suffering of many millions of people who could otherwise lay claim to assistance. The latter principle avoids this effect. Judged impartially, it seems that a person's claim to protection against the life-threatening effects of extreme poverty outweighs the claim of others to maximally fair treatment of this type.[17] In virtue of this, I believe that the demanding principle would be one that no one could reasonably reject in Scanlon's contractualist setting. The alternative view supposes that it could be reasonable to prize fairness in the allocation of duty about all else. It is hard to see what the justification for this claim to primacy could be. In the absence of some deeper rationale that can be advanced in support of this claim, its advocates appear to be open to the charge that they fetishise one specific form of fairness at the expense of people's lives. Given that this objection fails, I believe that the original principle would be accepted. Impartial contractualism can be seen to yield a demanding account of the requirement to assist as well.

This is an important intermediary conclusion. According to the views surveyed so far, affluent people are required to assist people living in extreme poverty up to the point at which they would sacrifice something of equivalent importance in the event that they did more. What matters according to impartial Act Consequentialism is that the benefit of assisting those in need outweighs the cost to affluent people of assisting, when considered from an impartial point of view. What matters for the impartial contractualist is that this course of action is sanctioned by a principle that no one could reasonably reject. Both theories hold that inaction in the face of extreme poverty is morally wrongful, and that the majority of affluent people ought morally to do more by way of assistance than is presently the case. However, the truth of this claim depends crucially upon the notion that morality requires people to accord equal consideration to the life and well-being of everyone when deciding how to act. That this is the case is far from self-evident. There is good

[17] Particularly once we recognise that this claim is *made* by people who are already privileged.

reason to wonder whether these conclusions continue to hold true in the event that personal considerations are granted a greater degree of moral standing.

IV. Mixed Moralities and the Requirement to Assist

Not all normative reasons are agent-neutral in type. People also have reason to care about their own well-being, and about their own relationships, in a way that is not commensurate with the value of these things when assessed from an impartial point of view. Considerations of this type are agent-relative. Their force is relativised to the person whose reasons they are. In this way, the fact that a child is in serious need provides me with an agent-neutral reason to act. But the fact that *my* child is in need gives me a further agent-relative reason to assist her. While the life of my child may not be worth more than the life of another human being in impartial terms, her life has *particular* value for me and I have reason to accord it a certain preference in relation to the well-being, projects and relationships of other people.[18] Mixed moral theories aim to accommodate this insight. They hold that what morality requires is not equal concern for other people, but *equal respect*. Equal respect is compatible with showing a degree of partiality towards oneself and one's loved ones. If this is correct, then we may need to rework our understanding of the moral requirement to assist in order to take account of this fact. Perhaps affluent people have morally sufficient reason to refuse to forgo certain personal goods after all – even when the need of others is very great indeed. Before we can say whether this is the case or not, we need to know more about the place that agent-relative reasons occupy in morality, and to explain their presence there. We need to know why morality requires only equal respect and not the more ambitious ideal of equal concern.

One answer to this question appeals directly to the character of common-sense morality and to the intuitions of affluent people in this area. According to advocates of this position, it is simply not plausible to think that morality requires so much of affluent people all of the time. Impartial morality is implausibly demanding. However, an argument of this type encounters serious problems. As we have seen, impartial moral theories stand to benefit those who are badly off at the expense of those who are not. They tend to require the net transfer of resources *to* those living in extreme

[18] With reasons of this type: 'the general form of the reason includes an essential reference to the person who has it.' These reasons are objective insofar as they can be understood and affirmed from the viewpoint outside the individual who has them, but they are not impartial (Nagel, 1986, 153). They include self-interested reasons to care about one's own life and other-regarding reasons to care about the lives of people to whom one is related (Parfit, 2011, *m*54).

poverty, even when this can be done only at considerable expense to those who are wealthy. In contrast to this, the distribution of costs and burdens accompanying common-sense morality, which consists largely of options and constraints, serves in practice to systematically favour the strong over the weak.[19] Given that the strong are also the key purveyors of social norms, including moral norms, the authority of this perspective seems to be compromised in certain ways. Indeed, as Gilbert Harman notes, common-sense morality might well be thought to bear the unconscious imprint of the self-interest of the powerful. If we are ourselves affluent, then considerations of this type should lead us to doubt the credibility of our own intuitions in this area. Many of us have weighty reason to want the moral burden lifted. The challenge is therefore to place the presence of agent-relative reasons inside morality on a surer footing, and to demonstrate that their inclusion in the moral equation is more than a form of self-serving rationalization.

Fortunately there is more that can be said on this matter. Foremost in this regard is Bernard Williams's claim that a strictly impartial account of morality is incompatible with the nature of personhood at a fundamental level. In support of this view, Williams notes that when human agents act, the perspective that they adopt is invariably first-person in type.[20] People do have the ability to *imagine* what it would be like to adopt a more impartial view of the world. However, when they act, they do so as agents with discrete identities who have particular interests and concerns. These are the considerations that give their lives meaning.[21] Yet impartial moral theories appear to ignore this fact. For this reason Williams insists that they are mistaken. According to Williams, impartial moral theories require human agents to treat their own projects and concerns as if they were merely one set of considerations among many of equal weight. They also require people to be motivated accordingly. Yet any agent who acted on an account of this type would experience a profound sense of alienation. There would no longer be any real connection between her conduct and the things that she cared deeply about. As a result of this, her action would no longer be connected with the deep sources of motivation within herself. Therefore, her personal integrity would be eroded.[22]

In response to this line of criticism, defenders of impartial moral theory have tended to stress the difference between morality as an account of right action, and morality as a decision-process that one must follow in order to act in a morally justified light. The theories discussed in the previous section are theories of the first kind. They do not require people to adopt an impartial

[19] Harman, 1977, 110-111
[20] Williams, 1995, 169-170
[21] Williams, 1981, 12-13
[22] Williams and Smart, 1973, 113-114

decision-procedure at all times.[23] Indeed, if their concern is to produce impartially better states of affairs then there is reason to think that this will not be the case. Given that the bearers of impartial value are often goods that require attitudes of personal partiality, a person is likely to be better off cultivating a disposition that enables him or her to respond directly to the demands created by loving relationships or personal projects, without conscious reflection. We would still adopt an impartial standpoint in order to know what morality required. However, motivation need not, and perhaps could not, be impartial if these ends were to be achieved in practice. Once this fact has been taken into account, the advocate of impartial moral theory holds that the problem of alienation is radically diminished.

However, it is far from clear that this settles the matter. Indeed, as Richard Miller notes, the extent to which impartial moral theories can embrace partial motives is still constrained in important ways. People would still have to submit their motivational sets to bouts of periodic re-assessment and critique. At this juncture, they would take a strange view of themselves. They would view their 'own psychology as a machine for producing good consequences, taking any difficulty in freely detaching and attaching [to personal projects and relationships] to be a defect if it reduces efficiency.'[24] When they fail to produce good outcomes, these people would have to view their own particular affection for people and ends, 'as an inevitable but unfortunate limitation, as an engineer might reject that an otherwise ideal alloy is brittle.'[25] In light of this, the challenge to personal integrity remains. At a basic level, it would not be wrong, Miller suggests, to refuse to take this attitude towards oneself. There must be constraints on what morality requires.

Samuel Scheffler develops the initial critique in a different way. He suggests that morality must *reflect* important facts about the type of beings we are.[26] More precisely, morality must take into account the specific nature of those whose conduct it aims to regulate. Relevant facts might include that human beings are susceptible to pain and that they are capable of autonomous agency. Crucially, these considerations also include the fact that each person has his or her own distinctive point of view. This aspect of personhood, in turn, has important ramifications for the character of human agency and motivation. It means that, 'people do not typically view the world from the impersonal perspective, nor do their actions typically flow from the kinds of concerns a being who actually did

[23] Railton, 1984, 152-53
[24] R. Miller, 1992, 339
[25] ibid.
[26] Scheffler, 1982, 56-57, 62

inhabit the impersonal standpoint might have.'[27] Yet, impartial moral theories overlook this fact when developing an account of right action. As a result of this, there is a principled rationale for seeking alternative theories. A more fitting moral theory would, according to Scheffler, reflect the independence of the personal point of view by, 'freeing [people] from the demand that their actions and motives always be optimal from the impersonal perspective, and by allowing them to devote attention to their projects and concerns to a greater extent than impersonal optimality by itself would allow.'[28] Morality must grant a person *options* to act in other ways. These claims have a bearing on the way we evaluate the conduct of affluent people.

a. Prerogatives

Critics of impartial Act Consequentialism take issue with the fact that it requires individuals to treat certain concerns and commitments – those that are naturally generated from the agent's own personal points of view – as wholly dependent for their moral significance on the relationship that they bear to an impartial ranking of different states of affairs.[29] In response to such criticism, Scheffler suggests that consequentialists revise their theory so that people are no longer required to promote the impartially best state of affairs at all times. More specifically, Scheffler defends the idea that morality includes an *agent-centred prerogative*. A prerogative of this type would allow each person to 'assign a certain proportionately greater weight to his own interests than to the interests of other people' in moral deliberation.[30] It would permit people, on occasion, to act in ways that advance their personal projects and relationships at the expense of doing what would make things go impartially best. More specifically, Scheffler suggests that an agent would be allowed to perform his preferred action (P) only when there is no alternative action (A) open to him, such that (1) A would produce a better overall outcome than P, as judged from an impersonal standpoint which gives equal weight to everyone's interests, and (2) the total net loss to others of his doing P rather than A was more than M times as great as the net loss of him doing A rather than P.[31] In this way, the new hybrid theory would better attend to the existence of agent-relative considerations and concerns.

[27] ibid. 62
[28] ibid.
[29] ibid. 8
[30] ibid. 20
[31] On Liam Murphy's re-formulation of the prerogative, an agent is permitted to perform any of the actions that, compared with the optimal (in impersonal terms) action available to her, are at least M times better for her than they are worse in impersonal terms (Murphy, 2000, 64 n.2). Scheffler, 1982, 169.

In order to establish whether the prerogative creates an option for an agent in a given situation, we need to be clear about three things. Firstly, we need to know whether there is an *option* open to the agent that would produce an impartially better state of affairs compared to the action she prefers. Secondly, if an action of this type exists, we need to know *how much* better it would be for other people, and how much worse it would be for the agent, than the action that she currently aims to perform. Thirdly, we need to know by what *factor* costs incurred by the agent should be allowed to outweigh gains for other people in moral deliberation. If this factor is large, then even small personal cost to the agent could offset large gains by other people, creating an option not to act in the way that produces the best overall outcome. If this factor is smaller in size, then the existence of moral options will be more narrowly constrained.

We have already said that, in our extremely unequal world, there will almost always be an option to do more good that is open to affluent people. By allocating resources to the best humanitarian organisations, an individual person, living in an affluent society, could very often save the life of a person living in extreme poverty or prevent some serious harm from befalling them. How much better an action of this type is than the one that they would rather perform depends upon what these people would have to forgo in order to assist. These are the costs of assistance. Their size depends in large part upon the particular circumstances that an individual inhabits.

In order to make progress on this front, it will be helpful to have a rough taxonomy of different types of cost in mind. For poor people who live within affluent societies, or for people who spend much of their time and money caring for disabled relatives, the cost of providing sustained assistance to even a single person living in a condition of extreme poverty could be very great indeed. To achieve this outcome, a person in this position might have to give up what small comforts she has: a room for the night, the month's rent, payment for her child's school meals or the success of a relationship that she is deeply committed to. As a result of this action, important personal goods would be compromised in a serious way and the well-being of the person who opted to assist would be correspondingly diminished. These costs are *serious*.

For a second category of person, for those who are less poor than this, or who do not have exceptional commitments of this type, the same level of assistance would require them to give up considerably less. These people might be required to limit their expenditure on holidays, to re-pay their mortgage at a slower rate, or to abandon a resource-intensive project that they had hoped to undertake. These are not small things. While it is clear that adequate housing and successful

relationships are among the fundamentals of what make a life go well, the happiness and respite that holidays bring also matters impartially. So too does security for the future, and the ability to partake in activities which one finds enjoyable, whether they are expensive to pursue or not. These costs are *moderate*.

For a third category of person, assistance at this level would require very little. It might require them to cut back on some amount of luxury expenditure, to accept the status implications of being less rich than they would otherwise be, or to forgo something so small that it would be imperceptible for the person whose loss it was. These costs are *minor*. This is not to say that they are necessarily inconsequential in absolute terms. The satisfaction provided by luxury goods is perhaps the major source of comfort that some people have. However, relative to other things that they might be called upon to forgo, goods of this type seem to count for very little indeed. Taking all of these things into account, we should conclude that the impartial good that affluent people are in a position to do is great in size and that the costs that they stand to incur by assisting range from the minor to the severe.

What should we now say about the factor by which affluent people are allowed to amplify the weight that they accord personal considerations in moral deliberation? The first thing to note is that this factor will have to be quite large if it is to have any effect at all upon the requirement to assist. According to moral theories that adhere to the ideal of strict impartiality, affluent people are required to incur serious costs in order to assist those living in extreme poverty. Those who defend the idea of a personal prerogative will want to resist conclusions of this type. They will insist that, in cases of this type, the people in question have sufficient moral reason to act in either way. Yet, even serious costs often pale in significance when compared with the loss or harm that will befall those living in extreme poverty if assistance is not provided. While failure to pay the rent on time or to pay for a child's school meals are bad, the death of a child is *many times* worse. Viewed from an impartial standpoint, there is strong reason to prefer the former set of outcomes to the latter. If the prerogative allows affluent people to treat these outcomes as equivalent, then it must allow them to amplify the weight of personal goods in question many times over. A prerogative that allows parents living in affluent societies to choose school meals for their own children, at the expense of the life of other children, allows for a degree of partiality that is already quite great indeed.

This may well be the case. However, I do not believe that the prerogative can extend much further than this. The reason for this is that the weight of the personal prerogative must be *continuous*

with the deep-lying rationale that renders it credible as an aspect of morality in the first place. The prerogative is not justified on the grounds that it yields an account of morality that better accords with everyday beliefs about what morality requires. Rather, the prerogative is incorporated into our understanding of morality in order to reflect the existence of the personal point of view and the things that are salient therein. Its purpose is to make morality recognisably human. A stronger prerogative than the one that has just been discussed is not needed to achieve this aim.

To see that this is the case, we should ask whether a moral theory that required people to give up certain non-essential personal projects, to refrain from spending large amounts of money on people who they hold dear, to repay their mortgage at a slower rate, or to forgo foreign holidays, could really be said to neglect the importance of the personal point of view in a world where other people are dying unaided. We should ask whether this account of morality could really be said *to do violence* to the type of beings that we are. I do not believe that this is the case. However, what we can be sure of is that a moral theory would not have this effect if it simply required us to forgo expenditure on luxury goods at the present moment in time. The objection that morality does violence to who I am because it does not allow me to buy luxury goods, when people are dying, is not really an objection at all. It is certainly not incompatible with the existence of the personal point of view that morality requires *more than this*.[32]

Furthermore, a prerogative that *was* strong enough to sanction the pursuit of these things would not only accord recognition to the fact of agent partiality, but also accord it *primacy* in moral deliberation. If affluent people could justifiably refuse to incur costs of this type, in a world where so many die unassisted, then it would seem that little if anything could *ever* be required by way of beneficence at all. On this view, even cases of easy rescue might be deemed unacceptably costly, and another fact about human beings – that their lives are both finite and fragile – would be neglected altogether. Extremely permissive accounts of the requirement to assist, therefore, come to sit in tension with the underlying idea that morality should reflect the nature of those whose conduct it seeks to regulate. In light of this, I suggest that the inclusion of a personal prerogative is unlikely to justify refusal to incur moderate costs by way of assistance, and we should reject the idea that there is a moral permission to pursue luxury goods at the expense of helping of those who live in extreme poverty.

[32] The alternative position runs perilously close to a sort of 'yuppie ethics' that most people believe can be rejected out of hand. According yuppie ethics there is a right to gourmet dinners as part of the 'good life'. This right that is then taken to override even the right of children to adequate nutrition (Shue, 1988, 697).

b. Thresholds

The demandingness of contractualist moral theories is a function of the ideal that they embody and the structure of justification that they employ. We have already seen that Scanlonian contractualism is strictly impartial. In light of this, the standard of reasonable rejection that it makes use of is essentially comparative in nature.[33] Anyone who does not accept a principle that imposes certain costs on themselves, when other people have greater reason to reject the alternative principles, is understood to show an inappropriate degree of partiality towards their own life and inadequate concern for the lives of other people. Yet, we might wonder whether this is really the case, particularly if the personal costs that a principle stands to impose on an agent are very great indeed. The contractualism of Richard Miller builds upon an insight of this type and foregrounds the idea that morality requires equal respect, rather than impartial concern for others. Once we have understood that this is the case, Miller suggests we will be led to endorse a principle of assistance that would permit affluent people to spend some portion of their income on luxury goods. This conclusion is at odds with what we have so far been led to believe.

In support of his position, Miller develops an idea that Scanlon himself rejects. This is the notion that there is a threshold level of cost 'such that it would be reasonable to reject any principle that would lead to one's suffering a cost that great, and reasonable to do so no matter what objections others might have to alternative principles.'[34] If there are costs of this type, then they comprise a non-comparative standard of reasonable rejection. Certain complaints are always valid. Furthermore, so long as these costs are of a certain order of magnitude, it seems possible that one could object to more demanding moral principles without showing a lack of respect for the people who stand to be assisted by them. When asked to justify rejection of these alternative principles, one could point to the grave costs that their acceptance would lead one to incur. A principle that did not impose costs of this type on anyone would then be one that no one could reasonably reject.

In this kind of contractualist setting, Miller suggests the moral principle that would be chosen to regulate attitudes towards the need of others is the Principle of Sympathy. This principle states that,

[33] Ashford, 2003, 277
[34] Scanlon, 1998, 196

> 'One's underlying disposition to respond to neediness as such ought to be sufficiently demanding that giving which would express greater underlying concern would impose a significant risk of worsening one's life, if one fulfilled all other responsibilities; and it need not be any more demanding than this.'[35]

A risk of the relevant type is understood by Miller to be a 'non-trivial chance that one's life would be worse than it would otherwise be.'[36] He also argues that a person's life could be made worse in the relevant sense, even if the untoward episode did not extend through long periods of time or impose grave burdens upon that agent. Someone's life would be made worse if a principle of assistance deprived that person of, 'adequate resources to pursue, enjoyably and well, a worthwhile goal with which he is intelligently identified and from which he could not readily detach.'[37] As we would expect, these goals include success in one's key relationships and projects. Miller suggests that they also include, 'the goal of presenting myself to others in a way that expresses my own aesthetic sense and engages in the fun of mutual aesthetic recognition… [the] goal of eating in a way that explores a variety of interesting aesthetic and cultural possibilities… and… [the] goal of enjoying the capacity of great composers and performers to exploit nuances of timbre and texture to powerful aesthetic effect.'[38]

To pursue these things, enjoyably and well, Miller notes that we will need to possess some stylish cloths, to have meals at nice restaurants occasionally, and to acquire 'more than minimal stereo equipment.'[39] As a result of this, he suggests that one would not violate the Principle of Sympathy by occasionally purchasing 'luxuries and frills' of this type. Nor would one violate the principle by buying these things for friends or family members. By ensuring that their lives are not worsened in these ways, Miller argues that we 'express an appropriate valuing of our special relationship.'[40] The Principle of Sympathy would still require 'significant giving' on the part of the affluent people. But the principle also permits far more by way of personal expenditure than other accounts that have been considered so far.[41]

This difference can only be attributed in part to the different structure of the moral theories that are in play. More important in this regard is the stance that Miller takes vis-à-vis the intuitions of

[35] R. Miller, 2004, 359
[36] ibid.
[37] ibid. 360; italics mine.
[38] ibid. 361
[39] ibid.
[40] ibid. 370
[41] ibid. 362

affluent people concerning what can reasonably be asked of them. Miller accords these intuitions weight. He believes that the fact that his theory fits better with common-sense morality is something that counts in favour of its acceptance. I have suggested that there is good reason to mistrust intuitions of this type. I would now like to suggest that, without the support these intuitions provide, there is reason to doubt the veracity of Miller's conclusions. Without an appeal to the authority of common-sense morality, there is a gap between the way in which partiality is justified in his theory and the permissiveness of the resulting principle of assistance.

To see this is the case, we should first note that the Principle of Sympathy takes as its focus the level of underlying concern that one's actions express for the life and well-being of other people. What matters in this regard is that people are concerned *enough* about the lives of others. Miller holds that judgements of this type are not fine-grained. Whether one is morally required to do more by way of assistance is a question that must be approached holistically. This, in turn, has important ramifications. It means that a person living in extreme poverty cannot always object to the behaviour of an affluent person, even when this conduct entails that some grave harm will befall her or someone else in her position. When called upon to assist, the affluent person can always state, by way of reply, that she is under no moral requirement to do so because her action in this specific instance is not something that will impact upon an overall assessment of her character.[42] This may strike us as strange. The type of indifference that this reply manifests, to the person who is in need, is not obviously consistent with the notion that each individual life is worthy of respect.

This criticism gains greater force when we analyse the content of the principle that Miller proposes. According to this principle, one's character is not morally defective if one chooses not to assist someone living in extreme poverty, when doing so entails anything more than a *trivial risk* that one will *for a short time* no longer be able to pursue a personal goal or good *enjoyably and well*. Miller argues that this principle is reasonable, and that it embodies the ideal of equal respect. He also argues that a more demanding moral principle would be liable to reasonable rejection, that it would undermine personal integrity and cut people off from their projects and goals in a way that was unacceptable at a fundamental level. I believe he is mistaken on both accounts.

The crucial test for the first claim is how the Principle of Sympathy fares in a contractualist setting of the type under consideration. It is important in this context that even those who lose out

[42] Miller writes that an agent who decides not to give a little bit more to charity can note that 'underlying concern for the needy is not subject to such fine distinctions. Since I am sufficiently well-disposed in my underlying attitude toward the needy, I do not have to give a little bit more, through extra donations on this scale' (ibid. 365).

in the selection of principles feel their claims have been heard and that the weight of their life and well-being has been duly counted. In light of this, they too can affirm that a principle is reasonable and worthy of respect. Would the Principle of Sympathy satisfy this condition? There is good reason to think it would not. While it seems possible people living in extreme poverty would not begrudge the affluent licence to pursue essential goods, commitments and relationships – even when this occurs at their own expense – the same cannot be said for fancy clothes, expensive meals and stereo equipment. The latter goods are not something they would, or should, recognise as constituting a core personal interest that warrants this degree of respect. Knowing that potentially life-saving resources had been diverted for these lesser ends, those living in extreme poverty could rightly feel aggrieved. They could also object to the idea that affluent people may only be required to accept a *trivial risk* of *limited* life-worsening in order to assist. The lives of those who stand to be assisted are of very great importance. Even allowing for a degree of morally legitimate partiality, it would seem to many that people can be morally required to sacrifice whole goods (of the type that Miller mentions) in order to attend to reasons to assist.

Whether or not this is the case turns on the truth of the second claim, namely that a more demanding moral requirement would undermine personal integrity and lead to a degree of alienation that no moral theory should allow. If this claim is correct, then we would reach an impasse: impoverished people could reasonably reject a permissive principle of assistance on the grounds that it failed to accord them equal respect, while affluent people could reasonably reject a more demanding principle in virtue of the way it impacted upon their personal goals and relationships.[43] However, there is reason to think that the claim is mistaken in the current context. What matters, we have said, is that a moral theory does not alienate the agent from his own personal point of view – and the things that are of value therein – even when he is positioned to do a huge amount of good, impartially construed. People who are called upon to assist are still entitled to some space in which they can cultivate certain goods that give their lives meaning. Yet, this view is not continuous with the more radical position that people must be accorded moral space to pursue *all* of these goods simultaneously and well. If there is a limit to the degree to which personal projects and goals can be compromised for the good of others, then this limit is less extensive than the one Miller suggests. A threshold of this type could be operative and still necessitate the choice of a principle that requires affluent people to incur slight or even moderate costs by way of assistance.

[43] Nagel, 1991, 173-174

If what has been said so far is correct, then there are three paths that are open to the contractualist who endorses a threshold-based notion of reasonable rejection. The first is to reject the claim that the Principle of Sympathy would be chosen in the morally relevant setting. Those in extreme need could insist on a more robust account of what sympathy requires without pushing those who are well-off below the threshold of reasonable rejection. Affluent people could be reasonably required to forgo luxuries and frills, and perhaps asked to incur moderate costs. The second option is to defend the Principle of Sympathy, but to insist on a narrower interpretation of its content than the one that Miller adheres to. Proceeding in this way, one might resist the claim that there is, in fact, a significant risk of having one's life worsened when there is only a non-trivial chance that one will be impeded in pursuit of sartorial, culinary and acoustic goals. The third option is to accept that this principle provides an adequate characterisation of what it means to have a sympathetic disposition, but to hold that this is not in itself sufficient to guarantee that all of the agent's moral responsibilities to people living in extreme need to have been successfully discharged. Indeed, Miller suggests this principle needs to be augmented by a Principle of Nearby Rescue. Perhaps it also needs to be augmented by a more robust account of beneficence. On this view, one might be duly sympathetic but still fall short of meeting one's moral responsibility regarding the distant needy.[44] Each option will lead to the genesis of moral requirements on the affluent that are considerably more stringent than the ones which Miller himself endorses.

The overview of moral theories is now complete. We have seen that impartial moral theories tend to place extreme demands on affluent people in our world. Affluent individuals are, on these views, morally required to incur serious costs in order to alleviate the plight of those living in extreme poverty. On mixed accounts of morality, the requirement to assist is attenuated in certain ways. However, it remains fairly demanding. Affluent people are still required to forgo luxury goods and to incur moderate costs by way of assistance. Given that most people do little to help those living in extreme poverty, and that many do nothing at all, these findings lend support to the Moral Claim that the majority of affluent people ought morally to do more. It is wrong that they fail to act. This claim is not true of a small minority of people. If doing more would force one to abandon a ground project, compromise a loving relationship, or forgo things that are essential to the exercise of one's core capacities as an agent, then these things provide one with sufficient moral reason to act in other ways. They also provide one with sufficient all-things-considered reason not to assist. The

[44] R. Miller, 2004, 378

pursuit of these things is neither morally wrong nor contrary to reason. Yet, this is not the situation of most people. Their conduct is morally problematic. The remainder of this chapter considers whether it is also problematic from the wider standpoint of all-thing-considered practical reason.

V. Practical Reason and the Requirement to Assist

When we deliberate about what to do, we can ask this question from a number of different standpoints. We can ask what we ought-morally to do. We can also ask what we have most reason to do, all-things-considered. Judgements of the latter type are the providence of practical reason. If the totality of considerations that bear upon some issue count decisively in favour of one course of action, and against the others, then this is the action that an agent has decisive reason to perform. It is what that agent 'ought' to do in the decisive-reason-implying sense and it would be contrary to reason for her not to act in that way. If this person is sufficiently well-informed about the situation but fails to act in the way that reason requires, then we can also say that her conduct is rationally deficient or irrational. On other occasions, a person will have sufficient all-things-considered reason to act in more than one way. When this is the case, that person ought to do one of the things that she has sufficient reason to do and it would be contrary to reason not to do any of them. According to the Decisive Reasons Claim, the majority of affluent people have conclusive reason to assist those living in extreme poverty, at a level above that which presently obtains. In order to evaluate the truth of this claim, we need to form an appropriate all-things-considered understanding of the weight of reasons to assist.

According to one prominent view, moral considerations are always of overriding importance when determining what course of action is best supported by reason. On this view of things, what morality requires is always what a person has most reason to do (and a person can never have sufficient reason to do that which morality forbids).[45] If this is the case, then the truth of the Decisive Reasons Claim is entailed by the truth of the Moral Claim. Affluent people are required by reason to assist those living in extreme poverty to exactly the same extent that morality requires this action of them. Yet, this claim of overridingness strikes many people as too strong. In practice, many of us believe that people may have sufficient reason to act in ways that violate moral requirements (even if we wish this was not the case). Indeed, most of us do not think that self-

[45] Scheffler, 1992, 52

interested action is always contrary to reason, even when it is morally wrong. To see that this is the case, we can imagine a situation in which a person finds some piece of lost property in a public place and decides to keep it, rather than turn it in to the relevant authorities. For some range of cases – in which the good in question is neither too great nor too small and in which the agent is neither too rich nor too poor – it seems appropriate to say that the choice of action was morally wrong, but not contrary to reason. Even if the agent understood the choice that confronted him, his decision can be explained by identifying the self-interested reasons that he had to keep the good in question. This action does not mark him out as rationally deficient. As a result of this, we should return to the case at hand. Inaction is often morally wrong. We need to know whether failure to assist those living in extreme poverty might also, on occasion, be contrary to all-things-considered reason.

a. Comparing Reasons

In order to establish what reason requires in cases of this type, we need to compare the impartial benefit of assisting people living in extreme poverty against the personal cost, to affluent people of acting, in that way. This all-things-considered reasons judgement differs importantly from moral evaluation. It is not constrained by the ideal of equal respect or concern which morality is understood to embody. And, whereas mixed moral theories recognise agent partiality by incorporating the idea of prerogatives or thresholds, both of which can be formulated in wholly impartial terms, the practical evaluation of options seems to require the more direct comparison of agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons.[46] This, in turn, gives rise to a number of the problems documented by Henry Sidgwick in *The Methods of Ethics.*[47]

According to Sidgwick, when we deliberate about what to do, we can legitimately ask this question from our own personal point of view, or from an imagined impartial point of view in which the good of each person counts equally. Depending upon the viewpoint that we adopt, we will answer the question differently. From the first point of view, agent-relative considerations are

[46] The agent-centred prerogative requires impartial comparison of what others stand to gain, alongside what the agent stands to forgo by acting, in a certain context. The impartial cost to the agent is then multiplied by a set factor in order to determine whether permission exists for that agent to act in other ways. In the case of thresholds for reasonable rejection, the impartial value of certain goods and commitments comprise a level below which everyone can recognise that the rejection of a principle is acceptable. These mechanisms respond to the fact of agent partiality, but can be characterised using only impartial terms.

[47] Sidgwick, 1981 [1907], 497-498

accorded primacy. What we have most reason to do is the thing that would make our lives go best in prudential terms. In contrast to this, when we assume the impartial standpoint, agent-neutral considerations are supreme. What we have most reason to do, from this vantage point, is the thing that would make things impartially better overall. Unable to bridge the gap between these two perspectives in any sensible way, Sidgwick suggests that the types of consideration that figure in each assessment are wholly incomparable. As a result of this, whenever agent-neutral and agent-relative considerations come into conflict with one another, the agent in question always has sufficient reason to act in either way. This is the *dualist* account of practical reason. If Sidgwick is correct, then we are forced to conclude that, whenever affluent people stand to incur *some* personal cost by assisting, they have sufficient reason not to undertake this action. Even when assistance is morally required, inaction will – on this view of things – rarely, if ever, be contrary to reason.

However, there is reason to think that the dualist account of practical reason is mistaken. The first factor, which casts doubt on this model, is the counterintuitive results that it generates when applied to certain types of *Extreme Comparison*. In these cases, an agent is confronted with a choice between incurring some *trivial* personal cost and averting the *catastrophic* ruin of many other people. The choice might, for example, be between saving oneself a minute of slight discomfort and preventing the painful death of several other people. According to the dualist account of practical reason, the agent in question has equally good reason to choose either option. There *is,* on this view of things, just as good reason to act in either way. But this claim is surely mistaken. If the life and flourishing of other human beings matters *at all* then it must, one might think, be able to tip the balance of reason in favour of action that secures these things, *at least some of the time*. Indeed, a person who knows the relevant facts in cases of this type is rationally required to undertake the life-saving action.[48]

In addition to this intuitive concern, it is also possible to take issue with the theoretical basis of Sidgwick's account. Indeed, as Derek Parfit notes, the dualist account of practical reason trades on a false dichotomy.[49] Crucially, it assumes that, when we ask what we have most reason to do, we must ask this question from one of only two standpoints and proceed on this basis. However, this

[48] The people who deny this claim are most likely to be those who deny that agent-neutral reasons for action exist *at all*. These people fall outside the ambit of the present study. However, we should note that the dualism of practical reason is also problematic for those who ascribe to rational egoism, or to certain forms of subjectivism about reasons. These people will want to reject the second aspect of Sidgwick's account. They will deny that one always has sufficient reason to do what would make things go impartially best.

[49] Parfit, 2011, 135

claim is mistaken. In reality, when we deliberate practically, we reach judgements about what to do, not from some imagined standpoint that we decide to enter into, but rather from our own actual point of view.[50] This perspective encompasses both agent-relative and agent-neutral considerations. It is neither uniquely egoistic nor other-regarding. Furthermore, from this vantage point, it is possible to compare the strength of different types of normative consideration. Indeed, it is in virtue of this integrated perspective that we are able to judge that the life-saving action is required by reason when thinking about the Extreme Comparison. We are able to see, from our own perspective, that self-serving action is *sometimes* not a proper response to normatively valuable aspects of the world in which we live.

b. Imprecise Comparability

If what has been said so far is correct, then it is not true that *any* personal cost incurred by the affluent could provide them with sufficient reason not to assist. However, this is a very weak conclusion. It does not tell us much about the way in which different types of reason *are* comparable with each other. Nor does it tell us how strong one type of normative claim must be before it can be said to decidedly outweigh a claim of a different type. At this juncture, we encounter further difficulties. This is because, as Parfit himself recognises, it seems likely that agent-neutral and agent-relative considerations are only *very imprecisely* comparable.[51] To see what this means in practice, it is useful to consider what we would say about a second type of situation in which a person is in a position to save the life of another person only at the cost of incurring serious personal injury. Most people think that, in a situation of this type, the agent in question has sufficient reason to act in either way. Neither the decision to incur this cost, or to refuse to do so, would be contrary to reason. However, what is particularly troubling in the present context is that this judgement seems to hold true whether the injury that the person in question stands to incur is relatively minor, such as the loss of a finger, or relatively major, such as the loss of both legs. Clearly, the agent-relative reason that the person has for wanting to avoid the loss of a finger is *much* weaker than the reason she has for wanting to avoid the loss of both legs. Yet, this fact makes no difference to the way in which we

[50] This point was made forcefully by Bernard Williams in section IV.

[51] On what Parfit terms *wide value-based objective views* when one of our two possible acts would make things go in some way that would be impartially better, but the other act would make things go better either for ourselves or for those to whom we have close ties. We often have sufficient reasons to act in either of these ways (Parfit, 2011, 137-141).

evaluate the options that are open to her. The loss of either a finger or of one's legs seems sufficient to provide one with rational licence to act in other ways.

This, in turn, has ramifications for the way in which we assess the conduct of affluent people. According to what has been said so far, these people have sufficient reason not to assist when they stand to incur serious costs by doing so. The issue that the imprecise comparability between reasons raises is whether much weaker agent-relative reasons might also be enough to support a conclusion of this type. We need to know whether it is possible to resist the claim that even minor costs provide affluent people with sufficient reason not to assist those living in extreme poverty. In practice, many affluent people insist that the refusal to forgo even small things is rational. We need to know whether this is, in fact, the case.

c. Decisive Reasons

The first response to the claim, that even minor personal costs provide affluent people with sufficient reason not to assist, focuses upon the Extreme Comparison. We have already said that agent-neutral and agent-relative reasons are not wholly incomparable. In situations where the choice we face is between a minute of discomfort and the death of several people, imprecise comparability between reasons makes no difference to the final evaluation of options. The first response holds that this is also true in the present case: we can reason *by analogy* from an understanding of the Extreme Comparison to conclusions about what the affluent have reason to do. In support of this proposition, it is possible to draw upon research about effective interventions that have already been discussed.[52] This data suggests that it is possible to provide a child with an additional year of primary school education for somewhere in the region of ten dollars. The first response holds that there is usually nothing of even *vaguely* equivalent value that most affluent people are in a position to achieve by retaining this money and spending it on themselves. Indeed, it simply cannot be rational for someone, who understands what is going on, to purchase luxury goods and trinkets, while other people remain illiterate and lack what they need in order to stay alive. An objection based on imprecise comparability between reasons, therefore, lacks traction in the present case.

This line of argument is unlikely to convince the sceptic. Even if one accepts that there is decisive reason to act when faced with the Extreme Comparison, this person will deny that the

[52] See the Introduction, Part V, for the relevant data.

analogy holds for the present case. Firstly, with the Extreme Comparison, the outcome was specified in advance. However, in practice, there is some uncertainty about the effect that allocating resources to aid organisations will have on a particular occasion. Many of these organisations are good at what they do, but the value of acting in this way is less secure than the analogy supposes. Secondly, the critic will also want to deny that, what people stand to forgo, by allocating money to aid organisations, is really akin to the proverbial 'minute of discomfort' that the original example made reference to. Even the minor costs we have discussed are, one might think, more serious than that. Indeed, the ability to purchase and possess certain commodities is an important source of happiness for many people living in consumer societies. Furthermore, the sense of future security generated by ample wealth is something that cannot be taken lightly. To forgo these things, in whole or in part, is, the critic argues, to incur real and non-trivial personal cost. In this regard, she agrees with the opinion of most affluent people.

While there is some truth in each of these claims, there are also limits on how far an argument of this type can progress. On the one hand, there are many types of intervention that we have good reason to believe are highly effective. On the other, the weight of agent-relative reasons is a matter of objective fact, not subjective opinion.[53] In order to count as a reason for action, a consideration must be such that it would furnish any agent who is similarly positioned with identical reason to act in that way. When we attend to claims made by the affluent about the cost of doing more, it is not clear that they pass this test. Personal reasons are not simply what an agent takes them to be. Affluent people may be mistaken about the things that provide them with agent-relative reasons for action. They may also be mistaken about the importance of these goods. Furthermore, there is reason to be wary of the inflation of personal claims in the present context. We have already seen that inaction is often morally questionable. Yet, by exaggerating the cost of assistance, affluent people can attempt to justify this omission and cast it in a rational light.[54] This is something that they have reason to want to do and it provides us with another reason not to take their claims at face value. Once we recalibrate claims about cost, in order to take this effect into account, an analogy with the Extreme Comparison may well be compelling.

[53] Although these reasons are relativised to the agent who has them, they remain both objective and general: in order to count as a reason, they must be reasons for anyone in that particular position to act in that way (Nagel, 1986, 153).

[54] As a result of this tendency we must, 'guard against self-deception and the escalation of personal claims simply to resist burdensome moral demands' (Nagel, 1986, 187).

The second response to the argument from imprecise comparability proceeds differently. It starts by noting that the argument in question posits a serious *disconnect* between what morality requires and what reason permits of affluent people. Whereas morality requires them to incur *moderate* costs in order to assist, they are also understood to have sufficient all-things-considered reason not to incur even *minor* costs in service of this end. The extent of this schism is something that needs to be explained. Crucially, the claim that morality and reason come apart in this way is markedly more plausible when the moral requirement, in question, stems from a moral theory that requires strict impartiality in our dealings with others. These theories do not accord direct weight to personal considerations. However, this is not true of the moral requirement discussed so far. As we have seen, this moral requirement is the product of an overlapping consensus, which includes mixed moral theories as well. On these more moderate accounts, the idea that morality and reason come apart in this way becomes harder to sustain.

To see why this is the case, it is helpful to consider the impartial Act Consequentialist conception of morality discussed earlier. On this account, people are required to continually service the impartially best state of affairs all of the time. Personal considerations do directly influence the content of moral requirements. Yet, they are real nonetheless, and they affect what a person has reason to do. Once they are factored into all-things-considered practical deliberation, it is plausible, therefore, to think that they change the content of normative requirements and permissions in salient ways. Given that this is the case, impartial morality – which excludes agent-relative reasons – and requirements of reason – which take these considerations into account – will often tend to come apart in practice.

In contrast to this, mixed accounts of morality accord partial reasons and values considerable weight *inside* of the theoretical framework that they employ. Agent-relative considerations are counted, and accorded recognition, either through the inclusion of a personal prerogative or through the inclusion of a non-comparative standard of reasonable rejection. In this way, they influence our understanding of what morality requires. They have been counted, in one sense at least, by the time that a moral verdict is reached. In light of this, the demands of mixed moral theories tend to be less severe than those of their impartial counterparts – and the requirements of morality and practical reason draw closer together.

This structural feature of mixed moral theories makes it harder to leverage the same argument against them. Only rarely will one have sufficient personal reason to act in ways that

contravene the relevant moral requirements. This point is underscored by the fact putative examples of conflict between personal reasons and morality almost invariably take the requirements of impartial moral theory as the point of comparison. It is markedly less plausible, when the requirement in question issues from a mixed moral theory, that personal considerations retain enough residual weight to support a different conclusion about what the sum of reasons require.[55] If it is the case that mixed moral theories also require moderate sacrifice, on the part of affluent people, then it seems that reason cannot permit a great deal more than this. The contrary claim, that the requirements of morality and reason come apart in the case of assistance, requires us to embrace a major exception to the convergence of normative requirements that generally occurs under theories of this type.

Thirdly, the success of the argument from imprecise comparability between reasons turns on the notion that the provision of assistance is bad *for* affluent people, relative to alternative states of affairs that they could try to bring about. Impartial reasons to assist are extremely weighty. However, it is the contrary claim, about what would make things go best from the agent's own prudential point of view, which lends weight to the conclusion that they have sufficient reason to act in other ways. The final response takes issue with this central notion. More specifically, it suggests that the fact that affluent people would forgo personal goods, of the type previously mentioned, provides them with only *pro tanto* personal reason not to do so. What matters in the present context is that affluent people would incur *net* personal cost by assisting. Yet, this has not been demonstrated. Indeed, if it could be shown to the contrary, that assisting people living in extreme poverty was in some way good *for* affluent people, and that this benefit sometimes exceeds what they stand to lose by acting in this way, then there could be no doubt about what reason required of them. Assistance would, in this subset of cases, be the best option open to the agent when judged both impartially and in purely personal terms. The problem of imprecise comparability between reasons would not then arise. The third response holds that this is, in fact, the case.

There is reason to think that at least some agent-relative considerations that count in favour of assistance exist. However, their weight and character varies significantly according to the conception of well-being that we endorse. According to most theories of well-being, *happiness* is something that people have reason to want for themselves. It is also part of what makes a life go well. In virtue of this, an agent has reason to choose the action that would produce great happiness

[55] Scheffler, 1992, 57-59

for him or herself, all else being equal. This claim is fairly uncontroversial. Yet, it is also an oft-noted feature of hedonic goods that the direct pursuit of these things tends, in practice, to lead to the frustration of their attainment. This is the paradox of hedonism. In practice, much (but by no means all) enjoyment is a by-product of success in the pursuit of goals and ends that one believes to be worthwhile. These things typically include success in a career of one's choosing, and the development of lasting relationships with friends and family members. However, it has also seemed to many that there is no, in principle, distinction between the type of valued end that can and cannot contribute to the production of hedonic states of this type.[56] More concretely, there is no reason to believe that self-regarding aims can contribute to a person's happiness, whereas other-regarding ends cannot do so. In addition, there is no reason to think that assisting those who live in a wretched condition is not something that many people believe to be a worthwhile aim of this type. If this is the case, then it follows that affluent people could attain instrumental hedonic benefit by assisting.

There is considerable evidence in support of this view. At the anecdotal level, many people report feeling better after giving money to charity or providing assistance to strangers. In addition to this, social scientific models, which take account of this motive, have proved to be more effective at predicting human behaviour than those that do not.[57] Finally, neurological studies have recently provided further evidence for the 'warm glow effect' by highlighting the propensity of altruistic behaviour to stimulate reward centres in the brain.[58] The claim here is not that agent-relative considerations provide *the* reason for which the people in question act. Given the paradox of hedonism, and the likelihood that such motivation would prove self-defeating, this is unlikely to be the case. The claim is rather that assistance often carries with it this significant side-effect which diminishes the net personal cost of assisting in important ways. Indeed, for someone who already has a great deal, this may plausibly be one of the main opportunities for happiness that remains unexplored.[59] When this is the case, assistance could, in principle, be provided to those living in extreme poverty at no personal cost at all.[60]

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[56] Raz, 1999a, 309-311
[57] Andreoni, 1990, 473
[58] Elster, 2011, 67
[59] Preliminary evidence in support of the connection between other-directed behaviour and happiness can be found in E. Dunn *et al.*, 2008, 1687-1688 and Harbaugh *et al.*, 2007, 1622-1625.
[60] If we return to the Extreme Comparison, the wager here is that a person who chooses to save the lives of millions will end up happier than the person who decides to forgo a minute of discomfort – and that her life will go better in virtue of this fact.

This is an important finding. However, we should not allow a focus on the warm glow effect to detract from an understanding of other ways in which assistance might be good for affluent people. The value of assisting people living in extreme poverty can be viewed in at least two different guises. On the one hand, the action can be understood as an appropriate response to the *need* of other human beings. On the other, it can be understood as an action that successfully fulfils a *moral responsibility* that is held by the agent. The warm glow effect is more likely to be a by-product of the first type of perspective. The thought that we have helped a child, or contributed to some cause we believe in, is something that we might rightly take pride in. Few people feel the same way about moral duty. However, it is also important that we remain on good terms with ourselves over a longer time period. The aim of leading a morally decent life is one that many people take to be worthwhile. At the same time, the fact of inaction is often difficult to reconcile with this preferred picture of the self. In light of this, these people may also have other agent-relative reasons to assist: they find the thought that they are not good people somewhat troubling, and it threatens to erode their sense of self-worth if left unchecked.

An agent who feels the force of this predicament can respond to her situation in one of two ways. The first option is to alter her conduct so that it conforms better to the ideal of moral decency that she affirms. The second option is to deny the moral weight of the case for assistance, to deflect blame from oneself, and to try to avoid thinking about the matter. However, this option also comes at a cost to the agent. In the first instance, a person who proceeds in this way is required to hold beliefs that are epistemically irrational. Her view of the world, and of her own place in it, is motivated in large part by practical concerns of the type I have mentioned, rather than by an appreciation of what she judges to, in fact, be the case. As a result of this, the perspective may prove difficult to sustain, requiring a degree of *effort* on the part of the agent. In addition to this, the entire edifice of belief seems prone to collapse when disturbed by moments of deep reflection. This is particularly true towards the end of a person's life. Secondly, the agent who proceeds in this way might also be expected to live a life of *diminished spontaneity* given that her conduct is mediated through epistemic filters that she chooses to maintain. Thirdly, at a deeper level still, her *agency* seems to be compromised. She responds to the world not as it is, but as she wants it to be. Finally, this person risks loss of personal *integrity*. Her conduct is not a true reflection of what she values, and she is not really who she takes herself to be. These are quite serious personal costs. For the morally conscientious person, who finds the persistence of extreme poverty troubling, it may be less costly

simply to modify her conduct in certain ways. This is particularly true when this incongruity can be avoided by forgoing things that are only of little personal value.

Reflection of this type seems to push us beyond a hedonistic account of well-being, and towards an account that includes non-hedonic mental states as a component of what makes a person's life go well. Indeed, we might wonder whether happiness or enjoyment is the primary product of a life in which an agent remains true to what she values (irrespective of what this happens to be). For many people, this kind of life is better understood as one that feels *meaningful* from the perspective of the agent. After all, the pursuit of these goods may or may not be enjoyable. In striving to do better, we often experience moments of deep anxiety frustration. Nonetheless, these activities are essential to a sense of personal fulfilment. And this is something, quite aside from pleasure, that we all have reason to want for ourselves. To say all of this is not to assert, in utopian fashion, that one must necessarily look beyond oneself and towards the welfare of distant strangers in order to achieve a sense of meaning. Rather, it is to insist that action of the latter kind can also contribute indirectly to the sense that one's life matters in the grand scheme of things – and that an effect of this kind can also serve to diminish the personal cost of assisting. The extent to which this is the case will depend, in part, upon how heavily a person is invested in realising cosmopolitan goals. However, the provision of assistance does not need to take on the status of a personal project in order for a sense of meaning to result from it. The belief that actions mattered in this way is simply a by-product of achieving outcomes that the agent values.

Alternatively, reflection of this kind might push us towards a conception of well-being that identifies personal value in goods such as *autonomy* or *integrity*, that can be realised independently of the mental states of the agent. It is not enough, one might think, that people are happy, or that they believe that they have done something valuable with their lives. It must also be the case that they have, in fact, done something valuable with their life before it can be said to have gone well. They must partake in activities and realise ends that have objective value in their own right. These things include certain accomplishments, the development of personal capabilities, and the cultivation of loving relationships. However, they also include things like living a morally decent life and helping people living in extreme need – even if they are people whom one has never met. Taken together, these things can make a person's life go well. On these more expansive conceptions of well-being, they too are something that individual people have personal reason to bring about. Furthermore, this remains true whether they recognise it to be the case or not. Of course, there are still many things

that a person could choose to do or pursue that would make their life go well. It is not possible to engage with everything that is of value.[61] In light of this, it may not be the case that moral or other-regarding action is *necessary* for a life to go well, objectively speaking. However, the provision of assistance could, in principle, contribute to a life of this type. The non-contingent personal benefit that affluent people would accrue from acting in this way would then serve to offset personal reasons not to assist in a further subset of cases.[62] These reasons, unlike those considered previously, do not depend for their existence on recognition that helping people living in extreme poverty is a good or moral thing to do. If agent-relative reasons of this type exist, then they bear, in principle, upon the conduct of all affluent people.

In light of what has been said so far, we should conclude that the provision of assistance to people living in extreme poverty could be good *for* affluent people in certain ways. Resources set aside for this purpose are not always simply squandered from the personal point of view.[63] How much weight we should accord reasons of this type in practical deliberation depends, in turn, both upon the correct conception of well-being and upon the beliefs and circumstances of the particular agent. Given widespread disagreement about the first matter, it makes sense to focus primarily upon the instrumental benefit that other-regarding action can have for affluent people (with this benefit understood largely in terms of mental states). According to the argument developed here, agent-relative considerations of this kind sometimes defeat countervailing considerations *of the very same kind* that favour acting in other ways. Indeed, one might sensibly think that the hedonic dividend, feeling of fulfilment and sense of personal value realised by acting in this way could, on occasion, match or even surpass the more transient hedonic benefit created by patterns of commodity consumption and expenditure that the affluent would have to alter in order to assist at a level

[61] Raz, 2001, Ch.1

[62] With regard to the extreme case, the wager here is that the life of person who chooses to save the lives of millions will go better in virtue of this fact and that this remains true even if she gets no happiness or sense of worth from what she has done.

[63] On this point, see Raz who considers a moral requirement to contribute one-tenth of one's income to charity. 'Surely,' he writes, 'here there can be no doubt that the moral requirement is essentially against my interest. It is a requirement to reduce my resources in favour of others, and reducing my resources is against my interest. Indeed so, unless what I do with my resources is not reduce them but use them. I am not acting against my interest when I go to see a film, even though I buy a ticket to do so. This is not simply "reducing" my resources. It is using them. So the description of [the] tithe example is already loaded. If giving (that sum) of money to charity is an act that benefits me then the fact that it depletes my resources does not show that it is against my interest. It is just an ordinary case of using my resources… Looking after the poor, teaching, tending to the ill, and so on are all activities which can benefit agents. They can give valuable content to their lives and bring satisfaction… So giving to charity is good for the giver, or at least we have no reason to think otherwise' (Raz, 1999a, 309).

beyond which that presently obtains. When this is the case, assistance can be provided at *no personal cost*.[64] Assisting those in serious need is what these people have decisive reason to do.

Furthermore, even when considerations of this type do not make the provision of assistance net beneficial in agent-relative terms, the cost of assistance is likely to be diminished to the point of triviality in a further subset of cases. In these cases, an analogy with the Extreme Comparison will stand up to scrutiny. When the personal cost of doing more is either trivial or non-existent, affluent people have decisive reason to assist. It is contrary to reason that they fail to do so.

Conclusion

This chapter has defended the claim that the majority of affluent people are morally required to do more to assist people living in a condition of extreme poverty. It has been argued that only those who are already badly off, or who have weighty personal reasons not to act in other ways, are exempt from the requirement to do so. This remains true even on accounts of morality that are fairly moderate, requiring only equal respect for other people rather than the stronger notion of equal concern. These moral theories take the cost of assisting seriously. Yet, the degree to which they can accommodate personal considerations is constrained in certain ways. Indeed, it remains important that the weight of the prerogative or thresholds that they endorse is consistent with the rationale for the inclusion of these elements as an aspect of moral theory to begin with. Any moral theory that is permissive enough to sanction inaction tends to run foul of this constraint. The permissions that they grant are not needed in order to reflect the independence of the personal standpoint or to respect the integrity of the agent. Failure to assist people living in extreme poverty is, therefore, for most affluent people, a moral omission of considerable scale. The majority of people fall short of what morality requires and their conduct is, in this sense at least, morally wrong.

Secondly, this chapter argued that many people also ought to do more to assist people living in extreme poverty all-things-considered. It is something that they have decisive reason to do. There is little support for this thesis among the affluent. Few believe that inaction in the face of extreme poverty is contrary to reason. Furthermore, any attempt to show that this is the case has to address the difficulty of comparing different kinds of normative consideration. Nonetheless, this chapter argued that the Decisive Reasons Claim is correct. In support of this view, it noted that

[64] Mogensen, 2013, 8

there are often good agent-relative reasons for affluent people to assist those living in extreme poverty. These reasons sometimes offset the cost of acting in that way altogether. It also argued that the present case bears a close resemblance to Extreme Comparisons. In these cases – where the impartial good of acting in one way is very great indeed, and the personal cost of doing so is trivial – the impartially better act is required by reason. Finally, it argued that the Decisive Reasons Claim fits better with certain structural features of the relationship between morality and practical reason. Mixed moral theories already accord weight to agent-relative reasons. If they require people to assist, then reason itself cannot permit the affluent to do a great deal less than that.

The truth of these two claims lends support to the notion that people living in affluent societies currently occupy one of three possible normative positions. Firstly, there is a small minority of people who are *not required either by morality or by reason* to do more to assist people living in extreme poverty. These are people who would incur serious personal costs if they allocated further resources to aid organisations. They can point to the existence of an agent-centred prerogative or moral threshold in order to justify their refusal to do more on this front. Secondly, there is a group of people who are required by morality to do more, but who also *have sufficient non-moral personal reason* to act in other ways. Indeed, the arguments advanced in this chapter point to a gap between requirements of morality and the requirements of reason in the present case. Whereas the former require affluent individuals to incur moderate costs in order to assist those living in extreme poverty, the latter require action in service of this end only when the personal cost of doing so is minor or non-existent. Those who incur minor costs in order to provide assistance, but who do no more than that, act in a way that is morally wrong but not in a way that is contrary to reason. Finally, there is a group of people who are *required both by morality and by all-things-considered reason* to do more to assist. These people do not incur even minor costs to help those living in extreme poverty. They do not act even though they could, in many cases, do more without being any worse off at all.

Given that the majority of affluent people do not contribute to humanitarian organisations, they fall into this third category. Their conduct is not consistent with reason. While we can explain the conduct of those who would incur greater costs by pointing to their reasons for action, inaction by this latter group of people still needs to be explained.

Chapter Three: Explaining Inaction

The previous chapter defended the claim that individual people, living in affluent societies, often have decisive reason to assist those living in a condition of extreme poverty at a level that has not yet been reached. In many cases, there is no comparably weighty reason for them to act in other ways. This remains true even if we allow that there are agent-relative reasons for people to value and pursue their own particular ends.[1] It also remains true once we take into account the fact that the decision of whether to assist is made under conditions of uncertainty. What, if anything, these people stand to lose by assisting is simply too little, relative to the value of the lives of those living in extreme poverty, for inaction to be construed as a proper response to reasons. What they would forgo, even in terms of their own self-interest, is too small for inaction to cast in a fully rational light. Most people accept that situations of this type arise some of the time. I believe that they are a relatively common feature of modern life. Among people who live in rich countries, most of their disposable income is now spent on non-essential goods.[2] The consumption of luxury items continues to rise at an exponential rate. Furthermore, it seem likely that many people would not even notice if the money in question was discretely withdrawn from their bank accounts and used to help people who currently go unaided. However, inaction continues to be the norm. Only a tiny fraction of private wealth is used to alleviate the plight of people living in distant places and overall levels of charitable giving are in long-term decline.[3]

When the Decisive Reasons Claim is correct, inaction is not only morally problematic but also difficult to explain. It will not be possible to identify moral or non-moral considerations that render the conduct of affluent people intelligible in a way that is consistent with the idea that they are both *rational* and *fully informed*. In order to explain their conduct, in these cases we need to develop a different form of explanation altogether: we must turn to accounts of cognitive

[1] For a defence of the claim about agent-relative reasons, see Chapter Two. On the concept of an agent-relative reason, see Nagel, 1986, 152, 158-59.

[2] In the United States, the bottom 20% of earners spend just 45% of their income on food, clothing and shelter (Spayd, 1996, 26 May). Euromonitor data from 2009 shows that less than 7% of the money citizens spend is used to buy food. This is the lowest among of any countries on record (Civil Eats, 2011, March 29). For most families, the economic challenge is not to acquire the goods they need but those that they want, including holidays abroad and second homes (Frank, 1999, 15).

[3] Private giving accounts for 7 cents for every $100 of income earned in the United States (Singer, 2009, 24). Total giving (to all causes) fell as a fraction of national income from 2.26% in 1964 to 1.61% in 1998, a relative decline of 29%. In this regard, Robert Putnam comments that 'our spending for others has lagged well behind our spending on ourselves' (Putnam, 2000, 123, 126).

psychology and practical reason that cast light on the way in which people think and deliberate about what to do.

We have already said that, when practical deliberation is successful, it must be the case that it leads the agent to act in a way that is consistent with the reasons that bear upon his or her choice of action.[4] Under these conditions, a person will do what he or she ought to do. In order for this to be the case, a number of conditions must be met. Firstly, the person in question must have reasonably accurate beliefs about the situation that they are faced with, and about the options that are open to them. These are *beliefs about the world*. Secondly, the person must have reasonably correct *beliefs about value*. He or she must understand not only that certain considerations obtain, but also that they count in favour or against different courses of action to a certain extent. Thirdly, the agent must reason in light of these beliefs to *correct conclusions* about the action (or actions) that he or she has most reason to perform. These conclusions are the agent's normative judgements or ought-beliefs. Finally, the agent must be *motivated* to act on all-things-considered judgements of this type. The person must be moved to do what he or she believes there is most reason to do in the case at hand.

It goes without saying that not all affluent people are the same. Levels of assistance, like affluence itself, vary across the population as a whole.[5] Nonetheless, for reason and action to come apart in the way that has been specified, one or more of these conditions must not be met in practice. This chapter sets out to explain inaction in cases where the cost of assisting is negligible, by looking at the way in which each condition bears upon the deliberation and conduct of affluent people.

It is structured as follows. The first section looks at the possibility that false beliefs explain inaction, focusing on the views that people have about world poverty, about the effectiveness of aid, about the cost of assisting and about the amount that is being done already in this area. Finding these explanatory resources to be inadequate, the second section then looks at the kind of judgements that affluent people make about matters of value, addressing the possibility that they accord little value to human life, that they place a great premium on their own well-being or that they judge people living in extreme poverty undeserving of assistance. In conjunction with the first kind of consideration these factors shed some light on the patterns of behaviour that we observe.

[4] See Chapter One, Part II.

[5] When asked what kind of charities they had given to in the past six months, only 64% of the British public reported any form of donation. Among these people, 32% reported giving to charities which help children, 21% to those that help victims of natural or man-made disasters and 15% to those which provide aid *for people in poor countries* (TNS, 2010, 19).

The third section looks at the way in which affluent people deliberate about assistance, focusing upon the way in which different heuristics and biases impact upon the normative conclusions that are reached in this area. I argue that these factors play an important role in explaining inaction, leading people to think that they have sufficient reason to act in other ways (even when this is not the case). I also suggest that a compound explanation which incorporates an understanding of these factors, alongside the considerations set out in earlier sections, is sufficient to account for inaction in the majority of cases. The final part of this chapter considers whether affluent people are akratic or weak willed when it comes to forming the intention to act. However, it rejects this explanation of inaction in favour of an account that stresses the role of false belief, substantive error and faulty reasoning.

I. Beliefs About the Facts: World Poverty, Capacity, Cost and Other Factors

When we deliberate about what to do, we do so on the basis of an understanding of the world and our place in it. Factual beliefs, in conjunction with beliefs about value, feed into judgements about what we ought to do all-things-considered. Even if deliberation is sound in other respects, the false belief that something does not obtain when it does, or that it does obtain when it does not, can lead us astray by generating the appearance of reasons to act in other ways. We will then respond to the reasons that we would have had if our beliefs about the situation had been correct. Given that this is not the case, reason and action may come apart. Failure to do what we have reason to do can be explained in light of that fact.[6] Mistakes of this type may help to explain the conduct of affluent people. In order to establish whether this is the case or not, we need to know more about their beliefs that relate to world poverty, their own capacity to assist and the cost of doing so. If the cost of assisting is thought to outweigh the benefit of doing so, then affluent people may conclude that they have sufficient reason to act in other ways. Inaction would then be explained in light of that fact.

When asked about the problem of *global poverty* few people, if any, respond with surprise to the fact that the phenomenon exists. Almost everyone living in the United States and the United Kingdom is aware that there are many millions of people around the world who live in a state of

[6] On this point, Joseph Raz writes that, 'explanation of behaviour turns on the agent's beliefs that reasons apply rather than on the fact that they do apply and we can understand behaviour even if we think [that a person] was wrong in his beliefs about reasons' (Raz, 1999b, 17).

hunger and acute susceptibility to disease as a result of severe material deprivation. Information of this type is frequently found in the media and in the publication materials of advocacy organisations. Furthermore, the plight of those living in this condition is thought by most people to warrant attention. A recent survey found that 73 per cent of the British population reported being 'concerned' or 'very concerned' about the level of poverty in poor countries.[7] In the United States, a similar survey found that 87 per cent of Americans favoured the provision of food and medical assistance to people in needy countries.[8] Correct perception is sometimes impeded by the mistaken belief that the figures used to measure extreme poverty fail take into account the price differentials between countries.[9] Theorists such as Jamie Mayerfield have also pointed to limited experience of poverty as a factor that constrains the ability of the affluent to comprehend the severity of this situation.[10] Yet, the importance of these obstacles remains to be determined. The condition of extreme poverty usually carries with it very serious associations in the minds of affluent people. Indeed, the mental transition from poverty to famine, disease and mortality is one that is easily made. Furthermore, the need to alleviate extreme poverty is often identified as a key priority for wealthy nations.[11] Taken together, these findings suggest that affluent people recognise that extreme poverty has a serious human cost and that the alleviation of this condition is an important aim.

At the same time, affluent people tend to believe that their own individual or collective *capacity to assist* people living in this condition is circumscribed in important ways – with a small minority of the population doubting the possibility of assistance altogether. People in this latter category tend to endorse deterministic theses about the causes of poverty, such as the notion that overpopulation is the key driver of this condition, and to infer from this that any effort to prolong

[7] TNS, 2010, 21

[8] Programme on International Policy Attitudes, 2001, November 13, 4.

[9] In practice, the $1.25 dollars per day threshold used by the World Bank to monitor extreme poverty is a Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) adjusted figure. Those living in extreme poverty exist on a daily consumption of goods and services that is equivalent to (or less than) the amount of goods that can be purchased in the United States for that sum of money. In virtue of this fact, the claim that 'a little goes a long way over there' is not true in any meaningful sense. Some have expressed concern that this method of adjustment *underestimates* the number of people living in extreme poverty (Pogge, 2010, Ch.4).

[10] Jamie Mayerfield writes that, 'what so often passes for "suffering", for want of a richer vocabulary or clearer powers of discernment, in the experience of people who enjoy a firm material and psychological foundation in their lives, is not genuine suffering and can only be called so by the most distant and strained analogy' (Mayerfield, 1999, 46).

[11] When asked about priorities for government spending in the international arena, the British public identified poverty alleviation as the most important issue. When rankings were adjusted to include domestic goals and priorities, international poverty alleviation fell behind spending on health and education but was deemed more important than spending on the police, national defence or social services (TNS, 2010, 17-16).

life today will only yield further suffering in the long run.[12] More commonly, corruption and lack of education are cited as the major contributors to poverty, with natural disasters, war and conflict also playing a significant role.[13] Among these factors, beliefs about corruption are perhaps the most important. A large segment of the British public (57 per cent) agree with the statement that 'corruption in poor countries makes it pointless to donate money' and a further 53 per cent agree with the more general statement that 'most financial aid in poor countries is wasted.'[14] Similar findings hold true for the United States, where more than half of people surveyed (53 per cent) agree that 'the corruption of governments in African countries is so widespread that US aid does little good there. The US should stop throwing good money after bad.'[15] These studies indicate that the idea of local elites siphoning off resources that have been set aside for assistance is one that looms large in the public imagination of both societies.[16] This fear is then sometimes compounded by the idea of wasteful government bureaucracy squandering resources. Concerns of the latter kind are somewhat ameliorated when providers of assistance are non-governmental organisations (NGOs). American respondents suggested that reputable NGOs were two or three times more likely than government bodies to deliver assistance successfully, and people in the United Kingdom give these organisations vastly more credit for work being done in poor countries than government counterparts.[17] Nonetheless, scepticism about the efficacy of assistance, whether administered by state or non-state actors, appears to be the predominant trend.

Beliefs about the personal *cost of assistance* are perhaps the most difficult to ascertain, varying according to the specific outcome in question, and the degree of confidence that people are required to have in this goal being achieved. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, while people are sceptical of

[12] When asked about the causes of poverty, 18% of the British public mentioned overpopulation and birth control as an issue. Clearly not all of these people endorse the Neo-Malthusian hypothesis outlined above (TNS, 2010, 23).

[13] In response to the question 'What do you think are the main causes of poverty in poor countries?' 56% cited corrupt leaders and governments, 23% cited lack of adequate education, 18% cited overpopulation and lack of birth control, 15% cite natural disasters, 14% cited war and conflict and 10% cited international debt (ibid. 23).

[14] ibid. 25, 28

[15] When asked to estimate what percentage of US aid money that goes to poor countries ends up in the pockets of corrupt government officials, there the median estimate was 50% and the mean estimate was 53.8% (Programme on International Policy Attitudes, 2001, November 13, 14, 11).

[16] The prevalence of these beliefs is no doubt in part due to the memorability of the diagnosis, the ease with which one can imagine circumstances of this type arising and the fact that corruption is now often discussed (Slovic *et al.*, 1982, 465).

[17] Admittedly in the American case, the overall efficacy of these organisations was still not thought to be very high. The median estimate for how much aid gets through to people who really need it was 10% and the mean was 23%. These figures rose to 30% and 37% respectively when the organisation in question was a private charitable organisation such as Care or Save the Children (Programme on International Policy Attitudes, 2001, November 13, 6-7). For British figures *see* TNS, 2010, 32.

extremely low-end claims about the price for which assistance can be rendered, they are prepared to accept mid-range estimates that take administrative overheads into consideration. A quick survey of advocacy materials reveals claims such as the following: a single donation of '£18 can provide safe water for twenty people', '£25 could provide 35 pregnant women with HIV tests to help protect their baby' and '£134 would pay for a measles vaccination for 1500 children'.[18] Statements about the efficacy of assistance can be presented in several ways. If we assume that these statements are designed to maximise expected revenue from donors, then they can be understood to provide some idea of the price range for which the British public believes assistance can be rendered. I would suggest, by extension, that many people agree with something like Peter Unger's claim that, for $200, one could take a 'typically sick' 2-year old and give him a greater than 90 per cent chance, at the age of 6, of living to 21.[19] Indeed, among those who already give, many would be alarmed if it were discovered that life-saving assistance was considerably more expensive to provide than that.[20]

Beliefs about cost are complicated for another reason. In order to know what affluent people think about this matter, it is not enough simply to identify the price for which they believe assistance can be provided. These sums then need to be indexed to a further set of judgements about the way in which the retention or allocation of this money would bear upon the life and livelihood of the giver. As Avner Offer reminds us, 'economic goods are not final goods but intermediate ones.'[21] Someone who is rich will have to forgo less than someone who is poor in order to provide the same measure of assistance. This chapter addresses the class of people for whom the figures just mentioned are not a lot of money. We are concerned here with the conduct of those whose lives would be barely worsened, if at all, by providing assistance (beyond what they give at present) on this scale. However, it is not clear that affluent people conceive of their own situation in this light. In practice, they tend to believe that assistance will always require them to incur personal cost, and that these costs are of a greater magnitude than is actually the case.

There are four factors that feed into judgements of this type. The first factor is the common tendency to believe that money allocated for the purpose of assistance is a dead loss from the perspective of the agent concerned. This view follows from the notion that money used to help

[18] OXFAM, 2012; UNICEF, 2012; Medecins Sans Frontieres, 2012.
[19] This figure is closer to $275 once we take inflation since 1996 into consideration (Unger, 1996, 148). Jeffrey Sachs arrived at a similar figure for the amount of money needed to save a child's life by distributing of mosquito nets (Singer, 2010, 87).
[20] Recent estimates by Give Well suggest that the cost of saving a life through action of this type may in fact be somewhere in the $2000 to $11,000 range.
[21] Offer, 2006, 28

others is money not spent on oneself, and therefore something that cannot contribute to one's own well-being in a significant way.[22] This is not necessarily the case. Indeed, if the considerations set out in Chapter Two are correct, affluent people also stand to gain by assisting.[23] Nonetheless, the propensity to believe that their well-being is related to that of other people in a *zero-sum* fashion remains in place.

The second reason to think that affluent people overestimate the cost of assisting is the common propensity towards *materialism*. Many affluent people believe that wealth and material possessions are the core determinants of happiness. There is a large body of evidence that suggests that this is not the case: that happiness is largely derived from the relationships we form, and from other sorts of goods.[24] It also seems to be true that those who cling to strong forms of materialism are, in practice, less happy than those who do not.[25] Nonetheless, the prevalence of the contrary view leads those who affirm it to believe that their lives will, as a matter of fact, get worse, should they diminish their stock of money and material possessions, than would actually be the case.

The third source of mistaken belief about cost stems from the fact that many affluent people believe they live closer to a condition of *objective need* than is in fact the case.[26] Research in this area indicates that unmet need is hugely detrimental to well-being, whereas reduced expenditure on luxury is not. If the affluent deliberate about assistance on the unrealistic assumption that their needs will not be met in the event that they did more, then judgements about the cost of assistance will again be off the mark.[27]

Finally, research from experimental psychology indicates that people are fairly bad at judging the effects of future events on their well-being. Due to the propensity to *focus* disproportionately on the money or the good in question, and the failure to consider ways in which they might *adjust* to future situations, prospective costs are often thought to be greater than they turn out to be.[28] Nonetheless, the cumulative influence of these errors is hard to determine. Affluent

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[22] Simon Blackburn suggests that the idea of a direct opposition between egoism and altruism tends to derive from thinking of other-regarding behaviour in terms of a cash transaction. Viewed in this way, it seems that if my neighbour gets the money I do not, that if I get the money he does not, and that I am well-positioned to choose one outcome over the other. He suggests that, 'perhaps too much of our social life is perceived in [these] terms… not all relationships are "zero sum"' (Blackburn, 1998, 142-143).
[23] *See* Chapter Two.
[24] E. Dunn *et al.*, 2008; E. Dunn *et al.*, 2011
[25] Offer, 2006, 30; Kasser 2002; Kasser and Kanner, 2004
[26] Stutzer, 2004
[27] These people might then agree that the 'affluent' ought to do more by way of assistance, without judging their own conduct to be implicated by this statement.
[28] Kahneman *et al.*, 2006, 1908-1910; Aknin *et al.*, 2009, 523-527

people may well believe that they would incur costs when this is not the case and that the cost of assisting is greater than it actually is. However, the amount of money involved is often still judged by these same people to be quite small indeed.

A final set of beliefs that bear upon assistance concern the amount being done already, either directly or indirectly, by affluent people to alleviate the condition of those living in extreme poverty. With regard to the indirect contribution that they make, there is a well-known propensity among citizens to vastly overestimate the amount that their governments spend on foreign aid. One recent study in the United States found that the median estimate for the percentage of the federal budget allocated to aid was 25 per cent.[29] In reality, this figure is less than one per cent.[30] In virtue of this fact, the amount of assistance provided via tax revenue is fairly limited. As a percentage of national income, government spending on aid places the United States one place from bottom on the list of major donors. Furthermore, Jeffrey Sachs has suggested the average American pays only $4 each year to assist the world's poorest 600 million people.[31] Nonetheless, many Americans believe that they live in an exceptionally charitable nation. This misconception has an analogue at the individual level. As Robert Putnam notes, 'giving time and money to help others is a long and distinguished tradition in American society.'[32] Comparative studies support this view, suggesting that both philanthropy and volunteering rates in the United States are relatively high.[33] However, only a small amount of this time and money is directed towards helping those living in extreme poverty. According to the most authoritative survey on private philanthropy in the United State, only 5 per cent of private donations address 'international issues'.[34] In light of this, American generosity does not intersect with the plight of those living in extreme poverty in a serious way.

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[29] This figure rises to a staggering 45% among those without a high school diploma (WorldPublicOpinon.org, 2010 November 30, 1).

[30] Furthermore, only part of this allocation is need-based. Aid is more often used to serve geo-political and economic ends (Alesina and Dollar, 2000, 33).

[31] The United States spent 0.16% of its Gross National Income (GNI) on overseas development aid in the period 2000-09. This is less than the 21 of the other countries who have their aid allocation monitored by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). The relevant figure for the United Kingdom is 0.4%. This places it in joint tenth place among donor states (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011, 229). Sachs is quoted in Krugman, 2000, July 19, A29.

[32] Putnam, 2000*,* 117

[33] Ladd, 1999, 131

[34] If we want to know how much money is directed towards those living in extreme poverty, the picture is complicated in a number of ways. The 'international affairs' category includes organisations that work to promote peace and security or run student exchange programmes, as well as those that serve humanitarian and development-related ends. At the same time, a large amount of money (35%) is donated to religious organisations and to human services (9%). Some of this money may end up helping those in the poorest countries. However, Peter Singer suggests that, in the case of religious institutions, less than 10% of the money makes its way on to these people (Giving USA Foundation, 2011, 6; Singer, 2010, 24).

We are now in a position to consider how beliefs about the world bear upon the deliberation of the affluent. Taken singularly or together, do these beliefs explain inaction in cases of the type currently under consideration? There are at least three ways in which this might be the case.

In the first instance, affluent people might simply judge that the *cost* of providing further assistance outweighs the benefits of doing so. As we have seen, there is a tendency to underestimate the severity of extreme poverty and to believe that the costs associated with this course of action are of a greater magnitude than is actually the case.

Secondly, inaction might be explained by doubts about the *efficacy* of assistance. If affluent people do not believe that they are able to assist people living in extreme poverty, then they will not judge it as something that they have reason to do. However, beliefs about the redundancy of assistance do not need to be so extreme. If this capacity is thought to be severely curtailed by the prevalence of corruption or waste, then the expected value trying to assist could be reduced to the point at which it no longer appears to be the best option. In response to arguments of this type, advocates of assistance often note that, given the very great value of what one could achieve by providing assistance to a person living in extreme poverty, aid organisations would have to be extremely ineffective before the use of personal resources in this way stopped being the option with the greatest expected value.[35] Yet, taken in conjunction with the beliefs invoked by the first type of explanation, this need not be the case. If the costs associated with assistance are overestimated or imagined, and the gains associated with that action are underestimated or ignored, then the amount of uncertainty about the latter (and certainty about the former) that is needed in order to prevent assistance from seeming like a good option may not be as great as its advocates suppose.

A third explanation of inaction centres upon false beliefs about the amount of assistance already being provided. According to this account, most affluent people judge they have already done their *fair share* by way of assistance and hold that this fact counts against doing any more. Unwillingness to 'pick up the slack' caused by the inaction of others is understood to count against assistance, and this remains the case even in cases where the cost of helping is small and the rate of success high.[36] In a costly and risky venture, the third view holds that it is considerations of this type that are decisive.

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[35] Unger, 1996, 149

[36] Liam Murphy suggests that judgements of this type play an important role in common sense moral thought, but does not believe that they fully explain inaction (Murphy, 2000, 3-4).

If one or more of these claims are correct, then it may be possible to explain inaction, on the part of affluent people, simply by reference to their beliefs about the world. On this view of things, affluent people misapprehend the situation. They then reach mistaken conclusions about what they have reason to do. Finally, they adjust their conduct in light of these false beliefs. As a result of this, they do not act. Yet, there is reason to be wary of accounts of this type. Firstly, these reported beliefs *may or may not be those that affluent people truly hold*. It is not always the case that what people believe and what they claim to believe are one and the same thing. Secondly, even if the beliefs are genuine, the explanations considered above may *misrepresent the role that they play in deliberation*. Rather than serving as premises in deliberation about poverty and assistance, these beliefs may be affirmed after-the-fact in order to make judgements reached on independent grounds appear more palatable in some way. These beliefs would then be *motivated* rather than *motivating*. Crucially, beliefs invoked in either of these two ways do not lead to the conduct that they are held by the agent to explain.

There is special reason to think that this could be true of the beliefs that have been considered so far. The decision not to assist those living in extreme poverty is one that has very serious consequences for the lives of other people. In the absence of robust justification, it is the sort of action to which moral sanction often attaches. Letting others die without good reason is a serious wrong. Therefore, when conduct concerns the life or death of other people, there is weighty incentive to cast suspect behaviour in a morally acceptable light. Furthermore, while moral evaluation can take different forms, the appropriateness of blame is usually determined by reference to the content of a person's beliefs.[37] As a result of this, one way in which to make conduct appear less blameworthy is to deny knowledge of certain important facts. This attempt to deflect blame by misrepresenting what one knows serves to protect the individual both from the censure of the self and others. Taken collectively, Stanley Cohen suggests that the need to be free – both of troubling recognition and its consequences – has led, in Britain and the United States, to the emergence of entire *cultures of denial*.[38]

Is there any way by which to test these hypothetical explanations and to get a clearer picture of the role played by false beliefs? One way in which to do so is to consider how affluent people

[37] The degree of blame that attaches to a person who is ignorant, but who should have known better, is typically less forceful than the blame that attaches to someone who is aware of the facts and still acts wrongly.

[38] Cohen suggests that the need to avoid thinking about the consequences of poverty and atrocities has led to a situation in which denial, far from being an aberrant state, has become the normal state of affairs (Cohen, 2001, Ch.11).

respond to evidence that contradicts the things that they hold to be true. If their beliefs are genuine, and bear upon the outcome of deliberation, then we would expect the affluent to show an interest in this type of information and to modify their conduct accordingly. Yet, rarely is either expectation born out in practice. We have already said, for example, that people may fail to understand that the measure of poverty adjusts for price differentials between countries and that this could, in turn, influence their judgement. However, among those who do assert that 'a little goes a long way over there', few are interested in the measurement of poverty. In my experience, information about the true nature of the indicators rarely, if ever, prompts a radical re-evaluation of patterns of giving.[39] The same thing can be said of those who embrace deterministic theses about the causal drivers of poverty. We might expect these people to be relieved to discover that many of their own fatalistic beliefs about this condition are misguided.[40] Yet, rarely is this the case in practice. Indeed, the same can be said of those who point to corruption and waste in order to explain their own failure to do more, and also for those who claim that the amount already being done generates reasons not to assist.[41] The reception of new information is always lukewarm at best.

No direct inference can be made from observations of this type to conclusions about the role that false belief plays in deliberation. Those who ascribe to the notion that denial is widespread will hold that the reason this new information has no effect on the conduct of affluent people is because they already know the truth about the situation, and that they do not act in spite of this fact. But it is also possible that the reason exposure to information yields no change in conduct is because the false beliefs that affluent people entertain, though genuine, are not successfully displaced. In this vein, Leif Wenar notes that the entities tasked with disseminating information about extreme poverty sometimes lack epistemic credibility in the eyes of the audience they target.[42] More precisely,

[39] I have myself attempted to explain the PPP adjustment mechanism to many non-acting affluent people over the past decade. The response to information of this type is invariably underwhelming.

[40] After all, on this view population growth is thought to be unmanageable without starvation as a mechanism of population control (Shue, 1996, 103).

[41] Many developing countries are not particularly corrupt and many aid projects directly target those in need without engaging government intermediaries. A useful summary of corruption indicators can be found in Sachs, 2005, 313. Commenting on beliefs about corruption, Andrew Darnton concludes that, 'it may be that the public partly use corruption as a post-hoc justification for their almost instinctive reluctance to get engaged in global policy issues, to justify their inherent reluctance to donate their money' (Darnton, 2009, 16). With regard to levels of waste, many humanitarian and development organisations are cognisant of public concern in this area, embracing stringent accounting guidelines and keep administrative overheads to a minimum. Finally, with regard to estimates about the percentage of the federal budget spent on foreign aid, Steven Kull notes that, 'it is quite extraordinary that this extreme overestimation has persisted for so many years, even among those with higher education' (WorldPublicOpinon.org, 2010, November 30).

[42] Wenar, 2011, 107-108

Wenar suggests that the information provided by aid agencies is often compromised by their strategic interest in achieving certain results. Organisations that report on their own efficacy, on the low cost of assistance and perhaps even on the situation of people in far off places, are difficult to believe. As a result of this, affluent people may not take notice of what is said, or they may not believe what they hear. If the problem of mistrust is widespread enough, then false beliefs about poverty, about its causes and about levels of assistance already provided may remain in place, impeding action even though they appear to have been addressed.

There are two things that can be said by way of response to this line of argument. The first is that it works better as an explanation of some beliefs than it does with regard to others. Aid organisations are not the only entities that provide affluent people with information. The media, independent research centres, international organisations and national governments also perform this task in different ways. And not all information is readily amenable to partisan manipulation. At least in the case of claims regarding the nature of poverty indicators, or the percentage of the budget spent on foreign aid, there seems to be a fact of the matter. This evidence, at least, is not easily refuted. The second point is that, even when this challenge has force, it is still possible to evaluate the role played by beliefs about which there is uncertainty. In order to do so, we need to consider whether we think that the conduct of the affluent would change in the event that these specific beliefs were different. Intuitions about this counterfactual state of affairs can then be strengthened by appeal survey data, which explores the impact of various beliefs on support for aid at a general level.

When we imagine the conduct of the affluent people in a world where their beliefs differed from those that they now report, two things in particular stand out. The first is that beliefs about the efficacy of aid organisations seem to matter. If these organisations were thought to have a near perfect delivery record, then this would, in all likelihood, yield some change in the conduct of the affluent. In support of this claim, we can note that one study, which ranked trust NGOs on a scale of one to four, found that a one point increase in the level of trust displayed in these organisations corresponded to a 57 per cent increase in the likelihood that a person would favour the provision of more aid to poor countries.[43] Nonetheless, doubts about aid effectiveness are not by themselves sufficient to explain inaction. Even if affluent people ascribed to the belief in question, it is still easy to imagine many of them failing to assist. The second thing that stands out when adopting this

[43] This is only a correlation; causal inference cannot be made (Paxton and Knack, 2008, 10, 15).

counterfactual mode of inquiry is that beliefs about the personal cost of assistance also seem to matter a great deal. If affluent people really believed that the cost of assisting was trivial or non-existent, then it seems very likely that their conduct would be different. If affluent people thought, for example, that assistance was in their own best interest, or at least not strongly opposed to it, then it seems plausible that they would do *far* more to assist those living in extreme poverty than is presently the case. Experimental studies provide some support for this conjecture, revealing a close relationship between perceptions of cost and rates of assistance.[44] These factors warrant further investigation.

If what has been said so far is correct, then while some of these false beliefs matter for the explanation of inaction, others do not, or at least not to the same extent. Those that matter concern the efficacy and cost of assistance. Yet, it is not clear how exactly they come to have this effect. Those that do not matter are invoked, either consciously or otherwise, in order cast inaction in a morally acceptable light. The belief that assistance is impossible is perhaps exemplary in this regard. Given that they are often either insincere or misrepresented, these claims do not explain inaction. In reality, it seems that many affluent people conclude that they have sufficient reason not to assist, or are not motivated to do so, even though they also recognise that extreme poverty is worse than they openly acknowledge, that the capacity to assist is more robust than they sometimes suppose, and that their indirect contribution to poverty alleviation is not as great as is often stated. How to explain the conduct of *this type of affluent person* is the question that animates the remainder of this study. In order to make progress on this front, we need to look at how the beliefs that matter interact with conceptions of value and also with the practical deliberation of affluent people.

II. Beliefs About Value: Anti-Humanism, Partiality and Desert

When we make decisions about how to act, we do so based on an understanding of the things that matter. Beliefs about value, in conjunction with beliefs about the situation, feed into judgements about what we ought to do.[45] Even if deliberation is sound in other respects, mistaken beliefs about what matters (or about the extent to which something counts in favour or against a

[44] In practice, perceptions of cost have a strong bearing on the inclination to act altruistically. One case study monitored rates of assistance among those who encountered a person in difficulty when they were on their way to give a presentation. Among those that were *late* 10% stopped to help out. This figure rose to 45% for people who were *on time* and 63% for those who were *ahead of time* (Darley and Batson, 1973; cited in D. Miller, 2002, 111).

[45] In this context, the concept of value extends to include what is prudentially as well as morally valuable.

certain course of action), can lead deliberation astray. In cases of this type, people will respond to the reasons that they would have had if their beliefs about value had been correct. Given that this is not the case, reason and action may come apart. Failure to do what they have all-things-considered reason to do can be explained in light of that fact. If factual beliefs about the situation already contain certain inaccuracies, as is true in the case of many affluent people, evaluative errors can compound this situation, leading deliberation further astray. This section attempts to explain inaction by exploring notions of value endorsed by affluent people, and by looking at the way in which these views impact upon judgements about whether to assist those living in extreme poverty.

It is sometimes said that affluent people reject the idea that there is a moral requirement to assist those living in extreme poverty, and that this remains true even when the cost of assisting is judged by them to be trivial or non-existent. Supporters of this viewpoint identify a libertarian streak in common-sense morality, or point towards the popular distinction between doing and allowing, in order to account for the alleged disavowal of duties to assist. If affluent people adhere to views of the first kind, then they may reject the idea that morality requires them to promote good outcomes.[46] Alternatively, they may simply hold that there is a big difference between killing and letting die, believing that only the former category of effects incur serious moral sanction.[47] Yet there is reason to doubt that affluent people endorse either type of claim. Even in the United States, a country with a strong libertarian tradition, the surveys suggest that the majority of people believe there is a moral responsibility to assist those living in extreme poverty.[48] Lletting someone die is, we have said, usually thought to be seriously wrong. It is also difficult to explain why the affluent would misrepresent their own beliefs and display symptoms of denial if they really thought that inaction in the face of serious suffering was morally unproblematic. However, what is still more important for the present case is the fact that, even if affluent people did ascribe to these moral beliefs, it is not clear that this would do much to explain inaction. Both action and inaction would then appear morally permissible to them. However, we would still need to know why affluent people fail to assist

[46] Many libertarians such as Robert Nozick only defend the weaker claim that *justice* does not require us to promote the good of others (Nozick, 1974).

[47] Indeed, as James Rachels notes, 'when [we are] reminded that people are dying of starvation while we spend money on trivial things, we may feel a bit guilty, but certainly we do not fell like murderers' (Rachels, 1979, 159).

[48] When questioned, 69% of Americans agreed with the statement that wealthy nations have a 'moral responsibility' to help reduce hunger in the world. These people do not believe that the responsibility falls on the government alone. In fact, 43% view assistance as a 'strictly private matter [to be] taken care of by individuals giving donations through private organisations.' A further subset of the population believes that responsibility is shared (Programme on International Policy Attitudes, 2001, November 13*,* 12, 5).

when the expected benefit of doing so is great, and the cost associated with this action relatively minor. To answer these questions, we need to focus on more fundamental attributions of value.

When deciding whether to assist people living in extreme poverty, affluent people need to determine whether the good of assistance outweighs the cost that they would incur by acting in this way or whether, to the contrary, the cost associated with this option provides them with sufficient reason to act in other ways. The good of assistance is that the action would, if successful, help to prevent the premature death of people living in extreme poverty, or to reduce the amount of serious suffering in the world. Yet, these outcomes will only be judged positively if affluent people also accord antecedent value to human life and well-being. One explanation of inaction holds that this is not the case. It holds that the death and suffering of those living in extreme poverty is simply not thought by them to matter. If affluent people endorse a position of this kind, then even trivial personal costs will appear to provide them with sufficient reason to act in other ways, and inaction could be explained in light of this fact. According to this account, the worldview of the affluent is *anti-humanist* at heart. While these people may feel compelled by social pressure to pay lip-service to the moral ideal, according to which every human life has value, actual disregard for those living in extreme poverty testifies to the presence of powerful anti-humanist sentiment that lurks beneath everyday thought and practice.

This thesis has a strong intellectual lineage.[49] However, it is problematic for a number of reasons. In the first instance, it requires us to believe something about the affluent, and about ourselves, that many people find deeply counterintuitive. Either we must accept that affluent people are not really concerned about the suffering of other human beings, despite their claims to the contrary, or we must accept that, while they do care about these things, they are irrational in doing so – they are caring about something that they believe they have no reason to care about. This is a serious dilemma. Many affluent people really *do* seem to care about the fate of other people, and it has seemed to many that the attitude of concern is the *only* rational attitude to entertain in cases where the life and livelihood of others is seriously threatened. Of course, we cannot take these claims at face value. However, the anti-humanist account of what affluent people believe also makes it difficult to explain a number of familiar forms of human interaction.

[49] Indeed, Blackburn detects a permanent condition of pessimism when it comes to the interpretation human action. Since Freud, there has been 'a tendency to believe that behind all wants and desires lurk the dark forces of the unconscious' (Blackburn, 1998, 143).

Most obviously, if people do not accord value to the life and well-being of other human beings, then it becomes difficult to account for altruistic behaviour when it is directed towards people to whom they are not related. Not all cases of apparent altruism are truly altruistic. However, altruism as a category of action seems to be secure, with some people incurring very great costs in order to service of ends of this type.[50] The anti-humanist thesis also makes it difficult to understand the character of important interpersonal relationships such as friendship. In order to be genuine, this type of relationship requires more than mutual affection. It also requires us to recognise that our friend has an independent normative standing as a human being, which places limits on how we can behave in regard to him or her. On this point, Thomas Scanlon notes, there would 'be something unnerving about a "friend" who would steal a kidney for you if you needed one. This is not just because you would feel guilty to the person whose kidney was stolen, but because of what it implies about the "friend's" view of your right to your own body parts: he won't steal them but that is only because he happens to like you.' [51] Most friendships are not like this. In fact, the idea that people have value and that they warrant certain treatment in virtue of this fact seems to be 'deeply woven throughout the fabric of human emotion and motivation.'[52] Taken as a whole, these difficulties seem to undermine any explanatory purchase that the anti-humanist thesis has in the present context. It explains inaction only at the price of rendering unintelligible, other salient patterns of human interaction.

A more promising approach invokes a different set of value judgements: those concerning the cost of providing assistance to the agent in question. We have already seen that, in light of certain beliefs about the facts, many affluent people believe they would forgo more by assisting than is likely to be the case. These people may also accord greater *weight* than is warranted to goods of this type in practical deliberation. More specifically, the affluent may accord *primacy* or *near primacy* to personal considerations, such as their own well-being and that of their friends and family. If this is the case, then the cost of assistance will rarely seem trivial. The loss of even minor personal goods or opportunities will appear to offset the very large impersonal gains that could be achieved by

[50] ibid. 156

[51] Scanlon, 1998, 165

[52] In a similar vein, Samuel Scheffler imagines a person who *actually* lacked moral beliefs, never feeling moral outrage or indignation at the ill-treatment of someone by another human being. Such limitations on one's repertoire of human responses would make a person significantly incomplete, inhibiting a range of important attitudes and reactions. Ordinary interaction would not be possible. Scheffler concludes 'that liability to experience these emotions and attitudes is a *prerequisite for participation in human relationships of various kinds*' (Scheffler, 1992, 68-9, italics my own).

providing assistance to those living in extreme poverty. Inaction would then be explained by beliefs of this type. Indeed, while some partiality in practical judgement is legitimate, the claim here is that the weight that affluent people accord to personal considerations exceeds these bounds.[53] They may well recognise the value of human life. However, this explanation suggests that they are essentially tribal or egoistic in their ascriptions of value.[54]

In order to determine the plausibility of this explanation, we need to think more about the type of cost that affluent people stand to incur. These costs are not usually relational (in the sense that they concern those whom we are related to). Affluent people could do more for those living in extreme poverty without damaging their relationships with loved ones, or doing less for compatriots than they do at present.[55] Their affluence precludes this much.[56] Rather, the costs are personal in a more immediate sense. What the affluent would have to forgo in order to assist is, in the cases currently under consideration, the acquisition of certain commodities that they aspire to own or some part of their disposable income that might not otherwise be spent at all. When deciding whether to assist, it is *these* things that weigh in the balance of practical reason. They are good for the agent, but often only incrementally so. For explanatory purposes, the salient question therefore concerns egoism, not tribalism. We need to know what kind of premium affluent people put on the acquisition or retention of personal goods of this type.

In order for the current explanation to be successful, affluent people must believe that these things are sufficiently important to license their pursuit or retention at the expense of those living in extreme poverty. This is plausibly true of some people: even in a cool hour, some affluent people may judge that the personal value of these things is equivalent to the impersonal value of the life and well-being of those in serious need. But many would not go down this path. Absent the inclination to valorise wealth, or to accord fantastic properties to the goods in question, many wealthy individuals recognise that their own possession of things is less important than the primary school education of a child or the preservation of the core bodily functionings of another human being. Their beliefs about value display partiality towards themselves, but not to the extent that this

[53] On the boundaries of legitimate partiality *see* Chapter Two.
[54] Walzer, 1994, 81
[55] Evidence about the relationship between patriotism and support for assistance is inconclusive. 84.4% of Americans agree with the statement 'taking care of problems at home is more important than giving aid to foreign countries' (Programme on International Policy Attitudes, 2001, November 13, 5). Yet, curiously Paxton and Knack found no correspondence between degree of pride felt towards one's own nation and attitudes towards foreign aid (Paxton and Knack, 2008, 14).
[56] Affluence, and perhaps also good fortune.

putative explanation requires. These people do not believe that their own particular claim to the goods in question is as strong as the more general claim to assistance that is generated by the plight of those living in extreme poverty. Yet, they do not act. As a result of this, they may then come to feel that their conduct in this area is inconsistent with their own deeper ascriptions of value. The conduct of these people, at least, still needs to be explained.

A third explanation of inaction focuses on the role played by beliefs about fairness and desert. There is some support in affluent societies for the notion that it is wrong to make one person pay for another person's bad choices.[57] There is also widespread support for the view that rewards should accrue to those who are the most productive, who work hard, or who are morally good, and that they should not accrue to those whose conduct does not display these qualities.[58] Taken together, these beliefs about *fairness* and *desert* challenge the notion that there is always equal reason to respond to the serious need of others. When people are thought to be responsible for their condition, or undeserving of help, the weight of reasons to assist is judged to be diminished or cancelled.[59] Reasons to assist people livening in extreme poverty are anchored in unmet need. As a result of this, they too are vulnerable to challenges based upon claims of desert.[60] If affluent people believe that those living in extreme poverty are reckless, lazy or immoral, then the good of assistance will appear to be significantly diminished. It follows from this that the personal cost of assistance will gain correspondingly greater weight in deliberation, and people may conclude that they lack decisive reason to assist after all. Fairness-based and desert-based explanations of inaction hold that this is the case, and that inaction can be understood in light of beliefs of this type.[61]

Nonetheless, these explanations encounter difficulties once we identify the precise conjunction of beliefs that are needed in order for them to apply in the present case. In order for considerations of fairness or desert to be invoked in this way, affluent people also must believe that a certain sort of relationship holds between people living in extreme poverty and their present condition. Causal responsibility tends to be necessary in this regard: it represents an important part of the claim that someone brought about their own misfortune. Yet, it is far from clear that those

[57] Witness the debate about health care provision in the United States.
[58] For a summary of this evidence *see* D. Miller, 1999, Ch.4.
[59] Kagan, 1988, 19
[60] On this point, David Miller notes that 'people tend to be strongly concerned that the needy not be responsible for their neediness, either in the sense that they have brought their needs upon themselves, or in the sense that they could escape them with little effort' (D. Miller, 1999, 76).
[61] David Miller suggests that these factors have greatest effect when those who stand in need of assistance do not share bonds of friendship or solidarity with those who possess the capacity to assist. In situations of this type, he notes that 'claims of need will always be vulnerable to challenge by claims of desert' (ibid. 78).

living in wealthy societies believe this condition is met in the case of people who live in a condition of extreme poverty. Survey data suggests that, while these people do tend to believe that the causes of poverty are endogenous to poor countries, many of the impediments that they identify are a product of the natural environment rather than human agency.[62] Furthermore, among the man-made obstacles to poverty eradication that they identify, most are the product of elite malpractice by governments that lack a democratic mandate from their citizens. These beliefs about the causes of poverty count against the desert-based claim that those living in poverty are in this situation because they lack resourcefulness or possess bad character traits. Only rarely do people think that causal responsibility extends all the way down to the level of the individual. This claim cannot be true for the main victims of extreme poverty, namely infants under the age of five.[63] More generally, if the problem is understood to be with bad governance, lack of education and natural impediments to growth, then the claim that poor people are responsible for their suffering is one that ought to be rejected.

Beliefs about desert could still make a difference to deliberation about assistance. In order to do so, affluent people would simply have to ignore incongruence between the different things that they hold to be the case. There is some evidence that this is what happens. When talking about the problem of world poverty, in focus group discussions, affluent people often invoke a moral order frame according to which the distribution of wealth is understood to conform to a natural moral hierarchy.[64] The tendency to blame victims of injustice for their condition is also consonant with a set of psychological tendencies commonly referred to as 'just world thinking'.[65] Nonetheless, a study commissioned by the World Bank cautions against according considerations of this type too much explanatory weight in the context of individual philanthropic action. This report found that people who agree with the statement that 'others are poor because of laziness and lack of willpower' are only 12 per cent *less* likely to support foreign aid overall.[66] Furthermore, it is important to note in

[62] Of course, this distinction is only a matter of degree. The damage done by natural disasters will, for example, be affected by the planning and response mechanisms that are in place.

[63] The media reinforce this view. The majority of articles (56.2%) make no reference to the causes of poverty. Yet, among those that do venture into this terrain, 25.9% cite domestic or national level factors as causes, 17% cite global and structural issues, and *less* than 1% attribute poverty to individual behaviour or attitudes (van Heerde and Hudson, 2010, 395).

[64] Darnton and Kirk, 2011, 86, 90-92

[65] This tendency to believe that the world conforms to a moral order, in which those who do good are rewarded and those who do ill punished, makes it easier for human beings to plan effectively over time and reduces anxiety that would result from a proper awareness of the way in which chance bears upon life-plans (Rubin and Peplau, 1975, 72-75; Hafer and Begue 2005). This tendency can also receive social reinforcement (Hochschild, 1986; Lane, 1991).

[66] Paxton and Knack, 2008, 14

this context that correlation is not causation. It may well be the case that those who oppose foreign aid are more likely than others to seek moral consolation in the thought that those living in poverty are undeserving of assistance. If this is the case, then beliefs of this type explain less than they first appear to.

This concludes our discussion of beliefs about value. While these beliefs could, in principle, account for inaction in isolation from other factors, this is unlikely to be the case. Anti-humanist views, alongside more extreme forms of partiality or desert-based thinking, do not seem to be endorsed either consciously or otherwise by the majority of affluent people. A more plausible interpretation of inaction holds that mistaken beliefs about value *compound* the effect of mistaken factual assumptions, amplifying their impact on the outcome of deliberation. Indeed, we have already seen that many people believe they would incur personal costs by assisting even when this is not the case. Undue partiality towards oneself could further magnify the impact these perceived costs have on the outcome of deliberation. At the same time, we have noted that important doubts exist about the efficacy of assistance. The value of this option would be further diminished by the thought that, even when successful, aid is undeserved. Working in conjunction with one another, beliefs of both type may then lead affluent people to conclude that the balance of reasons no longer favours assistance, and that they have sufficient reason to act in other ways. Nonetheless, significant doubts remain. Importantly, it seems possible to imagine someone who knows the facts about assistance, who does not ascribe to the view that those living in extreme poverty are in any way responsible for their situation, and who does not adhere to heavily inflated notions of what they would forgo by assisting, but who *still* fails to assist those living in this condition. Reflecting on our own conduct in this area, we may believe that we ourselves are members of such a group. The fact that *this* possibility remains open generates pressure to look at other ways in which inaction could be explained.

III. Deliberating About Options: Heuristics, Bias and Error

When we deliberate about what to do, we do so in light of beliefs about the world and beliefs about value. Requirements of procedural rationality specify conditions under which beliefs are correctly ordered or related to one another. As an aspect of practical reason, these requirements regulate the process of deliberation by which we come to conclusions about what we have reason to

do. According to the framework set out by classical decision theory, a rational agent will choose the action or course of action that he or she judges to have the greatest expected utility or value. In this model, the expected utility of an option or prospect is the sum of the value of outcomes that it contains, each weighed by the probability that the outcome in question will occur. In order for decisions to be based upon sound judgement of this type, the agent in question must be capacity-rational: he or she must have the capacity to structure thought and deliberation in accordance with the requirements that make this the case. In addition to this, the person must reason effectively: he or she must deliberate, either consciously or otherwise, in accordance with the requirements of rationality in a specific context.[67] Taken together, someone who is rational and who avoids deliberative error, will arrive at judgements that are best supported by the reasons that he or she believes to obtain. If these beliefs are mistaken, then beliefs about what one ought to do all-things-considered are likely to be mistaken as well. Sound practical reasoning cannot correct for limited comprehension of the situation or for mistaken beliefs about value. Yet, it is also possible for deliberation to go wrong in other ways that may be relevant to the explanation of inaction in the present case.

Most human beings of adult age are capacity-rational, but only imperfectly so. Whereas an ideal deliberator would reason in light of all of his or her beliefs, and deliberate in complete accordance with the requirements of procedural rationality, actual human beings rely heavily on frames and heuristics in order to render complex situations intelligible and facilitate deliberation. These shortcuts and surrogates often serve us well, leading to correct inference about the course of action best supported by our beliefs. However, they also render human beings prone to certain forms of deliberative bias and error. In order to understand how this impacts upon the conduct of affluent people, we need to pay closer attention to the way in which findings from experimental psychology bear upon practical deliberation about world poverty. We also need to think seriously about the type of inferential errors that people make when deliberating about whether to assist. The failure of affluent people to do more at the present moment in time may be explained by errors of this type. This section considers each factor in turn.

Building upon insights from experimental psychology about the actual decision-making practices of human beings, Prospect Theory aims to provide us with a more accurate *descriptive* account of practical judgement than its classical predecessor, which proceeds on the assumption that

[67] As Joseph Raz notes, 'perfectly rational people can be bad reasoners' (Raz, 1999, 71).

human behaviour accords tolerably well with the precepts of rational-choice theory. The central insight of Prospect Theory is that choice between options or prospects tends to proceed in two discrete psychological phases: an *editing* phase and an *evaluative* phase.[68] During the first phase, people simplify the options open to them by coding different possible outcomes in terms of *gains* and *losses*. Outcomes are most commonly coded relative to the agent's current asset position. In addition to this, gains and losses tend to resist aggregation. If affluent people deliberate about poverty in this way, then the choice facing them is recast: rather than appearing as a complex choice between options connected to different possible states of affairs, the question of whether to assist becomes the question of whether to incur a loss (which is monetary allocation) for the sake of some probable gain (which is the well-being of those living in extreme poverty), or whether to maintain the status quo and do nothing at all. This is plausibly the case.

During the second stage of decision-making, people then evaluate the edited prospects and choose the one with the highest value. Here again, Prospect Theory departs from more classical accounts of decision-making. Firstly, it suggests that the value of an option is determined not simply by the weight that an agent accords to the good that it contains, but also by more contingent framing effects which bear upon the prospect's *subjective value*.[69] The subjective value of an option is the value that that option appears to have, for an agent, in a *specific deliberative context*. Secondly, prospect theory suggests that the impact that beliefs about probability have on the value of an option is non-linear. The value of a prospect is not the sum of the value of its outcomes, each weighed by its probability. In order to address this fact, prospect theory incorporates the idea that different probabilities have different *decision weights*.[70]

These findings bear importantly upon the way in which we understand the deliberation of the affluent in relation to the problem of world poverty and assistance. In the first instance, a central proposition incorporated into Prospect Theory is the idea that people are *loss-averse*. Across a wide range of contexts, experiments demonstrate that the aversiveness, or disvalue, of a loss is

[68] Kahneman and Tversky, 2000b, 28

[69] There are at least three ways in which beliefs about value might be said to be subjective. Beliefs about value are subjective in the first sense if the constitution of value is itself understood to be subjective, i.e. if the value of an outcome depends wholly upon the pro-attitudes of the agent in question. Secondly, if truths about value are objective, beliefs about value may still be subjective in the sense that they reflect the agent's own beliefs about what objectively obtains. Thirdly, beliefs about value can be considered subjective, and perhaps highly so, if they are beliefs to which not even the agent in question consistently adheres to. These beliefs are easily manipulated and do not reflect a person's considered convictions about some matter. It is this third sense of 'subjective' that concerns us here.

[70] Kahneman and Tversky, 2000b, 30

greater than the subjective value accorded to a gain of the same size in deliberation.[71] This, in turn, generates a status quo bias, and produces the 'endowment effect' whereby people are reluctant to part with what they already have, even for prospective gains of a greater size.[72] Given that affluent people must decide, in the present case, whether to incur an apparent loss in their current holdings for the benefit of those living in extreme poverty, loss-aversion will mean that they tend towards inaction.

In addition to this, the *identity* of the agent who will experience the loss or gain in question bears importantly upon the subjective weight that the consequence is accorded in deliberation. Most obviously, losses or gains that accrue to the *agent* who is making the decision loom larger than those that accrue to *other* people. These self-regarding effects are more conspicuous to the agent. Therefore, they are accorded greater weight in the evaluation of options.[73] This remains true independent of any further belief that the agent has about the particular value of his or her own life in relation to others.

Furthermore, when the loss or gain in question affects *other* people, the precise nature of the *recipient* seems to matter a great deal. If the recipient of the effect is an *individual* person, its influence will tend to be more pronounced than if an effect of the same size is dispersed over a *group* of people. At the same time, the extent to which the agent *identifies* with the person or people in question also influences his or her evaluation of the prospects in this area. This is particularly clear in the case of those with whom we share an actual *relationship*. It is much easier for people to accord weight to the well-being of a friend or acquaintance, in deliberation, than it is to accord the same weight to the well-being of a stranger. Sometimes we cannot but feel the impact of our actions. Yet this is also true, albeit in a different way, when the decision involves people that the agent has not yet interacted with and whom he or she may never meet. If this person or group of people are *socially distant*, in the sense that they appear to be unlike the deliberating agent in important ways, then the impact of a given choice on their well-being is likely to be discounted.[74] And, if the agent or agents in question have no *determinate* identity – if they are, for example, recipients of aid that are still yet to be chosen – then this, too, makes it easy to elide over the effect that the decision under

[71] ibid. 33
[72] Kahneman and Tversky, 2000a, 13-14
[73] Ross and Sicoly, 1982, 179-181
[74] On the idea of social distance *see* Unger, 1996, 35.

consideration will have upon them.[75] Taken together, these factors create what psychologists refer to as the 'identifiable victim affect'.[76]

Finally, the way in which one's own *agency* is implicated in producing an outcome affects attributions of subjective value in an important way. In the first instance, gains and losses that result from the agent's own *action* tend to be accorded greater subjective weight than those that are brought about by *omission* (this is true, even if people fail to endorse the strong moral thesis alluded to earlier). Jon Elster terms this the 'agency effect'.[77] Secondly, people tend to discount the gains or losses which result from their choices but which are *distant* from themselves. More specifically, Samuel Scheffler notes that, 'we tend to experience our causal influence as inversely related to *spatial* and *temporal* distance… our influence on our local surroundings in the present and the near future tends, as we say, to seem more real to us.'[78] This may, in part, be due to the fact that near effects are much easier than remote effects to observe. Finally, people tend to accord greater weight to effects that they bring about *by themselves* than to those that they bring about *in conjunction with others*. When an effect is brought about via the contribution of many different individuals, responsibility or credit for the outcome in question is dispersed. In cases that involve a great number of people, these effects are often mistakenly thought not to matter at all.[79]

None of these ascriptive biases favour assistance. Most commonly, those who stand in need of assistance are unknown to affluent people. All that the affluent know is that, if their action is successful, it will benefit a person, in extreme need, who is probably in a distant land and possibly darker than themselves. The recipients of aid are usually indeterminate as well as being physically and socially distant. Furthermore, this action will be mediated by aid organisations; it will be affected in conjunction with the action of a great many other people, and it will often have an impact that is more or less imperceptible to those who act. The affluent will not usually know whom they have assisted, or even if their contribution has helped anyone at all. In contrast to this, the loss that they stand to incur by allocating more resources to aid organisations appears to be direct, unmediated and personal. Against this backdrop, they stand out in sharp relief, and tend to resonate in the mind of the agent.[80] Indeed, reflecting upon the cost of assistance, the affluent may wonder whether they

[75] Small and Lowenstein, 2003, 5-16
[76] Jenni and Lowenstein, 1997; Kogut and Ritov, 2005
[77] Elster, 2011, 73, 75-76
[78] Scheffler, 2001, 39; italics mine.
[79] Parfit, 1984, Ch.3; Glover and Scott-Taggart, 1975, 171-209
[80] It is misleading to think that money that goes unspent does nothing for an agent. After all, we often criticise as imprudent those who do not maintain an adequate level of personal savings. What these

themselves will need these resources in the future. Crucially, these biases bear upon the deliberation of all people, to a lesser or greater extent, even if they do not believe that human life lacks value, that their own life is hugely more important than the life of other people, or that those living in extreme poverty are undeserving of assistance. If there is a problem with the subjective ascription of value to prospects, then this remains true regardless of one's considered beliefs about morality and value.

The deliberation of the affluent is also compromised in another way. The decision to assist, or not to do so, is one that requires the agent to deal with *uncertainty*. It is a decision under risk and one in which affluent people must choose whether to incur what seems to be a *sure loss* for some *probable gain*. In practical deliberation, the decision weight accorded to a 'sure thing' greatly exceeds the decision weight accorded to outcomes that the agent believes lack this probabilistic property.[81] This effect plays out differently in different contexts. People tend to be *risk-averse* when seeking gains. They prefer a small but certain gain to a prospect that contains risk but that has a greater expected overall value. Thus, while alleviating suffering is important in the present context, the provision of assistance is understood to be risky and the value of the option is likely to be discounted in light of this fact.

People also tend to be *risk-seeking* with regard to losses. They will, in practice, choose a prospect that contains greater expected disvalue over one that makes a much smaller loss certain to occur. This effect is even more pronounced than in the case of risk-aversion with regard to gains. Taken in conjunction with the first effect, it makes people considerably less likely to endorse the judgement that one has reason to accept small but certain losses for the sake of large expected gains. Yet, it is a calculus of this type upon which claim that affluent people have decisive reason to assist often rests. That people are disposed to think in this way remains true, even when one's considered beliefs about the situation and about value support the conclusion that it is a risk worth taking (i.e. when the dictates of classical decision theory suggest that this is a cost that one ought to incur). As a result of this, the way in which people respond to risk also impedes the deliberation of the affluent in this instance. Faith in one's own capacity to assist is likely to be shaken by cognitive bias of this kind.

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resources do is provide a degree of insurance against risk. When they are dispensed with, the agent opens herself up to the risk of worsening his or her life in certain ways. In general, people tend to discount the future and to discount the likelihood of low-probability events occurring. However, their judgements in this area are unstable. If the risk of misfortune is not edited out, and hence excluded altogether from deliberation, it may have a pronounced effect on conclusions reached.

[81] Kahneman and Tversky, 2000a, 2-3

Considerations of this type play an important role in explaining inaction on the part of affluent people. They affect the framing and weighing of options. However, for their effect to be felt it must be the case that affluent people *do in fact deliberate* about whether to assist. At the level of folk psychology, many people take issue with this assumption. It is sometimes suggested that affluent people simply do not think about extreme poverty and that this fact explains their present conduct.

The relevant claim can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, the thought might be that most affluent people *never* think about the fact of extreme poverty, or that they never consider the possibility that it has normative ramifications for their own conduct. Inaction could then be interpreted not as the product of any mental process, conscious or otherwise, but rather as a by-product of failure to reflect on this matter altogether. On the other hand, the claim could be that affluent people only *rarely* think about extreme poverty and the way in which it bears upon their own choice of conduct. Extreme poverty would then be something that they think about infrequently and its consequences would become easy to ignore. This interpretation fits well with the idea that what is 'out of sight is out of mind'.

With regard to the first claim, Gilbert Harman has suggested that procedural rationality does not require people to clutter up their minds with all the trivial things that follow by inference from what they already believe.[82] A requirement of this type would be too demanding given our actually existing mental faculties. In light of this, a rational person may not think about something, even when there is an inferential connection that holds between this thing and the other things that he or she also believes to be true. Yet, the extent to which this is possible is also seriously constrained. As John Broome notes, it does seem to be the case that we are required to have these beliefs if their object is something that we care about – in the sense that it is something which we take more than an idle interest in.[83] To reach a cursory judgement on some matter does not require much effort. People who are capacity-rational are disposed to arrive at beliefs of this type. In addition to this, we have already said that most affluent people are not anti-humanist in their outlook. Most affluent people find the phenomenon of extreme poverty and the plight of people living in this condition at least faintly troubling. In light of this, they are disposed to think about it on at least one occasion, and to reach normative judgements that are compatible with the beliefs that they already entertain about value and about the world. Further to this, the affluent are provided with many cues to think about these things. If it is the case that they never think about those living

[82] Harman, 1988, 12
[83] Broome, 2013, 158-159

in extreme poverty, we need to know what happens when affluent people receive a request for donations or other forms of solicitation. Whether or not they decide to give on occasions of this type, it seems that a decision has been made. Therefore, the first claim is not plausible. Very few people have never thought about extreme poverty at all.

In contrast to this, the second claim is very plausible. As Michael Bratman notes, human beings are *planning agents*.[84] The capacity to form and execute plans enables us to extend the influence of rational reflection over time by dispensing with the need to consider each decision anew. It also makes conduct relatively stable, facilitating social coordination and interaction with others. When we act, we often do so in light of standing commitments or personal policies. These policies or commitments are then only subject to periodic re-evaluation.[85] Bearing this in mind, it seems unlikely that affluent people consider each prospective case of assistance on its merits. Rather, they tend in practice to settle on the notion that some fixed amount is required of them, and then to adjust their conduct accordingly.[86] This is the grain of truth in the claim that affluent people simply do not think about poverty: they consider their own conduct in this area only infrequently at best. As a result of this, failure to respond to a particular appeal can often be explained by the judgement that one's conduct is continuous with conclusions previously reached in this domain. Of course, the adoption of personal policies of this type would not be problematic if they were more finely attuned to the demands of the situation. However, the fact that assistance is so often not forthcoming, even when the cost of doing more is trivial or non-existent, suggests that this is not the case. As such, an explanation of inaction, which rests on the notion of personal policies or standing commitments, is not complete. What we need to know is why, when they do think about these things, affluent people consistently settle on policies which require little if anything of them, despite the very great need of those living in extreme poverty. The challenge is not necessarily to explain how affluent people think about assistance on a case-by-case basis, but rather to explain this one systematic tendency for error.

Given that the majority of people do deliberate about this matter, the biases and distortions described by Prospect Theory have explanatory traction in the present case. However,

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[84] Bratman, 1999, 2-3

[85] Plans and intentions embody a presumption against reconsideration. This property reduces the sense of duress that would accompany incessant decision-making. It is also 'supported by a kind of social pressure' towards 'habits of non-reconsideration' that support increased stability and that make someone a reliable planner in schemes of interpersonal coordination' (Bratman, 1999, 67). Bearing this in mind, Richard Miller makes the evaluation of 'personal policies' central to his theory (R. Miller, 2004, 360).

[86] Among those who reported giving money to charities in the U.K. 69% reported donating the same amount as they did six months ago (TNS, 2010, 20).

these factors do not exhaust the ways in which deliberation can go astray. More precisely, the problem may not be only with the weighing of options, but also with patterns of inference that shape perception of the choice under consideration. One way in which this occurs is through the common tendency to view those living in poverty primarily as members of a *hopelessly overwhelming group*. Faced with a situation of this kind, the most powerful operative thought is often that, while the situation is extremely bad, it is not something that affluent people can hope to effect through action on an individual basis.[87] Indeed, whatever the agent decides to do, many millions of people will go unassisted. Furthermore, it is readily apparent that one cannot have reason to do what is impossible. Bearing this in mind, the deliberating agent (correctly) concludes that he or she does not have decisive reason to eliminate poverty on this scale. Lacking reason to pursue this overarching aim, the agent then concludes that he or she *also* lacks reason to assist individual people who live in this condition: to assist these people would only be to remove a single drop from an ocean of suffering. Yet, even if this last claim is correct, the pattern of inference is mistaken. The decision to assist can make a huge difference to the lives of *certain people* living in extreme poverty. Assisting *these* people is not impossible. Therefore, this course of action needs to be considered on its own merits. Indeed, there is a great deal to commend it. The error, characteristic of *futility thinking,* is to believe that, if we cannot address it all (or some large part of it), then any action is futile and hence not worth the effort.[88]

A second form of deliberative error also stems from the relationship between poverty as a mass phenomenon and judgement about individual cases, but it reverses the logic of futility thinking. In cases of *depletion thinking,* the deliberating agent begins by debating whether to provide assistance to those living in extreme poverty in a single case and concludes that she has decisive prima facie reason to act. However, it then occurs to this person that, no matter what she does now, there are likely to be many more cases like this one in which assistance is called for. Following on from this, the agent concludes that, if the initial judgement is correct, and it is true that she ought to assist in this first case, then *simple consistency* forces her to accept that she also ought to assist in other cases of this type. At this point, a new concern arises – the agent recognises that, if the present course of action was iterated many times over, she would then be left hopelessly depleted and unable to pursue her own projects or relationships. This is a state of affairs that she has very strong agent-

[87] This view of the situation can lead to what Jonathan Glover refers to as 'irrational paralysis of the imagination.' The sense that action is insignificant or pointless is, he argues, a 'size illusion' brought about by certain contexts (Glover and Scott-Taggart, 1975, 172-173).
[88] I take this term from Peter Unger (Unger, 1996, 75).

relative reason not to bring about and it is definitely not something that she judges herself to have decisive reason for. Yet, the latter judgement appears to cast doubt on the truth of the initial verdict concerning the requirement to assist in the individual case. Now the need for consistency pushes the agent in the opposite direction and appears to indicate that something about the first judgement is mistaken. While there is undoubtedly good reason to assist, the person subsequently judges there must also be sufficient reason, mysterious though it remains, to act in other ways.

The error displayed by this line of thought is not with the initial judgement, but rather with the understanding of the further conclusions that it commits one to. What is true is that, even if the person assists in this first case, there will be a great number of *similar* cases. If the person is then compelled by consistency to form any judgement about these further cases, it is only that they ought to assist, in cases of this type, *to the extent* that they resemble the first. The level of need among those living in extreme poverty is likely to remain constant. However, only rarely will two situations arise in which the decision facing the agent is exactly the same. If the agent incurs a cost by assisting, then, each time they respond positively to a request for help, their resources will be diminished by some increment, and the cost of assisting in the future will rise by a commensurate amount. When this cost is sufficiently great, then the agent is rationally permitted to act in other ways. This point will typically be well short of the serious depletion that he or she had previously countenanced.[89] The belief that one ought not to bankrupt oneself may also entail believing that one lacks decisive reason to forgo *equivalent* goods in order to assist those living in extreme poverty. However, it tells us little about a situation in which the cost of assistance is minor or altogether non-existent.

In virtue of the beliefs that they hold about the world, there is a tendency among affluent people to think that they would incur personal cost by assisting even when this is not the case, and to overestimate the size of any losses that they stand to incur. These costs serve to countervail reasons to assist that are provided by the serious plight of people living in extreme poverty. The fact of inaction gives us reason to believe that the outcome of practical judgement is further prejudiced against assistance by the weight attached to considerations of this type: prospective costs are inflated, prospective gains diminished. To account for this effect, one can appeal to settled beliefs about value: those that concern the special importance of one's own well-being, or about the deservingness of those in need. However, the present analysis suggests that failure to assist is more likely to be explained by a set of *framing effects and biases* that result from the heuristics used in

[89] *See* Chapter Two.

practical deliberation. In contrast to the beliefs about value considered previously, the effect of these phenomena is general and robust.

Taken together, they suggest that people are reluctant to part with what they *already have*, and that they are especially reluctant to incur *certain personal losses* for the sake of *risky impersonal gains* that would accrue to a *distant mass of unknown* people as a result of action taken *in conjunction* with the action of other affluent people. This remains true even when a fully rational agent would accord greater value to the latter prospect. It could also serve to tip the balance of reasons against action.

Given the further inclination of affluent people to engage in futility thinking or depletion thinking, an appeal to deep-seated beliefs about value may be unnecessary. A *compound explanation* that foregrounds beliefs about cost and probability, in conjunction with framing effects and deliberative error, seems sufficient to account for inaction in the majority of cases. These factors lead affluent people to conclude that they have sufficient reason not to assist and to act in other ways. However, this is not to say that they will regard inaction as moral. Those who fail to assist may continue to cling to weak moralisations of their conduct, or deceive themselves about the true nature of their conduct.

IV. Motivation: Weakness of Will

Requirements of procedural rationality specify conditions under which the mental states of the agent are correctly ordered or related to one another. On the cognitivist theory of motivation that is endorsed here, requirements of this type apply not only to relationships between different beliefs, but also to the relationship between beliefs and the intention to act. An intention is a motivated mental state, one that disposes an agent to act in some way. When an agent is procedurally rational, then that agent will form the intention to act on the basis of beliefs about what she has sufficient or decisive reason to do. She will intend to do what she believes she ought to do. By doing so, the agent will comply with what John Broome has termed the 'enkrasia' requirement on practical reason.[90] This requirement states that, if you believe your reasons require you to do something, you intend to do that thing. Someone whose mental states do not conform to this condition is akratic, or afflicted by 'weakness of will'. She does not form the intention to do what she believes ought to be done, all-things-considered. This is the paradigmatic form of practical

[90] Broome, 2013, 88-91

irrationality. When an agent is akratic, reason and motivation may come apart. If affluent people are akratic in the present case, then inaction could be explained in light of this fact without invoking the other factors considered so far.

The phenomenon of akrasia or weakness of will is only poorly understood, with some philosophers denying the possibility of akratic action altogether.[91] At the same time, many people believe that it is possible to act against one's own better judgement.[92] Yet, the phenomenon itself remains curiously resistant to introspection. In the present context, this may not be a bad thing. Indeed, the very strangeness of this condition might be thought to count in its favour when it comes to explaining inaction. We have already noted, at a phenomenological level, that many affluent people feel there is something deeply uncanny about their present behaviour: they struggle to render their own conduct coherently in light of beliefs that they also have about the plight of those living in extreme poverty. Many of these people insist that they really do believe that the reasons to assist are decisive – and that they know they ought to do more – but they fail to act in spite of this fact. When asked why they do not act, 'weakness of will' is the only answer that is forthcoming. Affluent people who are in this situation understand themselves to be grappling with some form of invisible barrier to action, with a form of specific irrationality that is in some way beyond their control.

Before we consider whether they are right about this, it is important to clarify what weakness of will is not. Firstly, weakness of will is not *compulsion*. An agent does not display weakness of will when incapacitated by addiction or emotion, even though that person desires to act in a contrary manner. Secondly, weakness of will is not *momentary error of judgement*. A person is not akratic if one of the options available to her appears best in the heat of the moment, and that agent acts on this specific judgement even when it is inconsistent with her deeply held beliefs or convictions. Finally, weakness of will is not a failure to do what *others* judge you to have all-things-considered reason to do, or a failure to do what you judge yourself to have reason to do in some more *limited* sense. What matters here is the agent's own judgement about her conduct. Furthermore, action that the agent believes to be immoral or imprudent is not necessarily akratic if the agent also judges that she has sufficient all-things-considered reason to act in that way. An akrasia-based explanation of

[91] Hare, 1952, 120 124-26, 164-65, 167-71

[92] On this first point, Donald Davidson asks, 'does it never happen that I have an unclouded, unwavering judgement that my action is not for the best, all things considered, and yet where no action I perform has a hint of compulsion or the compulsive? There is no proving that such actions exist but it seems to me absolutely certain that they do' (Davidson, 2001, 29).

inaction must contend that this is what affluent people lack: a belief that failure to assist is licensed by reason.

To aid this discussion further, it is useful to consider a hypothetical instance of akratic action. Unfortunately, good examples of akratic action are few and far between. However, it is possible, through careful specification, to describe an action of this type. To this end, we should consider the case of a person who intentionally takes a glass of wine, even though she knows that she ought not do to so because she will then be unfit to fulfil some of her obligations. This person is not reckless. She does not judge, even in the moment, that the hedonic benefit gained by drinking or the benefit of accepting hospitality makes this option the best. Nor is she the victim of a compulsive desire to drink. She is not an alcoholic. Nor does she think that it is only morally wrong or imprudent to act in this way. Rather, the person in this example knowingly takes the drink contrary to her conscious all-things-considered better judgement.[93] This person is weak-willed.

How does the action described here compare to the conduct of the affluent person who fails to provide assistance to people living in extreme poverty, even when the cost of doing so is trivial or non-existent? The first thing to say is that it is not the case that *everyone* would act in the way that the akratic person does in the aforementioned situation. While some people are weak-willed, others are resolute in circumstances of this type. This suggests that the propensity towards akratic behaviour, if not wholly anomalous, takes on some of the properties of a character trait. Those who are weak-willed in one area might be expected to manifest this tendency in other areas as well. At the same time, for other people the phenomenon may remain irreducibly foreign.[94] Yet, this conception of akrasia jars with the current conduct of affluent people in at least two respects. In the first instance, failure to assist those living in extreme poverty is a near *ubiquitous* feature of modern life in affluent societies. It is far from clear that this type of conduct is only manifested by those with an inconstant disposition. Secondly, if inaction were the product of akrasia *en masse,* then it would be a form of akrasia that was curiously *constrained*. It would only seem to manifest itself in this one area. If we were to grant that those who fail to act to have an akratic disposition, then we would expect greater evidence of this fact in social life. Yet, as the lack of good examples reveals, this is simply not the case.

[93] This example is a variation of that provided by Gary Watson (Watson, 1977, 324).

[94] This difference may explain why some people find the existence of akrasia self-evident, while others cannot comprehend action of this type. For those who are not akratic, the condition is likely to remain a mystery.

In addition to this, we should note that, even among akratic agents, weak-willed conduct is not the norm. It is an anomalous, but not wholly foreign, aspect of their conduct. The akratic agent may suspect that he or she is liable to this form of practical irrationality without knowing when exactly her conduct will deviate in this way. In contrast to this, inaction on the part of affluent people is *constant over time*. In order to explain inaction, it would seem to be the case that, whenever affluent people think about doing more to assist people living in extreme poverty, akrasia intervenes and precludes them from doing so. This is difficult to understand. More generally, widespread, targeted, stable conduct of this type is symptomatic not of akrasia but rather of judgement based on reasons or, at the very least, judgement based on reasons as they appear to the group of people with whose conduct we are concerned. Finally, it seems that akratic action may be amenable to correction through conscious reasoning, or to containment through the adoption of certain precautionary measures. In the same way that an agent, who knows of his or her own propensity to make reckless decisions, can lend his or her conduct rational direction through the use of various precommitment devices, one might think that an akratic agent could use strategies of this type to limit the effect of this disposition and bind themselves to the course of action that they judge to be all-things-considered best.[95] In our case study, the person concerned could have arranged transport home in advance, just in case she was akratic that evening. With regard to those living in extreme poverty, the affluent could set up a standing orders to have the money debited from their account, thereby resisting the propensity to akrasia that is sometimes, ex hypothesi, awakened in them by more direct appeals. Yet, many affluent people do not do this, either. Perhaps they are also incapacitated by akrasia when it comes to forming the intention to sign the standing order. However, this would go to show that there is nothing *ad hoc* about the behaviour in question. It consistently maps onto certain features of a situation in the same way that we would expect reason-based judgement to do so.

While these difficulties seem to tell decisively against an interpretation of inaction grounded on the notion that affluent people are akratic, we have not yet accounted for the intuitive sense, which many affluent people have, that their own conduct is best illuminated by an explanation of this type. I believe that the appeal of akrasia can be explained by the fact that affluent people commonly misdiagnose their own conduct in this area. We have already said that people who demonstrate weakness of will do not form the intention to do what they believe they *ought* to do *all-*

[95] Elster, 2007, 237-239

things-considered. This omission is contrary to reason in the eyes of the agent and profoundly irrational. In contrast to this, an agent demonstrates moral weakness if she does not form the intention to do what she believes she *ought-morally* to do. This omission is wrongful, but it is not necessarily contrary to reason. Furthermore, one can display moral weakness without displaying weakness of the will.[96] An agent may believe that she has decisive moral reason to act in one way, but sufficient non-moral personal reasons to act in another way. She can then intend to act in the latter way without being irrational. This is, according to the compound explanation considered previously, likely to be true of many affluent people.

Yet, acting in a way that is contrary to what one believes morality requires, can seem, at the phenomenological level, very much like akrasia. The agent does not do what, in one very salient sense, she believes she ought to do. This, in turn, jars with her image of herself as a moral agent in much the same way that akrasia strikes at the notion that one is rational. The resulting action can seem very strange indeed from the agent's point of view. This remains the case, even though the person looking at this scenario from the outside will find it easy to rationalise that person's conduct with reference to the agent's beliefs about what is in his or her own interest. Many affluent people accept that they are morally required to do more for people living in extreme poverty, but do not act. This is particularly true of those who self-identify as akratic: if these people thought that there was sufficient moral reason to act in other ways, then no other explanation of their conduct would be needed. Yet, the invocation of weakness of will is mistaken. These people are morally weak. Due to experiential and conceptual similarities between the two predicaments, these people believe that their action is contrary to what they ought to do all-things-considered, when in fact it is only contrary to their beliefs about what they ought-morally to do.[97]

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the failure of affluent people to assist those living in extreme poverty at the present moment, even in cases where the personal cost of doing so would be trivial or

[96] This is true on the assumption that moral reasons are not always overriding in practical judgement.

[97] While the appeal to akrasia may be wholly innocent, this is not necessarily the case. Moral weakness is something that people take a very dim view of indeed. Realising that the charge of immorality could be levelled at them, affluent people may want to insist that they are weak-willed instead. It is much better to be blocked from rightful action by some uncontrollable contortion of practical irrationality than to act wrongly in the cool light of day.

non-existent. In order to explain this pattern of behaviour, it has looked at the process of deliberation in greater detail, drawing upon philosophical reflection about the nature of practical reason, survey data regarding public beliefs and attitudes towards poverty, and research from experimental psychology into the heuristics and frames that affect deliberation. To make progress on this front, the chapter also separated the process of deliberation into its different component parts. Taking each stage in turn, it focused upon the beliefs that affluent people have about the world, their beliefs about value, the process of reasoning itself and upon the motivation of conduct. At each point, the chapter asked what role obstruction in this area might play in an explanation of inaction. With this understanding in place, the chapter then argued that failure to assist, in cases of this type, is the product of a compound error. The mistakes that people make, at different points in the process of deliberation, work to reinforce each other, ultimately leading conduct astray.

More specifically, this chapter argued that the relevant kinds of error are threefold: they concern factual beliefs about extreme poverty and about the capacity to assist, they concern evaluative beliefs about what matters and how much, and they concern the process of deliberation itself. With regard to the cost of assisting, people tend to believe that life would go worse without certain things than it would actually go, and to believe that their own well-being is more important than it actually is. In addition to this, they are loss- and risk-averse, factors that help to sustain a bias in favour of the status quo. Even small costs take on exaggerated significance in the minds of affluent people, at the point of deliberation, and concerns about the future tend to loom large. At the same time, affluent people tend to underestimate the effectiveness of certain kinds of intervention. They sometimes believe, tacitly, that people living in poverty are undeserving of assistance. And, when they think about assistance at all, the value of this action is diminished by the impact of further biases. Indeed, this chapter argued that people are reluctant to part with what they *already* have; that they are especially reluctant to incur *certain personal losses* for the sake of *risky impersonal gains* that would accrue to a *distant mass of unknown* people as a result of action taken *in conjunction* with that of others. Futility thinking and depletion thinking represent a further form of rational error.

Looking at the situation in this way, affluent people will tend to reject the notion that failure to assist is contrary to reason. These people conclude that the losses they would incur by assisting provide them with sufficient reason to act in other ways. When they act on this judgement, they are mistaken but they are not akratic or weak-willed. At the same time, many affluent people continue to

be concerned about the morality of inaction. They worry that failure to do more is, even based on their own understanding of the situation, contrary to what morality requires. For this reason, they continue to adhere to moralising accounts of their own conduct and to advance explanatory theses that have no explanatory power.

Chapter Four: Extreme Poverty, Political Institutions and the Division of Labour

This thesis has defended the claim that the badness of extreme poverty generates a moral requirement to assist people living in this condition. There are duties of humanity that require anyone who is in a position to prevent or remedy a serious ill, to perform that action unless they would incur significant personal cost by doing so.[1] Most people who live in affluent societies are the bearers of this kind of moral responsibility. However, they do not provide assistance on a scale that is sufficient to discharge these duties successfully. As a result of this, the problem of extreme poverty continues to be much worse than it would otherwise be. Failure to meet this moral requirement gives rise to the Moral Problem, placing serious strain on the claim of those living in affluent societies to lead morally decent lives.[2]

In order to address this problem, it is important to develop a proper understanding of the obstacles and impediments that affluent people face when deliberating about poverty and assistance. This is a complicated area. Indeed, I argued in the preceding chapter that a convincing explanation of inaction is likely to be compounded in form. Yet, viewed from the perspective of the agent, there can be little doubt that the belief that doing more on an individual basis would be costly or burdensome serves as a major check on action in this area. While many affluent people recognise that the use of their resources in this way would be morally good (and perhaps even that it is morally required), the inclination to assist (when present at all) tends to be countervailed by the perception that doing more would be contrary to that person's self-interest. Understood in this way, as a particular instance of a more general conflict between morality and the real or perceived self-interest of the agent, contemporary inaction raises questions that political theorists have long sought to address. Foremost among these is the question of how people who display a mix of self-regarding and other-regarding motives can best work together to secure important moral ends.

One solution to this problem is to construct well-designed political institutions that can help individuals overcome the obstacles that they encounter. This chapter develops this insight further by looking at the possibility of constructing a division of labour between state and citizen, which would see political institutions take on responsibility for discharging duties of humanity, thereby leaving individuals freer to focus upon their own personal goals and objectives. This institutional approach

[1] See Chapter Two, Part IV.
[2] Wallace, 2013, Ch. 5

to motivating assistance has a number of advantages over reliance on philanthropy alone. However, I argue that there are important theoretical and practical issues that need to be addressed before we make this kind of arrangement the primary locus of cosmopolitan ambition, both now and in the future.

This chapter is structured as follows. In the first section, I look at the idea of an institutional division of moral labour in greater detail, laying out its function and situating it within the contemporary tradition of liberal thought. In the second section, I then argue that the traditional, statist conception of the division of labour is poorly suited to the world in which we live. Unless some of the values that it seeks to uphold are universal in scope, I suggest that this institutional arrangement may harm the global poor by treating certain preferences as legitimate, even though they reduce the likelihood that duties owed to them will be discharged on a voluntary basis. The third section explores ways in which the moral remit of the state could be expanded to include global poverty alleviation, and details the rationale behind such a revision. Importantly, such an approach would be non-utopian (resting upon a realistic partition of motives), progressive (improving upon existing practices), and morally superior (in terms of efficiency and fairness gains), to other alternatives. However, there are also important objections to a political project of this type. The fourth section addresses the claim that this arrangement would be illegitimate, given the need to respect the plurality of moral doctrines which citizens affirm. The fifth section considers the claim that it would be unstable given any realistic understanding of political sociology. I argue against this claim by looking in greater detail at the beliefs and values that would be needed in order to sustain this division of labour over time.

I. The Institutional Division of Moral Labour

The idea of a division of moral labour has been understood differently in different contexts. On the one hand, it has been used to characterise the theoretical distinction between principles of justice, which are designed to regulate the basic structure of society, and moral norms and values that apply elsewhere in life.[3] On the other, the idea of a division of moral labour is often used to describe a particular institutional ideal: one that assigns public institutions and individual citizens distinct roles in relation to the attainment of moral ends. More concretely, this approach holds that

[3] Scheffler, 2005, 239

institutions should discharge certain duties on behalf of citizens, thereby reducing or eliminating the need for people to pursue these things directly in their private lives. The rationale for an arrangement of this kind can also be construed in different ways. In one reading of the situation, the main benefit of such an approach is that it addresses conflict *within* the moral sphere between different values and the competing claims on individual action that they give rise to. Understood in this way, the hope is that political institutions can completely discharge certain moral duties on behalf of citizens, thereby ensuring that no residual demands (beyond the requirement to support the institutions in question) bear upon their choice of conduct in their daily lives.[4] On a different reading of the situation, the primary purpose of this arrangement is to make it easier for individuals to collectively realise moral outcomes that they endorse at some level, but which they cannot pursue directly or are not motivated to pursue due to the belief that such action would be costly and contrary to their own self-interest.[5] It is this second, institutional, conception of the division of moral labour that concerns me here.

The hope that well-designed and rational political institutions can help individuals to discharge their moral responsibilities more effectively occupies a central place in the political thought of Thomas Nagel.[6] It also plays an important role in John Rawls' theory of distributive justice. According to the argument that Rawls sets out, political institutions are the appropriate subject of principles of justice because only they can overcome the information and coordination problems that people face when acting alone. Even if they were morally motivated, individuals could not prevent certain forms of pernicious inequality from arising as a result of their own free transactions. These inequalities would then distort the overall distribution of goods and opportunities in such a way that justice no longer obtained. In order to address this problem, and to ensure that the background conditions against which such transactions take place continue to be fair, Rawls contends that the basic structure of society must be designed in such a way as to offset these effects. When public institutions perform this role successfully, using a combination of regulation and redistribution, Rawls argues that individuals and associations are left 'free to advance their own ends more effectively within the framework of the basic structure, secure in the knowledge that elsewhere in the social system the necessary corrections to preserve background justice are being made.' [7]

[4] Porter, 2009, 175-176
[5] White, 2012; Nagel, 1991, 53-54
[6] Nagel, 1991
[7] Rawls, 1993, 269

This rationale does not apply directly to cases in which we are concerned only with the sufficientarian goal that no person fall below some minimum level of resources. A moral objective of this type could, in principle, be achieved either through the provision of an institutional safety net, or by the charitable action of morally motivated individuals. However, even when public institutions are not uniquely positioned to achieve these goals, there are general reasons to favour a political solution to the problem of securing moral ends. Firstly, collective action designed to promote these outcomes often produces important *efficiency* gains that would be lost if the pursuit of these goods was left to the discretion of individuals. Once people commit to a collective undertaking on this basis, the state or collective agent tasked with realising the end in question is able to plan more effectively over time and draw upon the advantages that accompany economies of scale. Secondly, the greater stability, which results from the public provision of social goods, benefits people who are in receipt of these goods. Not only are these things provided, which would also be true in a society characterised by a high level of philanthropy, but they can rest more *secure* in the knowledge that these things will continue to be there in the future. The fact that there are established political institutions that have this outcome as their stated aim makes the meeting of needs less contingent on the will of individual people. As a result of this, those who depend upon it are freer in the republican sense, as discussed by Philip Pettit.[8] Thirdly, the fact that everyone partakes in procuring the good, and that costs can be imposed in an equitable manner, means that the *relative cost* of securing the good is lower for morally motivated persons than it would be in cases where only some people act to promote it through private philanthropy. Fourthly, the public procurement of these ends has the potential to realise important *fairness* gains. More precisely, an institutional arrangement of this kind guards against free-riding, and ensures that no one is left 'picking up the slack' caused by the failure of others to discharge their duties on a voluntary basis. Fifthly, the provision of goods that are secured using tax revenue tends to *feel less costly* than the alternative approach, which requires people to pay for goods continuously and directly on an individual basis. Given that the perception of incurring personal cost is both unpleasant and also a major impediment to action, the fact that the collective provision of goods has this subjective quality is an important virtue of the arrangement. Finally, an institutional approach of this kind serves to 'lock in' certain patterns of behaviour, functioning as a *commitment device* for actors who might

[8] Pettit, 1997, Ch.2-3

otherwise deviate from their own stated objectives over time.[9] The central thought here is that even agents who are committed to moral ends may be overwhelmed by the kind of prudential or egoistic considerations that loom large in deliberation at the point of decision. Knowing this to be the case, and aware that they will fail to discharge their moral responsibilities successfully if they continually succumb to motives of this kind, these people have reason to support institutional arrangements that make it easier to do the right thing. The institutional division of labour is an arrangement of this type.

The construction of an institutional division of labour, between state and citizen, is not the only way in which we could respond to the tendency among individuals to fall short in the moral domain and succumb to personal or partial motivations. One alternative would be to lower our aspirations for morality. By modifying our understanding of what morality permits, in a way that takes into account what people might realistically be expected to achieve, we would arrive at a set of demands that required those who are well-off to forgo less (by way of perceived self-interest) and, in this way, make moral compliance easier to achieve. Another alternative would be to try and bring about a moral transformation in the lives of individual people. If they could be persuaded to make the achievement of moral goals part of their own personal projects or ambitions, and to take satisfaction in the achievement of these aims, then the potential for conflict between the demands of morality and the interest of the individual would again be diminished. However, both approaches suffer from serious limitations. The former is problematic for moral realists, who deny that we have either the capacity or the incentive to 'water down' our understanding of morality in this way, while the latter has proved difficult to effect on a voluntarist basis. Indeed, schemes that require human beings to be less partial and more altruistic in their daily lives tend to retain a utopian quality. As the history of the twentieth century attests, this quality can easily become dystopian, albeit no more successful, when backed by the heavy-handed apparatus of the state.

Against this backdrop, the idea of an institutional division of labour represents an attractive third way. It denies that we need to revise our understanding of morality in a deflationary manner and it also promises to steer clear of the pitfalls of utopian theory, resting upon what its advocates take to be a realistic partition of motives within the self.[10] To understand how such an arrangement would function, it is important to appreciate that the institutional schema in question rejects the

[9] Measures of this kind, 'involve affecting the external world in ways that cannot be instantly and costlessly undone, for the purpose of making it less likely that one will choose the [lesser outcome] in the future' (Elster, 2007, 237).
[10] Nagel, 1991, Ch.6 and Ch.10

thesis of psychological egoism, and draws instead upon the notion that human beings have a sincere, but not always overriding, interest in the individual and collective realisation of moral ends. It matters for people whether they live in a society that conforms to principles of justice and whether they themselves lead morally decent lives. For this reason, the division of labour strategy holds that they will support institutions that realise these principles and address the needs of those who are very badly off. However, the approach in question also recognises that people have their own lives to lead – that each person is the repository of more partial concerns and motives that require an outlet in individual and social life. Therefore, the division of labour holds that citizens should be left free to focus primarily on the pursuit of their own goals and aspirations, so long as they continue to support institutions that correct the adverse effects that their personal choices have on the well-being of other people.

II. Why the Traditional Division of Labour is Problematic from a Global Perspective

The idea of a division of moral labour has conventionally been understood to apply to the architecture of a single society, with the purpose of achieving values that apply only within this unique sphere of social cooperation. Political theorists who are concerned with the realisation of egalitarian objectives at home typically imagine a system in which the state ensures a just distribution of resources, while citizens pursue their own goals through the mechanism of the market, the institutions of civil society, and also in their personal lives. On this understanding of the division of labour, public institutions are directly responsible for the attainment of some moral ends, but not others. They are responsible for securing background justice and guaranteeing that an appropriate distribution of rights and opportunities is obtained. However, they do not aim to advance *particular moral goods*, such as friendship or personal projects, which individuals are best placed to pursue for themselves. Nor are they concerned with moral obligations that citizens have to those who live *beyond their borders*. Duties to assist those living in extreme poverty must, on this account, be discharged through the private action of individuals if they are to be discharged at all.

Construed along these lines, the institutional arrangement in question is morally problematic. Not only does it neglect the needs of non-citizens at an institutional level, but it also risks harming those who live in extreme poverty by reducing the likelihood that citizens will discharge the duties of humanity on a voluntary basis. To see why this is the case, we need to say

something more about the political sociology of the division of labour and about the social practices that it sustains in the national context. In particular, we should pay attention to the role that liberal political thought has traditionally accorded the market in relation to the production and consumption of social goods. The practice of market exchange tends to be embraced by liberal theorists on the grounds that it provides an important source of information about the true cost of individual choices, that it allows for freedom of occupational choice in a way that is consistent with citizens' basic liberties, and that it serves as an engine of productivity, innovation and growth that is hard to replace.[11] Many of those who laud these characteristics also recognise that the market can have a less salutary effect on the beliefs, attitudes and preferences of those who have their lives structured by this institution. In particular, theorists since de Tocqueville have expressed concern that the economic life of modern democratic societies may lead citizens to embrace materialism and individualism to an unwarranted degree. However, these propensities are thought to be morally unproblematic *so long as* citizens continue to support political institutions that adjust for domestic inequality, and channel the desire for private gain to socially productive purposes.

This conclusion, about the moral permissibility of the beliefs and attitudes that the market gives rise to, is premature. Importantly, the argument advanced so far fails to recognise that the private preferences of citizens may also have a dramatic, and potentially detrimental, impact upon the life and well-being of people who live beyond the borders of a sovereign territory. This is especially true of the world today. The extent to which those who live in affluent societies are self-regarding or altruistic in general, bears directly on the likelihood that those living in extreme poverty will be able to access essential goods and services. Furthermore, if we take the argument about individualism and materialism seriously, as I believe we should, then there is good reason to think that those who live and work in a market setting are less likely to find the case for assistance compelling (and less likely to act on these moral duties when they believe that they exist), than those who live under a different set of institutional arrangements. Given the absence of global institutions that can compensate for the effect that these preferences have on the fulfilment of moral responsibilities that are owed to the world's poorest people, the traditional statist division of labour appears to suffer from a *lacuna*: it creates political institutions that offset the negative effects created by dominant patterns of personal interaction within the *domestic* sphere of society, while failing to

[11] Dworkin, 1985, Ch.8; Nagel, 1991, 91; Satz, 2010, 17-26, 66-71

address the negative impact that these same patterns of interaction and identification have on those living *abroad*. As a result of this, it may need to be revised in certain ways.

In order to see why the practices that the division of labour sanctions in the domestic context are problematic when viewed from a cosmopolitan standpoint, we can begin by looking at the effect that the practice of market exchange has on citizens' *beliefs about value*. The case for assistance, set out so far, rests on acceptance of the more general claim that human life and flourishing is of ultimate and intrinsic value. This value then grounds duties of humanity that are owed to all. However, the purchase and sale of goods in a market economy tends to proceed on a different assumption, namely that the value of what is priced is contingent: that the goods in question are something that can sensibly be bought and sold within a system of market exchange. Commenting on this fact, Michael Walzer notes that 'market relations imply a certain moral understanding that applies to all those goods that count as marketable.'[12] Sometimes, this perception is warranted. Yet, in many other cases, it is problematic. The idea that something is a commodity can have a corrosive effect upon public understandings of that thing and of the terms on which it should be provided. Furthermore, as Michael Sandel argues, 'the perception that almost anything can be bought or sold no longer applies to material goods alone.'[13] Under an institutional arrangement, which foregrounds market practices, these attitudes towards value increasingly govern the whole of life, shaping our understanding of childbirth, of our own bodies, of caring relationships, and of civic duties.[14]

In the following chapter, we will see how a tendency to embrace mass-marketing techniques among NGOs that work in the field of poverty eradication often leads to the service they provide being undervalued by those who are in a position to donate. By purchasing the good of assistance from these organisations, in much the same way that they would buy any other good or commodity, those who donate cease to be mindful of the fact that it is the life of another human being that sometimes rests in the balance.[15] However, at this juncture, I make only the weaker claim, that cosmopolitan arguments are less likely to find a receptive audience in a society that has grown accustomed to thinking about matters of value in this contingent manner. Among those who internalise the notion that value is a product of supply and demand, rather than a matter of status or

[12] Walzer, 1983, 104
[13] Sandel, 2012, 6
[14] ibid.
[15] This is a case of what Sandel refers to as 'corruption'.

moral standing, a moral argument that proceeds on the basis of rights or some other humanitarian premise is, I believe, likely to have diminished appeal.[16]

The market experience also affects *beliefs about individual well-being* and about the way in which it is related to the welfare of others.[17] Viewed from a first-person perspective, the market experience tends to reinforce the idea that the acquisition of material wealth and commodities is a central component of what makes a life go well.[18] Recent research from experimental psychology (and also from the discipline of happiness economics) suggests that this is not the case; a preoccupation with material goods, at the expense of other things, actually tends to diminish levels of reported happiness.[19] However, the contrary perception is widespread. It has a negative impact on rates of assistance because it leads people to embrace exaggerated notions of what they stand to forgo by acting in this way.[20] In addition to this, the 'bargaining discourse' of the market lends support to a second important supposition, namely that human interaction takes the form of zero-sum transactions (in which the gains or losses that accrue to one person are offset by those that accrue to another).[21] Viewed in this light, altruistic conduct – when directed towards those who are not in a position to reciprocate – appears to be self-defeating. A number of studies have confirmed that market norms tend to 'crowd out' other forms of motivation, reducing the likelihood that people will be moved to act altruistically by the presence of need alone. Indeed, psychological studies have found that even small cues, hinting at the monetisation of a transaction or game, are enough to significantly diminish other-regarding inclinations.[22] This fact is also damaging from a cosmopolitan standpoint. Viewed through the lens of mutual competition, potential donors are more likely to see the provision of assistance in terms of a choice between morality and self-interest, and to express concern that they will be 'suckered' in the event that they do more by other people who are less conscientious than they are.[23]

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[16] Walzer, 1983, 99-100

[17] According to Robert Lane, 'it is possible to conceive of a market experience that is typical, frequent and paradigmatic for those who do market work for pay, use money and buy – rather than make, inherit or receive – the commodities with which they adorn their lives' (Lane, 1991, 4).

[18] The tendency to focus on incremental material advancement was initially welcomed by political theorists as an alternative to life dominated by the more violent passions (Hirschman, 1997).

[19] According to these studies, it is quality of relationships and experiences that bear more directly upon subjective indices of well-being (Dunn *et al.*, 2011; Dunn *et al.*, 2008; Nicolao *et al.*, 2009).

[20] *See* Chapter Three

[21] Pettit, 1998, 66; Blackburn, 1998; Polanyi, 1968 [1947]

[22] Vohs *et al.*, 2006

[23] More speculatively, we can note that the most popular rationale employed in defence of a market-based economy is that this system allocates resources in the most efficient way possible, encouraging growth and leading to the maximum overall satisfaction of preferences without requiring coercion. This argument is broadly utilitarian in character: it holds that, by winnowing out those who are not competitive within a

None of this is to say that the impact of the market experience on cosmopolitan sensibilities is *solely* negative, that the *only* obstacles to private assistance are those that derive from the market experience, or that the forms of belief and bias identified herein will *necessary* exist under all institutional arrangements that aim to secure a division of moral labour.[24] There is, to the contrary, some evidence that the market has worked historically to undermine certain kinds of prejudice; that many of the heuristics and biases that affect deliberation in this area are a product of our evolutionary inheritance; and that the political or public realm may function as a source of norms and values that serve to offset some of these effects. However, what is apparent at this juncture is that the traditional statist division of moral labour may have a tendency to worsen the condition of those living in extreme poverty by treating certain sorts of belief and preference as legitimate, even though these preferences diminish the likelihood of private assistance. Without further action to ensure that duties to humanity are discharged successfully, the arrangement in question risks harming the global poor.

III. A Simple Revision? Extending the Moral Scope of the Division of Labour

Faced with a problem of this type, there are two ways in which we might proceed. Firstly, we could place our faith in the ability of global institutions to correct for the harmful effects that the private preferences of affluent people have on the well-being of those living in a condition of absolute poverty. However, institutions capable of performing this role effectively do not yet exist

market setting, the greatest social good is achieved (Lane, 1990; 23). At the same time, one reason people give for refusing to assist is that the overpopulation makes it impossible to prevent premature loss of life or serious suffering. According to exponents of this view, saving one person today entails that more must die tomorrow. There is little evidence that this situation currently obtains (Sen, 1999, 205-209). However, what is striking in this context is the extent to which these neo-Malthusian views parallel claims made about the market in a quite different political context. In both cases the argument is that some must perish in order for others to succeed. Those who accept that this kind of cost is a necessary evil in the domestic setting may also be more likely to find the population thesis intuitively appealing than those who doubt its initial validity. This effect would be consonant with the broader social phenomenon of market norms 'spilling over' into domains of social and political life that are not organised by this type of economic transaction (Titmuss, 1970; Hochschild, 1986, 67-68).

[24] Marx famously refers to the market as a 'cosmopolitan' institution in *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*. He writes that, '[a]s money develops into international money, so the commodity-owner becomes a cosmopolitan. The cosmopolitan relations of men to one another originally comprise only their relations as commodity-owners. Commodities as such are indifferent to all religious, political, national and linguistic barriers. Their universal language is price and their common bond is money. But together with the development of international money as against national coins, there develops the commodity-owner's cosmopolitanism, a cult of practical reason, in opposition to the traditional religious, national and other prejudices which impede the metabolic process of mankind' (Marx, 1981 [1859], 152). Haskell, 1985a; Haskell, 1985b; M. O'Neill, 2012; White, 2012

and are unlikely to emerge in the near future. Alternatively, we could hold that the task of discharging duties of humanity should be taken out of citizens' hands (to the extent that this is possible) and instead allocated to the same political institutions that aim to secure background justice in the domestic setting. This cosmopolitan approach to the state-level division of labour holds that domestic political institutions should be designed so that they promote a range of moral goods that are *universal in scope.*[25] So long as the citizens of affluent nations continue to support these institutions, which would have the authority and capacity to discharge these duties on their behalf, they could then go about their own lives safe in the knowledge that the adjustments (needed to prevent anyone from falling below this absolute threshold) were being made on a global basis. In this section, I argue that this institutional approach to the eradication of extreme poverty deserves to be taken seriously. The rationale for what I shall term the *wide-scope division of labour* is stronger than the rationale for its more traditional statist counterpart. Furthermore, the current proposal meets several of the desiderata that characterise good theory.

In order for modern states to discharge duties of humanity successfully on behalf of citizens, in the context of extreme poverty, governments would have to take action in at least three areas. Firstly, wealthy states would have to improve the *quantity* of assistance that they provide to severely impoverished people. It is important that affluent nations meet the targets they have themselves set in this area, and that they countenance more ambitious humanitarian and development goals.[26] Secondly, states would have to improve the *quality* of the assistance they provide. This would require them to make sure that funds allocated to address poverty are targeted effectively and that assistance is provided to those who are in serious need.[27] Finally, states would have to stop partaking in *harmful* practices that contribute to the problem of extreme poverty and construct new regulatory frameworks in order to guard against these outcomes.[28] Core objectives in this area might include, among other things, the reduction of tariff barriers on agricultural goods and textiles produced by developing countries, the robust monitoring of the extractive industries, and the

[25] This is a division of labour between citizen and state. There could also be a higher-level division of labour among nations, structured so as to better achieve the ends that they are authorised to pursue (Nagel, 1991, 178-179).
[26] Sachs, 2005; Riddell, 2007, 17
[27] Collier and Dollar, 2000; Easterly and Williamson, 2011
[28] Pogge, 2002

provision of greater oversight to prevent the transfer of illicit funds to and from economically developing countries.[29]

Building upon the earlier discussion, there are a number of reasons to endorse a proposal of this kind. Firstly, the centralised generation and disbursement of funds, which this approach entails, has the potential to realise important *efficiency gains* that are not available when humanitarian and development goals are financed by some section of the population on an *ad hoc* personal basis. At the present moment in time, NGOs working in the field of poverty eradication have to contend with unstable revenue flows over time, coordination problems which lead to the replication of activities by different actors, and shortfalls in information.[30] The state is uniquely positioned to address these obstacles because of the scale and stability that public financing brings with it, the centralisation of decision-making power that collective action embodies, and the ability to partake in long-term planning that these two characteristics facilitate. In addition to this, the state is positioned to make long-term credible commitments in this area. This is of further benefit to those living in extreme poverty: it provides them with *assurance* that they stand to be assisted, and that the services which they rely upon will continue to exist over time. The condition of extreme poverty is one of serious suffering and deep anxiety for the future. By recognising and responding to this fact, the current approach helps target an important source of psychological duress.

Focusing more closely on the donor-side of the equation, the division of labour approach also ensures that the *relative cost* of successfully discharging duties of humanity is lower, for morally motivated citizens, than it would otherwise be. In most affluent societies, relative wealth is an important determinant of personal happiness, whereas absolute wealth is not.[31] When thinking about assistance on an individual basis, the perception that use of personal resources in this way would make one worse-off than others (in relation to whom our own happiness is constituted) serves as an important check on action in this area.[32] The division of labour arrangement helps to overcome this problem by ensuring that all members of a society contribute to the fulfilment of this goal. Indeed,

[29] Even with these measures in place, citizens could still be required to take private action to help people living in extreme poverty. This would continue to be the case so long as there were opportunities to do a huge amount of good at little cost to themselves. However, should states perform the task set out by the division of labour successfully, far fewer opportunities of this kind would exist for individual citizens. By targeting their programmes effectively states could 'pick all of the low hanging fruit.' As a result of this, and the rising cost of assistance, the demand for private action would be diminished.

[30] Riddell, 2007; Barnett and Finnemore, 1999

[31] Easterlin, 1995; Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2002

[32] On this point, Judith Lichtenburg writes that, 'the most practically relevant reason that people are not more generous towards those in need is that other people are not more generous' (Lichtenburg, 2004, 88).

by ensuring that the cost of assistance is spread equitably, the goal of poverty eradication could be met without necessarily having any impact upon the relative position of those who are called upon to assist. Duties of humanity can be discharged successfully with almost no one being made worse off at all. In addition to this, the division of labour arrangement has the potential to realise important *fairness gains* by providing mutual assurance that other people, within that society, will not free-ride on efforts to eradicate extreme poverty, and that no one will be left picking up the slack caused by the failure of others to discharge their duties successfully.[33] Many people object to the idea that they should forgo a great deal as a result of their own moral conscientiousness, while millionaires and other wealthy people do nothing to discharge moral responsibilities owed to those living in poverty around the world. The division of labour addresses this concern.

Another virtue of this approach is that the provision of assistance to those living in extreme poverty through a system of taxation and collective action by the state would *feel* less onerous, at an individual level, than attempts to discharge duties of humanity on a voluntary basis. The question of what the state should spend our money on, and whether it should pursue the objective of ending poverty abroad, seems quite different from the question of whether we as individuals should spend our own money achieving this outcome and is, I believe, more likely to meet with an affirmative answer. This effect can be explained in a number of ways. People are already accustomed to political institutions using tax revenue to pursue other-regarding objectives. Money deducted at the point of income is not something they have had time to grow attached to, and it does not form part of the material baseline against which individuals tend to evaluate their own personal options. Beyond this, individuals incur a cost when deliberating about whether to assist, which stems from the anxiety that is produced by the thought of what they stand to lose and the difficulty that this creates in doing what is right for them.[34] The automaticity of the division of labour approach removes this cost by making this type of deliberation largely unnecessary.

Finally, the division of labour arrangement helps to overcome the problem of moral weakness that arises in the context of widespread inaction. By delegating moral responsibility for discharging duties of humanity to the state, citizens are able to 'lock in' a course of action which they endorse, but from which they also know that they might defect if they were left to their own devices. In order to address this problem, many affluent people have already established standing orders with banks that commit them to providing resources to aid and development organisations over time.

[33] This still leaves the problem of other countries not doing their fair share in the fight against poverty.
[34] G.A Cohen, 2000, 23-25

These arrangements, while motivationally efficacious, can be easily undone. Once the public institutions have adopted the current programme as their official aim, the commitment in question is still harder to reverse. In this sense, the division of labour acts as a stronger *commitment device* than existing practices. In the absence of an arrangement of this type, many affluent people risk living in a condition of 'bad faith'. The problem of bad faith arises when people ignore or reject the moral course of action in order to pursue their own ends, and then deceive themselves about this fact, insisting both to themselves and to others that their own conduct in this area (and perhaps the life they have led more broadly) is worthy of moral affirmation. For a number of reasons, this is not a good state to be in.[35] Furthermore, it is the claims of the world's poor people that place greatest pressure on the notion that the conduct of the affluent is acceptable from the moral point of view.[36] The wide-scope division of labour addresses this problem by arranging the world in such a way that moral outcomes are easier to achieve.[37] It makes it easier to be moral.

So far, we have looked at the more immediate virtues of the wide-scope approach to the division of labour. In addition to this, there is more general reason to make this arrangement central to the way in which we think about global political theory. The proposal in question is *non-utopian*, it is *morally progressive*, it *builds upon existing practices* in a constructive way, and it is compatible with *the goals and aspirations of non-ideal theory*. Taking the first point first, a political theory is utopian if the institutions it describes cannot be achieved in practice, or if they cannot be stable over time, because of certain fixed features of persons or certain enduring facts about the nature of the world in which we now live.[38] The propensity of human beings to defect from cooperative schemes that require the suppression of the personal point of view results in a constraint of this kind. The wide-scope division of labour responds to this fact by authorising the state to pursue important moral ends on behalf of citizens, thereby diminishing the degree of concern for these things, which citizens need to display in their private lives if they are to avoid acting wrongly. The wide-scope division of labour applies this logic to the eradication of extreme poverty, as well as to the pursuit of justice at home. It

[35] *See* Chapter Two, Part IV.
[36] It is here, and also perhaps in our treatment of animals, that the most serious moral failure occurs at the present moment in time.
[37] Writing about what he terms 'our own pathetic failure' to live up to even the most cursory demands of impartiality, Thomas Nagel suggests that, 'any political theory that merits respect has to offer us an escape from the self-protective blocking out of the importance of others, which we may find psychologically unavoidable in a badly arranged world but which involves the denial of an essential aspect of ourselves' (Nagel, 1991, 19, 32).
[38] Nagel, 1990, 21-22, 27-28

holds that such an arrangement is likely to be feasible and stable in light of a realistic understanding of human motivation.

The current proposal is also morally progressive insofar as 'the successful implementation of its principles would constitute on balance a significant moral improvement over the status quo.'[39] All but the most hardened aid sceptics accept that there are some *types* of aid that have the potential to do a great amount of good for people living in extreme poverty, and also that the existing practice can be *improved* in important ways.[40] There is also a consensus that many existing practices in the international arenas have a seriously detrimental impact on people who live in this condition.[41] The wide-scope division of labour requires the re-orientation of state action across these areas, in service of the ultimate goal of poverty eradication. Therefore, it does not lead to general affirmation of the status quo. However, what it does do is build upon the more morally acceptable aspects of existing international practices. It recognises that victories in this area tend to be hard-won and that we cannot afford to disregard progress that has already been made.[42] Central elements of a wide-scope division of labour already exist in nascent form. If a more robust scheme of state-authored assistance could be developed and rendered stable, something that we do not yet have reason to doubt, then this would be a very great moral achievement indeed.

Finally, the establishment of a wide-scope division of labour could serve as a stepping-stone or bridge to the achievement of more ambitious cosmopolitan goals, such as global distributive justice, further down the line. We are not compelled to view the current proposal in this transitional light. Those who ascribe to more minimal accounts of international morality can sensibly view it as a political solution to the specific problem of individual-level inaction in the face of extreme poverty. At the same time, theorists who extol the virtues of ideal theory often argue that the search for immediate improvements can be dangerous if it is not situated within a framework of wider goals and aspirations. What we are able to do in the future, with what chance of success, and at what cost to ourselves, are all affected in a path-dependent manner by what we choose to do now.[43] As a result of this, we should try not to accidentally foreclose avenues that lead to still better states of affairs over a longer time frame. Yet, the establishment of a wide-scope division of labour would do nothing to impede and might even be conducive to the development of just global institutions at a

[39] Buchanan, 2003, 39
[40] Collier and Dollar, 2002; Easterly and Williamson, 2011; Easterly, 2006, 375
[41] Pogge, 2010, 20; Kar, 2011; Kar and Cartwright-Smith, 2010; Ndikumana and Boyce, 2008; Collier, 2008, Ch.9
[42] Buchanan, 2003, 39
[43] Simmons, 2010; Gilabert, 2012

later point in time.[44] If states are tasked with discharging similar moral goals in international life, more sophisticated international institutions may emerge in order to help parties respond to coordination problems that they face and to discharge their obligations effectively.[45]

IV. Would the Wide-Scope Division of Labour Be Legitimate?

One important objection to the division of labour approach, which has not been discussed so far, holds that it would be illegitimate for the state to take on this responsibility given hostility to cosmopolitan goals that exists among some sections of the population.[46] According to criticism of this kind, it would be seriously wrong for the state to take resources from people who do not accept that there are duties of humanity and to use them for the purpose of helping those living in extreme poverty. This is because those who have this precise configuration of beliefs lack either content-dependent or content-independent reason to endorse the policy. If they are made to pay for overseas aid, then these people are, the argument goes, simply being coerced. The first thing to note here is that the problem of legitimacy does not arise if we equate the legitimacy of state action with the comprehensive moral justification of a given policy or practice. The wide-scope division of labour approach stands to help millions of people around the world who would otherwise lose their lives or suffer from a condition of extreme wretchedness. A wide-scope division of labour would also help affluent people discharge moral responsibilities that are owed to these people. In this sense, it would meet what Joseph Raz terms the 'normal justification thesis' for political authority, by enabling them to better act on reasons that they already have.[47] As a result of this, it may be the case that the proposal is justified, and that the state has the authority needed to carry it out, even if some people do not accept the justification that is on offer. However, a number of theorists reject the notion that the distinction between justification and legitimacy can be collapsed in this way.[48] Indeed, on an alternative view developed by John Rawls, the legitimacy of the principles that govern the basic structure of a society is a product of the degree to which they meet a standard of

[44] That is unless we embrace Lenin's revolutionary dictum that 'the worse, the better'.
[45] *See* Chapter Five for evidence in support of this claim.
[46] Around 8% of the British public falls into the category of 'Disapproving Rejecters' when it comes to support for overseas aid. These people believe that spending on overseas aid should be cut (MORI, 2008, August).
[47] Raz, 1985, 18-19
[48] Simmons, 1999; Schmidtz, 1990

hypothetical justification to reasonable people. More precisely, he defends the Liberal Principle of Legitimacy which holds that, 'our exercise of political power is fully proper only when it is exercised in accordance with a constitution the essentials of which all citizens as free and equal may reasonably be expected to endorse in light of principles and ideals acceptable to their common human reason.'[49] The current, legitimacy-based critique of the wide-scope division of labour may have purchase in this context. It holds that any attempt to expand the moral remit of the state in this way would not display the required degree of neutrality between different moral doctrines, privileging a cosmopolitan perspective in a way that makes this action illegitimate.

In support of this claim, the critic may begin by noting that, in any modern society, people adhere to a variety of different moral beliefs concerning the standing of others and the nature of the good. At the same time, these people also need to settle upon shared principles of justice, which establish the terms of social interaction, if they are to receive the benefits of society understood as a cooperative undertaking for mutual advantage. This tension between pluralism and the need for common principles of justice can (according to liberal theories of justice) be resolved through the mechanism of partial agreement. Confronted with a situation of this type, reasonable people will agree that, in public political life, it is *best to treat citizens as if* they were free and equal, and to endorse principles of justice that can be derived from this basis. This, in turn, has important ramifications for the legitimacy of state action. The decision to accord all citizens liberal rights, to structure opportunities in a way that is fair, and to secure background justice within the bounds of the state, can be justified to all reasonable people by reference to principles that do not rely on the truth of any single comprehensive moral doctrine. The principles in question rest only on the content of this public agreement. Drawing only upon a process of purely political reasoning, the justification of constitutional essentials remains neutral between different moral theories.

According to the critic, this condition is not met in the case of moral principles that the wide-scope division of labour aims to further. Unlike the domestic division of labour, this institutional arrangement aims to secure important moral goods for *non-citizens*. Moral support for this approach derives from the notion that human beings, and not just one's fellow citizens, are the bearers of equal and ultimate value. Yet this universalist premise is not one that all citizens in a liberal polity will necessarily endorse, given the range of moral doctrines that they affirm. Nor is it something, the critic argues, that they must grant for political reasons. Ex hypothesi, the people in

[49] Rawls, 1993, 138

question do not form or aspire to form a society with those living in extreme poverty, and they do not *need* to settle on principles of justice in order to facilitate an undertaking with this purpose. In light of this, reasonable people, who adhere to political principles of justice at home, may refuse to treat *all* people as free and equal and instead choose to relate to those living beyond national borders in the way that their own comprehensive doctrines specify. Viewed in this light, the subsequent use of public resources to pursue cosmopolitan moral ends, and the attempt to inculcate support for this undertaking amongst citizens, may be illegitimate because it runs foul of the neutrality requirement. The wide-scope division of labour would require the institutions of the state to act in a way that some reasonable people have neither political nor moral – as they perceive it – reason to endorse.

There are two ways in which the defender of the wide-scope division of labour might try to foreclose this line of argument, neither of which is entirely satisfactory. The first approach holds that the Liberal Principle of Legitimacy applies only to constitutional fundamentals, not to policy decisions about how the state conducts itself in relation to those living in extreme poverty, and that it does not therefore need to be satisfied in this instance. This argument is problematic because the controversy surrounding the wide-scope division of labour concerns the scope of the values that the institutions of the state are authorised to serve. According to the critique discussed so far, citizens only need to settle on domestic principles of justice (in order to enjoy the benefits of mutual cooperation), and to accept the trade-offs between their own preferences and those of other people with whom they interact in this context. In contrast to this, the wide-scope division of labour proposes to use tax revenue in a fundamentally different way. It aims to help non-citizens lead better lives, and this is something that requires a deeper level of justification.[50] The second response to the legitimacy critique holds that there is already a global scheme of mutual cooperation that exists, or which people must aspire towards, that connects affluent people to those living in extreme poverty.[51] In virtue of this, the argument holds that everyone has political reason to grant those living outside their state the same moral standing that they accord their fellow citizens. However, this argument is also problematic because it makes the legitimacy of the wide-scope division of labour turn on the vexed question of whether there is, or ought to be, a global basic structure. If

[50] Of course, it may be a preference of some citizens for those living in extreme poverty to be assisted. Citizens who do not share this concern could then perhaps accept this expenditure in the same way that non-religious people accept the public funding of religious institutions. The bundle of goods and services pursued by the state would be something that, taken as a whole, they consent to. However, the legitimacy of the wide-scope division of labour would then turn on the contingent matter of whether a sufficiently large portion of the public embraces this aim.

[51] Abizadeh, 2007

possible, it would be best to demonstrate that the wide-scope division of labour could be legitimate, independent of this further claim.

This kind of argument can be developed in a number of ways. The most direct response to the legitimacy critique holds that it misunderstands the enterprise of political liberalism at a fundamental level. In a just society, support for principles of justice is not the product of a *modus vivendi*. It does not, this reply notes, stem from the fact that these principles contribute to an arrangement from which all stand to gain (even when this is true). Rather, agreement in this area is a *moral agreement* that is supported for *moral reasons*.[52] Liberal principles of justice draw support from an overlapping consensus between different reasonable comprehensive doctrines. When a consensus of this type exists, the moral grounds for affirming principles of justice will vary from person to person according to the different doctrines that they affirm. However, all will understand that the terms and conditions laid out by principles of justice are in fact *just*, and not merely *useful* to them.

This, in turn, has ramifications for the way in which we assess the legitimacy of the wide-scope division of labour. What we need to know is whether there are, among all the doctrines that could form part of an overlapping consensus of this kind (i.e. that have the moral resources needed to endorse liberal principles of justice in the domestic arena), there are any that do not *also* recognise the equal and ultimate value of *human life* more widely. One possibility is that there are none: that one cannot hold that prospective citizens are free and equal without holding this view about citizens *qua* persons. In the context of personal interaction, Thomas Scanlon and Joseph Raz have both argued that it would be extremely difficult to form lasting relationships with a person who valued you only as a friend or companion, but not also as a human being.[53] These relationships would be highly, and perhaps unacceptably, contingent. The same might be true of those who value their fellow citizens *only* as members of a collective undertaking. They may prove to be unable to forge the bonds of trust and community that are needed to sustain a liberal society over time. Their doctrines would then have to be deemed unreasonable on this basis. If this line of argument is correct, then it would follow that all reasonable moral doctrines *necessarily* contain the resources needed for the public pursuit of cosmopolitan aims to be justified to their adherents, regardless of the other differences that exist among them. As a result of this, the legitimacy condition would be met: insofar as the wide-scope division of labour worked to secure goods that all citizens acknowledge, it would not be

[52] Rawls, 1993, 143-148
[53] Scanlon, 1998, 165; Raz, 1999, 282, 287-88

prejudiced against any single reasonable moral doctrine and would respect the ideal of political neutrality.

Alternatively, there may be some doctrines that provide adequate support to principles of justice in the domestic context, but which do not support action to procure wider cosmopolitan aims. Certain nationalist doctrines, which hold that the relation of moral equality exists *only among members of the same nation*, might conform to a specification of this type. Of course, someone who affirmed this view could not endorse liberal principles of justice for a society that contained many nationalities and ethnicities. This may, in turn, mark them out as unreasonable. But if we bracket out this concern for the time being, then these people could, in principle, form part of a domestic overlapping consensus (given the requisite degree of co-incidence between the nation and the state) without accepting that something is owed to all people in virtue of their basic moral standing. If doctrines of this type exist, and are deemed to be reasonable in light of the conception that political liberalism sets out, then the next step is to consider whether they would find support in a liberal society characterised by the free interplay of public reason. After all, the liberal principle of legitimacy requires only that the exercise of political power show due regard for moral doctrines that citizens would actually affirm when their judgement is not impeded by deliberative obstacles and error.[54]

There is reason to doubt that beliefs of this kind would survive in a society that had already realised justice within the domestic sphere to an appropriate degree. Indeed, as Allen Buchanan has argued, the key liberal institutions tend to have a salutary effect on the views that people entertain about the fundamental moral status of others.[55] While there may be good reason to accord a degree of priority to compatriots, the claim that non-nationals lack the required normative standing, which is needed in order to generate claims to assistance, rests upon an arbitrary status ascription of the sort that liberal institutions have proved adept at overcoming. In light of this, it may well be the case that chauvinistic doctrines of the type considered here would simply fail to find adherents in a properly structured liberal society. If this was the case, then once again the problem of legitimacy

[54] The second formulation of the liberal principle of legitimacy states that: 'our exercise of political power is proper and hence justifiable only when it is exercised in accordance with a constitution the essentials of which all citizens may reasonably be expected to endorse in light of principles and ideals acceptable to them *as reasonable and rational*' (Rawls, 1993, 217).

[55] These institutions include legal rights that guarantee freedom of thought, reliable systems for the social identification of expertise and a culture of epistemic egalitarianism that encourages citizens to both challenge and respect the arguments that are put forward by others (Buchanan, 2004).

would not arise: the cosmopolitan division of labour could still be justified to all citizens in light of moral goods that they commonly acknowledge.

Finally, it is possible that the preceding thesis is mistaken and that moral doctrines of this kind would continue to find support even in a society where liberal institutions function as they should. The steps needed to address extreme poverty could not then be justified to reasonable people irrespective of the doctrines that they freely affirm. This result would be problematic for the Liberal Principle of Legitimacy. This is because, at an intuitive level, it seems we cannot afford to give certain minority doctrines a veto power over public policy when the life or death of so many people depends on whether the state is authorised to adopt measures of the relevant kind. Some measure of neutrality is important for the question of legitimacy. But it is not the only thing that bears upon what institutions are permitted to do in a situation of this kind.

In order to accommodate this insight, we could hold that the wide-scope division of labour proposal is justified – albeit not legitimate – and that this is what matters in the present context. Alternatively, we might reject the liberal account of legitimacy on the grounds that it is incompatible with the measures that are needed to prevent those living in extreme poverty from losing their lives. Finally, we might amend the Liberal Principle of Legitimacy so that it takes account of these considerations. Indeed, it is plausible to think that the state must remain neutral only among doctrines that make possible fair terms of social cooperation *and also* accord moral standing to persons more widely. It is these beliefs that most clearly warrant respect. Interpreted in this way, the reasonableness of a moral doctrine would then turn upon its compatibility with a set of substantive claims that extend beyond those (concerning the good of society and standing of citizens) that the enterprise of political liberalism set out to incorporate from the very beginning.[56] However, the additional claim about the standing of persons remains compatible with a wide range of comprehensive moral doctrines. In light of this, the revised principle still fits with the idea of liberalism as a political venture.[57] The wide-scope division of labour could then be justified to all reasonable persons, on terms that they would accept.

[56] This revision may not be radical. Rawls rejects the notion that the doctrine of political liberalism is neutral between all values, or that it rests on no moral values at all. He states that the principles of justice as fairness are substantive: the common ground they draw upon is not procedurally neutral ground (Rawls, 1993, 191-192).

[57] Rawls argues that what matters in this context is that liberalism leaves 'sufficient space for citizens to pursue ways of life worthy of moral respect' (ibid. 187).

V. Would the Wide-Scope Division of Labour Be Stable?

The preceding discussion focused on what citizens have reason to do or to accept in relation to the problem of world poverty, and also upon what the state has the authority to do in the absence of unanimous support among the population. The question of stability focuses on a different set of considerations. It forces us to think about what citizens would actually do, and come to believe, under an arrangement of this kind. A second challenge to the wide-scope division of labour holds that it could not engender continued support for the goals that it aims to further, and would therefore be unstable over time. In order for the approach in question to succeed, citizens would have to combine personal partiality in the private sphere with on-going support for cosmopolitan political institutions. Yet, egalitarian theorists have long worried that beliefs and attitudes cultivated by the market (in the domestic context) threaten to erode this partition of motives, leading citizens to undermine the moral character of public institutions via the electoral choices they make. According to the critique that I now want to consider, there is good reason to doubt that citizens will continue to support poverty eradication abroad, even if the tendency can be kept in check within the confines of a single society. Those who already chafe at the limits imposed by the domestic pursuit of egalitarian ends will, this critique holds, frustrate the implementation of public measures designed to address the problem of extreme poverty through their voting behaviour. In its strongest form, this stability-based critique suggests that the wide-scope division of labour is indirectly self-defeating. It holds that the institutional arrangement, necessitated by the wide-scope division of labour, will generate an outlook among citizens that subverts the very ends that it aims to bring about. Lacking the important virtue of stability, the critique suggests that the wide-scope division of labour is utopian after all.

This stability-based challenge can be formulated in at least two different ways. The first account holds that it is psychologically incoherent to ask citizens both to act as market actors in their private lives and also to consistently manifest high levels of support for the eradication of extreme poverty abroad.[58] In order to do this, they would have to work hard for material goods that they desire and believe that they are entitled to, while also endorsing collective action by the state which

[58] Nagel has expressed a similar concern about liberal egalitarian political theory, stating that 'the tension between its public impersonal egalitarianism and its encouragement of the private pursuit of personal aims may be too sharp to permit coherent reflection in the integrated but internally differentiated personality of the individuals who are supposed to embrace them both' (Nagel, 1991, 58-59).

diminishes their stock of possessions and re-directs resources, acquired through market transactions, to benefit the distant needy.

While there may be some tension here, it is important to note by way of response that these two attitudes do not necessarily sit in opposition to one another at a theoretical level. It is quite possible that entitlement or desert-based claims are understood to hold true *only* when certain background moral conditions are met, both at home and abroad.[59] In this regard, I believe that the psychology of the athlete is illuminating. A person who is engaged in professional competition of this kind competes fiercely for his or her own particular victory over sporting rivals within the boundaries established by an impartial framework of rules. Yet, the dogged pursuit of personal success in this environment does not necessarily translate into diminished support for rules that establish the basis of fair competition. While some athletes cheat, the propensity to act in this way is contingent. For every athlete who behaves in this way, there are many others who understand that the value of what is achieved in this context depends upon conditions of background fairness being met. Such a view is, therefore, not psychologically incoherent. Affluent people could, in theory, come to value personal achievement (delineated in material terms), and to believe that they are entitled to what they have, only when they know that this outcome has not been achieved at the expense of other people who have had serious illness left untreated, or their life cut short by extreme poverty.

The second version of the stability-based critique is harder to address. Understood in a more moderate light, this objection holds that, while a division of motives along these lines is possible, it is *unlikely* to be sustainable given a *realistic understanding* of the way in which the institutions in question would operate. Although citizens could, in theory, develop the integrated outlook that the division of labour requires of them (in relation to both domestic and global moral goods), the operation of the market will, on this view of things, continue to frustrate this pattern of moral development in practice. Given the pervasive impact that the market has on the lives of individual people, this argument holds that it will be very difficult (as a matter of sociological fact) for citizens to confine the effect that it has on their personal development to a single sphere of activity. In practice, we should expect self-regarding and acquisitive impulses to bear upon the political choices that these people make as well. And, if this is the case, support for the wide-scope division of labour will diminish over time. According to this line of criticism, there is an important

[59] In this case, beliefs about entitlement and desert become legitimate expectations (Rawls, 2001, 72-74).

gap between what is possible and what will actually happen under the institutional arrangement described so far.

In order to ascertain the weight of this objection, it is important to look at the empirical claim that it makes in greater detail. While it is true that norms associated with the market are increasingly dominant in the social life of many post-industrial societies, it would be a serious error to conflate what is possible, or even likely, with what already exists. Furthermore, there is reason to question the tacit assumption made so far that actually existing versions of the division of labour (which can be observed in these types of society today) accord tolerably well with the ideal set out by egalitarian theories of justice. If this is not the case, then it will not be possible to make valid inferences from observations about individual conduct in market societies to claims about the way in which the market experience will continue to affect individual behaviour under institutional arrangements of the sort that this chapter describes.[60]

Joshua Cohen has done much to advance this line of argument in response to the claim that incentive-seeking behaviour (inculcated by the market) will lead to unjust inequalities, even in a society where institutions are designed to preserve background justice and citizens also support institutions in this public role.[61] According to the argument he sets out, this outcome will be avoided because political institutions exert a powerful influence over the ethos of a society and, hence, upon the personal beliefs, attitudes and values of its members.[62] As a result of this, Cohen suggests that just domestic institutions will generate their own moral support, enhancing the virtue that citizens display when making private choices.[63] For our purpose, a more moderate version of this thesis is sufficient: namely, that under a properly constituted wide-scope division of labour, political institutions designed to realise the goal of poverty alleviation could, in practice, create and sustain public support for the ends that they seek to further.

[60]Commenting on this point, Rawls notes that 'the limits of the possible are not given by the actual, for we can to a greater or lesser extent change political and social institutions and much else' (Rawls, 1999a, 4-5).
[61] J. Cohen, 2001
[62] On the concept of an ethos *see* Wolff, 1998, 105.
[63] In this regard, Cohen draws support from Rawls who writes that, 'A theory of justice must take into account how the aims and aspirations of people are formed… everyone recognises that the institutional form of society affects its members and determines in large part the kind of persons they want to be as well as the kind of persons they are. The social structure also limits people's ambitions and hopes in different ways; for they will with reason view themselves in part according to their position in it and take account of the means and opportunities they can realistically expect. So an economic regime, say, is not only an institutional scheme for satisfying existing desires and aspirations but a way of fashioning desires and aspirations in the future' (Rawls, 1993, 269).

In order to determine whether this hypothesis is correct or not, we need to look more closely at the way in which political and social institutions affect the moral development of citizens. According to Rawls, a political system can only be stable if citizens develop a normally sufficient 'sense of justice': one that leads them to comply with the demands that just institutions place upon them.[64] Citizens possess a sense of justice when they identify, on a personal level, with moral principles. This sense is sufficiently strong when the demands of justice normally prevail against any inclination towards injustice on the part of citizens.[65] Developing this notion further, Rawls draws upon the psychological work of Lawrence Kohlberg in order to show how this balance of motives could come about in practice. Based on the view that he sets out, the moral development of citizens proceeds in three stages. At the first stage, a person develops attitudes of love and reciprocal care towards his or her parents and towards other family members. This process is natural and more or less automatic. At the second stage, this person will also become aware of other citizens who follow the rules and norms of that society. Understanding that these rules, which are widely upheld and observed, work to the individual's own overall advantage, the person will then wish to reciprocate and do their part. In light of this, the person will develop ties of 'friendly feeling and trust' for fellow citizens.[66] Finally, at the third stage of moral development, the individual will develop an appreciation of the fact that these rules, which have served them well, are good in their own right and worthy of support (independent of any actual pattern of reciprocity). At this point, the individual will come to affirm the principles of justice. They will also embrace the idea that human beings are endowed with certain moral rights.[67] Progress towards this end derives from a settled family environment, from a liberal education system, and from the process of civic education to which people are subject so long as they reside in a liberal society.

By extension, one might hope that the same process could also be used to inculcate support for institutional measures designed to tackle the problem of extreme poverty overseas. However, there is reason to believe that this view of things is unduly optimistic. Importantly, the cognitive-developmental approach to moral learning, upon which this account relies, has been challenged on a number of fronts.[68] To begin with, recent advances in the field of moral psychology have tended to demonstrate that the primary impetus for moral decision-making is emotional and intuitive, with

[64] Rawls, 1993, 141
[65] Rawls, 1999a, 398
[66] ibid. 429
[67] Kohlberg (1973), 632
[68] Gilligan, 1982, 18; Haidt and Kesebir, 2010

rational deliberation playing only a secondary role. One result of this is that the idea of reasoned progress towards higher levels on moral cognition may be mistaken.[69] Developing this challenge further, recent work has also tended to stress the social function of moral belief, looking at ways in which moral codes help to minimise conflict and facilitate cooperation among large groups of people. From a social functionalist perspective, the second stage of moral development (which draws heavily upon the force of social convention) is largely sufficient for this purpose. Therefore, parochialism tends to be, 'descriptively the default, normal, evolutionarily prepared state of moral cognition.'[70] Indeed, if the stability of the division of labour rests on personal identification with higher-level moral principles, then this finding also presents us with further cause for concern. Commenting upon this problem, in relation to cosmopolitan goals and objectives, Martha Nussbaum notes there is a tendency among citizens to find, 'in an idealized image of the nation or leader a surrogate parent who will do our thinking for us.'[71] Many people do not progress beyond this point.

These considerations suggest that the account of moral development sketched out by Rawls is incomplete. Yet, their revisionary force should not be overstated. In the first instance, it is an exaggeration to suggest that his account is insensitive to social or sentimental aspects of moral development, or that it relies upon the progression of reason alone. Rather, Rawls recognises that moral attitudes and beliefs emerge in the context of social interaction with others. Furthermore, when this is not the case, that they emerge naturally in this context, he argues that moral education should be used in order to place the moral sentiments on a sound footing and to supply the motives that lead people to support just institutions.[72] Developing this insight further, there is reason to hope that certain forms of cosmopolitan education could help to generate support for the wide-scope division of labour. According to Martha Nussbaum, who is an advocate of this approach, education could be tailored to ensure that citizens 'recognise the worth of human life wherever it occurs' and also make sure that they see themselves 'as bound by common human activities and problems' to people who live a great distance away.[73] In order to achieve this goal, the education system would

[69] Richard Rorty suggests that most of the work in changing intuitions is done 'by manipulating our feelings rather than by increasing our knowledge… the emergence of a human rights culture seems to owe nothing to increased moral knowledge, and everything to hearing sad and sentimental stories' (Rorty, 1993, 122-23).
[70] Haidt and Kesebir, 2010, 819
[71] Nussbaum, 1997, 84
[72] Rawls, 1999b, 459-461
[73] Nussbaum, 1997, 9

have to be altered so that it encouraged citizens to critically examine their own beliefs and traditions, to develop an appreciation of the fact that they are all members of a wider community of human beings, and to develop their narrative imagination so that it became easier for them to understand, and to empathize with, the predicament of others.[74] There has already been some progress in this area. Surveys of public opinion suggest that the majority of people living in affluent countries already believe that extreme poverty is a moral problem that needs to be addressed.[75] This is still more remarkable given the markedly imperfect conditions under which their moral education about global issues currently takes place. There is reason to hope for further gains in this area in the future.

Beyond this, there is reason to think that the establishment of egalitarian political institutions at the national level could help to stabilise the wide-scope division of labour in a number of ways. An egalitarian society would include measures designed to ensure that there was a wide dispersal of capital across the population, to block the intergenerational transmission of advantage, and to prevent the corruption of democratic politics by economic elites.[76] When viewed from a sociological perspective, it would display many of the attributes that characterise Esping-Andersen's, *social democratic* model of the welfare state.[77] Under these conditions, there is some evidence that people do, in fact, tend to develop greater concern for the plight of people who live in a state of absolute material deprivation. Indeed, the degree to which actually existing institutions conform to the social democratic ideal is the single factor that has the *greatest* overall bearing on the quality and the quantity of overseas aid that states currently provide.[78] This suggests that the idea of universal concern, embedded first in domestic political institutions, comes to have a powerful bearing on the views and attitudes of those who live under them.[79] As a result of this, cosmopolitans do not need to make an enemy of those who are concerned primarily about inequality at home: drawing upon both

[74] The purpose of such an education programme would be modest. It would not aim to bring about a moral revolution in the life of individual people. Rather, it would help citizens grasp the principled rationale behind the wide-scope division of labour and, in this way, motivate continued support for it. Whether this would require citizens to progress beyond the second stage of moral development is an open question. We might hope that, in a society of this kind, even conventional morality would come to have a more universalistic character.

[75] TNS, 2010, 21; Programme on International Policy Attitudes, 2001, November 13, 4; Glennie *et al.*, 2012, 15

[76] Rawls, 2001, 149-150

[77] M. O'Neill, 2012, 91-92

[78] Commenting on this finding, Noel and Thérien conclude that, once egalitarian ideas are institutionalised, they become 'powerful political instruments' which 'function as causal mechanisms and help explain why welfare states act predictably [when rendering assistance] in the international arena' (Noel and Thérien, 1995, 540-545).

[79] Lumsdaine, 1993

civic education and the power of example, egalitarian political institutions will provide much of the support that is needed to render wide-scope division of labour stable over time.[80]

Finally, there is reason to hope that a new kind of patriotic sentiment could develop in a society where just domestic institutions were already in place. Historically, nationalism has often served as an obstacle to cosmopolitan reform, leading people to privilege one particular form of group identity over and above responsibilities that are owed to other human beings. However, it has also served a useful social purpose. Importantly, nationalist feeling has tended to reinforce a sense of solidarity within communities, making it easier to develop and sustain just domestic institutions based on the ideal of loose reciprocity.[81] This function was particularly important during early periods of industrialisation when the spread of new markets and technologies gave rise to a sense of atomism and social dislocation, which threatened to undercut the social basis of the state. However, once egalitarian political arrangements exist, these problems can be addressed in different ways. Crucially, it becomes possible to check inequality through redistribution of wealth and to maintain a sense of social solidarity through civic education.

Under these conditions, space emerges for patriotic sentiment, shorn of its original function, to take on a new character. In many cases, patriotism leads to pride in the domestic goals and achievements of that society. However, it is also possible that citizens could come to take pride in the programme and values that their country promotes overseas.[82] Should they succeed in establishing a wide-scope division of labour, citizens could then feel proud that they do more to help people living in extreme poverty (and are, in this sense, more virtuous) than people living in other affluent countries. They could also enjoy the reputational enhancement that public recognition of this fact brings with it. This kind of attitude towards humanitarian achievement is already in evidence in countries such as Norway today.[83] Taken in conjunction with the programme of

[80] It would, however, be a mistake to conclude from this that the beliefs and preferences needed to realise egalitarian and cosmopolitan ends are always in fact the same. Indeed, egalitarian sentiment can function as a double-edged sword when it comes to tackling extreme poverty abroad. I have argued that under favourable conditions (i.e. when justice has been made secure in the domestic context), those who identify with egalitarian principles will typically extend the scope of their moral concern to non-nationals and support institutional measures designed to improve their condition. Yet, when this first goal is frustrated (as has tended to be the case, given rising levels of inequality in almost all affluent nations over the past several decades), an active concern with the distribution of goods at the societal level can also work to the detriment of the global poor, leading to the marginalisation or bracketing of their moral claims. Commenting on this phenomenon, Noel and Therien write that 'in countries where domestic redistribution is seen as an important priority, foreign aid is less popular; where this is less so, there is more concern for the fate of the poor in the [global] South' (Noel and Thérien, 2002, 632).

[81] D. Miller, 1989, 68

[82] Caney, 2008, 512-513

[83] Smillie and Helmich, 1998, 117-121

cosmopolitan education that Norwegians have adopted, it represents a major accomplishment. Norwegians have found a way in which to discharge their moral duties effectively. Many of them have also found collective meaning in something that is of great objective value.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at one way in which the citizens of affluent countries could be motivated to discharge duties owed to those living in extreme poverty more effectively. Building upon the notion that there is a shortfall in moral motivation at the individual level, it has focused on a political solution to the problem of inaction.[84] This solution is to construct a wide-scope division of labour between state and citizen. According to this institutional arrangement, the state would take on responsibility for discharging duties of humanity to the extent that this is possible, thereby leaving individuals freer to pursuer their own person goals and objectives in their private lives.

By extending the scope of the moral ends that the state is authorised to pursue, this approach incorporates concern for the suffering of people who live beyond national borders, something that more traditional accounts of the division of labour have tended to overlook. It also has a number of advantages over reliance upon private philanthropy alone. Firstly, collective action of this kind has the potential to realise important efficiency and fairness-related gains in the field of poverty eradication, by drawing upon economies of scale and by ensuring that none are left picking up the slack. Secondly, the existence of these institutions would also allow people who need assistance to stand more secure in the knowledge that the goods that they need will be forthcoming. Thirdly, this approach to funding assistance would also be less motivationally demanding than an approach that relied solely on personal contributions. Once the political decision to implement this approach had been made, citizens would not have to continually reaffirm their commitment to give funds on an individual basis. In this way, the approach would serve as a commitment device for citizens who want action to address world poverty but who struggle to bring their own individual conduct in line with this aspiration.

The wide-scope division of labour proposal also has several more general qualities that characterise successful proposals. It is non-utopian, building upon a realistic understanding of moral

[84] The political approach is sensitive to the insight that an 'important, perhaps the most important task of political thought and action is to arrange the world so that everyone can live a good life without doing wrong, injuring others, benefiting unfairly from their misfortune, and so forth', and applies it to moral problems that arise in the global domain (Nagel, 1986, 206).

psychology and of the motivational resources that people are able to draw upon. Indeed, it recognises that it is 'in large part a practical social task (and social goal) to achieve a measure of fit between what morality demands and what people's motivational resources can supply.'[85] Beyond this, the proposal also recognises the value of what has been achieved already by building upon best elements of the existing aid regime. It is morally progressive, requiring existing practice to be modified in ways that would comprise a direct improvement on the status quo. Finally, this arrangement is compatible with the goals and aspirations of non-ideal theory. Indeed, even if this arrangement could be established and rendered secure at a national level, there may still be a need for greater international coordination in order to address the problem of poverty at a global level. The establishment of national institutions, which are designed to help citizens discharge duties of humanity more effectively, supports this aspiration.

The final part of this chapter addressed questions about the legitimacy and stability of this kind of arrangement. In response to the first concern, that this undertaking would breach the bounds of political consensus, the chapter argued that a wide-scope division of labour could be justified to people who affirm a wide array of reasonable comprehensive moral doctrines. In response to the second concern about stability, it argued that support for this arrangement could be sustained by a process of cosmopolitan education and also by the development of egalitarian institutions at home. In support of the latter claim, it noted that those societies which already approximate the egalitarian ideal tend to provide more (and better) assistance to people living in extreme poverty than other nations. Finally, I suggested that nationalism could come to take on a new character once these institutions were in place and that citizens could come to take pride in the achievements of their country in this field.

[85] Scheffler, 1992, 4

Chapter Five: Extreme Poverty and the Problem of Transition

Political theory is a practical enterprise concerned with what to do – not simply a theoretical enterprise concerned with what to believe. In order to meet this normative aspiration fully, it must offer us some guidance about where we ought to go collectively from here. This is particularly important when we are confronted with a situation that is morally urgent. The fact that over one billion people currently live in a condition of extreme poverty is a situation of this kind. In the second chapter of this thesis, I argued that people who live in affluent societies have a moral responsibility to assist those living in extreme poverty. Existing levels of private assistance are not sufficient to discharge these duties successfully. At the same time, most wealthy nations have made important pledges to tackle the problem of extreme poverty on behalf of their populations. The main vehicle for delivering on this promise has been the provision of aid to low-income countries. However, this practice is also replete with problems: financial commitments go unmet, aid allocation often bears little relationship to levels of underlying human need, and harmful practices continue to go unchecked.[1] Taken together, the political representatives of people living in affluent societies also come up short in this area. As a result of this, the motivational deficit among ordinary citizens translates into a wider moral failure: those who live in a condition of serious need go unaided and many more people die than would otherwise be the case.

We could respond to this situation in a number of ways. One option would be to try and establish a supranational authority capable of discharging moral responsibilities on behalf of affluent people and their political representatives. In this vein, we might aspire to create a world state or international organisations that are better able to direct action in this area. Alternatively, we could try to develop greater levels of empathy and altruism among people living in wealthy countries. If *these* people could be made to identify with the plight of people living in extreme poverty on a personal level, then it seems likely that significant progress could be made on a voluntarist basis. This chapter considers a different approach. Building upon arguments made in Chapter Four, it holds that the idea of delegating moral responsibility for poverty eradication to national governments is broadly correct, and that the major challenge is to make this kind of arrangement work more effectively in practice. At the level of theory, the suggestion is that we try to develop a wide-scope division of labour between state and citizen that would see domestic political institutions take on moral

[1] Alesina and Dollar, 2000

responsibility for eradicating extreme poverty (to the extent that this is possible), thereby leaving individuals freer to focus on their own private lives. In order to perform this function effectively, wealthy nations would have to improve the quantity and quality of the assistance that they provide.[2] They would also have to stop contributing to practices that harm the global poor. Yet, most affluent countries do not yet have institutions or policies in place that conform to this arrangement. As a result of this, we need to know whether it is possible to get to an arrangement of this type from where we are *now*.

The intuitive response of most people will be to answer this question in the affirmative. After all, an approach to poverty eradication that focuses on reforming domestic institutions *appears* to be realistic. It does not require a huge leap of the imagination to conceive of a state of affairs in which it was realised and implemented by many of the nations that presently fall short in this regard. However, this is not enough to show that the wide-scope division of labour should serve as the focal point of practical endeavour. Before we can make judgements of this kind, we need to look more closely at the theory and practice of transition. We also need to know more about the nature of the current proposal and about the steps that would have to be taken in order for it to be made a reality. With this understanding in place, it will then be easier to say whether the proposed arrangement is accessible, whether it is achievable, and whether it can be achieved in morally permissible ways. These considerations help to determine whether the proposal is one that we have conclusive reason to adopt.

This chapter is structured as follows. The first section looks at the theory of transition in greater detail and at the way in which it intersects with the current proposal. I suggest that the wide-scope division of labour is best understood as a component of non-ideal theory and that, in light of this, it must meet certain practical requirements. The second section then looks more closely at the process of transition. Before we can reach sound judgements in this area, I argue that we need to develop a proper understanding of the status quo and of the forces that sustain it, of the agents who could drive forward a programme of political reform, and of the opportunities and constraints that these actors face. The third section then aims to apply this understanding to the present case. It looks at the different factors that sustain political inaction in the face of extreme poverty, highlighting the role played by both elite interest and public opinion. The fourth section expands our understanding of the situation by considering whether there are agents who could affect transition to

[2] Sachs, 2005; Singer, 2010, Ch.7; Riddell, 2007, 381-414; Collier, 2008, Ch.11; Banerjee and Duflo, 2011, Ch.10.

a better state of affairs. It highlights an important role for NGOs in this context. The fifth section draws upon sociological theory in order to map out a path of transition that connects these agents to the desired institutional outcome. The sixth section focuses on the structural opportunities and constraints agents face, while the final section looks at specific measures that they could adopt in order to develop support for this approach to poverty eradication.

I. The Theory of Transition and the Wide-Scope Division of Labour

The way in which we evaluate a proposal or ideal depends in part upon the purpose that it is intended to serve. Political theory is often divided into two parts, each of which has a different function and operates under a different set of constraints. One type of theory is ideal theory. This body of thought aims to describe the best possible institutional arrangements for a society, operating under favourable conditions with high levels of general compliance.[3] By proceeding in this way, it provides us with an account of ideal institutional arrangements which we should achieve if we can, and also with a normative standard against which to evaluate existing institutions and practices. Non-ideal theory is different. This type of theory is concerned with how we should act in a world that falls far short of the ideal. It also aims to cast light on the process of transition from one state of affairs to another, explaining how long-term goals might be achieved or worked towards, often in gradual steps. More precisely, non-ideal theory aims to identify pathways of transition that are morally permissible, politically possible and likely to be effective.[4] The notion that we should construct an institutional division of labour at the national level, in order to help citizens discharge duties owed to those living in extreme poverty is, I believe, best understood as part of non-ideal theory. It is an interim arrangement that would do much good in its own right, and also make possible still better institutional arrangements further down the line. This section explores the type of conditions that this kind of proposal is subject to, and maps out the path ahead.

Both ideal and non-ideal theory must generate proposals that are *feasible.* The institutions that they describe must be logically and physically possible, compatible with human psychology and capabilities, and something that could be achieved with the resources that are foreseeably available to us at some basic level.[5] An ideal that ignores these hard feasibility constraints could never be

[3] Rawls, 1999b, 245
[4] Rawls, 2001, 89; Simmons, 2010
[5] Buchanan, 2003, 38

realised.[6] Conversely, a proposal that meets this condition will be the sort of thing that 'could come into existence as the result of our choices, given the limits set by our moral and psychological natures, and by facts about social institutions and about how humans can live under them.'[7] This kind of ideal will push, but not exceed, the limits of what we have reason to think is practically possible.[8] In addition to this, a political ideal may also be *accessible*. In order for this to be the case, there must be 'a practicable route from where we now are to at least a reasonable approximation of the state of affairs that satisfies its principles.'[9] This condition is not always met: many feasible arrangements cannot be reached given the political, economic, and cultural constraints that we currently face. Yet, this does not prevent them from being correct specifications of a political ideal. Inaccessible theories can still perform an important theoretical function (helping to clarify what the most desirable feasible institutional arrangement would be). They can perform an evaluative function (helping to compare complex states of affairs).[10] They can perform an emotive function (inspiring people to take measures that are available to them now in service to a higher end which they deem worthy of allegiance).[11] Finally, they may also be of indirect practical relevance. Given the possibility of unforeseen change in the world around us, these ideals may become practicable in the course of time.[12]

For non-ideal theory, the situation is quite different. This type of theory aims to develop institutional proposals that move us *closer* to the ideal. It should also provide us with an account of how transition to and from these waypoints could actually occur. In light of this, it is essential that the arrangements it describes are accessible. They are intended to perform a bridging function. If there is no practicable route *to* them from where we now are, then it is unclear what service they provide. In addition to this, non-ideal theory should aim to articulate arrangements that are politically *achievable*. It is not enough that one hypothetical way exists in which to reach the arrangements that it describes. It must also be the case that efforts to achieve this objective stand a reasonable chance of success. Many things that could easily happen have zero (or close to zero)

[6] Gilabert, 2012b, 117-125
[7] Simmons, 2010, 7
[8] This kind of ideal will probe, but not exceed, the limits of what we have reason to think is practically possible (Rawls, 2001, 4, 13).
[9] Buchanan, 2003, 38
[10] Stemplowska, 2008, 336-337
[11] On this point, Samuel Scheffler writes that, 'an ideal may inspire us even if it is unattainable, and striving to achieve it may uplift and improve us even if our efforts fail' (Scheffler, 1992, 120).
[12] Gilabert and Lawford-Smith, 2012, 813.

chance of actually coming about.[13] This is important because the dictates of practical reason require us to take account of both the goodness of outcomes and the prospects of success when determining what to do.[14] A proposal that cannot hope to succeed is unlikely to command our support in this context; there will almost always be better options available. If non-ideal theory is to provide recommendations about the best course of collective action, then it must take into account probabilistic considerations of this type.[15] Beyond this, the best practical proposal will set out goals that can be achieved in *morally acceptable* ways. When this is the case, there is a good chance that the arrangements that it describes can be brought into existence, even when we exclude paths of transition that require unacceptable moral wrongdoing along the way.[16] A proposal that meets all of these conditions has a strong claim to our attention. Being morally good in this robust sense may make it something, pending consideration of alternatives, which we are morally required to try and bring about.

In order to know what evaluative criteria to apply to the current proposal, we need to know more about its properties and about the purpose it is intended to serve. While the previous chapter left this question open, I would now like to suggest that the idea of a wide-scope division of labour, designed to discharge duties of humanity more effectively on a national basis, is best understood as a component of non-ideal theory. To see why this is the case, we should start by noting that it is possible to imagine still more *desirable* solutions to the problems that we now encounter. Ideally, we might develop global institutions that could take action to address serious inequality in the international realm, as well as the more basic goal of eradicating extreme poverty. And, even those who are concerned only with the latter sufficientarian aim, will recognise that it is possible to *improve* upon the current proposal in certain ways. In a well-functioning international system, there would also be a *second tier* division of labour that helps states secure the efficiency and fairness gains among one another, in relation to the goal of poverty eradication, that they are able to secure for their citizens (by using this arrangement) in the domestic context.[17] Indeed, even those who believe we

[13] Estlund, 2008, 264-265
[14] Gilabert and Lawford-Smith, 2012, 818-819
[15] ibid.
[16] Buchanan, 2003, 38
[17] The license individuals have to concentrate on their own personal lives is morally unproblematic in the domestic context only when there is also a just order in place, which helps them to realise impersonal values. The same is true of the relationship between each state and the world. Commenting on this fact, Thomas Nagel writes that 'we will be able to tend our own gardens with a good conscience only when this surrounding situation has improved radically, and international institutions of some kind sustain a world order within which the natural pursuit of national interests forms part of a universally acceptable pattern of international relations, like the pursuit of personal life in a just society' (Nagel, 1991, 178-179).

have moral and prudential reason to oppose a world state, have good cause to support a scheme of this type. Furthermore, neither proposal necessarily exceeds the bounds of what is feasible in the narrow sense that is used here. They do not press up against 'hard' constraints of the kind that have been identified. However, what is true is that these arrangements are difficult to achieve at present, given the shortfall in moral motivation that states currently display.

A central conjecture of this chapter is that, once states take on responsibility for the eradication of extreme poverty, prompted by institutional reform in the domestic context, they will then be more inclined to create the supranational institutions that are needed in order to address the coordination problems that they face in this area. This thesis draws support from both liberal and constructivist theories of international relations. The liberal approach holds that state-society relations 'have a fundamental impact on state behaviour in world politics.'[18] More precisely, liberal theorists argue that the state is not a unitary actor, but rather a political institution that tends to 'represent some subset of domestic society, on the basis of whose interests state officials define state preferences and act purposively in international politics.'[19] The establishment of a wide-scope division of labour would, in this context, depend upon the antecedent emergence of a coalition of actors who are prepared to mobilise politically around the issue of extreme poverty in the domestic context. Yet, in the event that this constituency came into being, this development would then also have wider implications for state preferences; when they exist, democratic institutions would create an incentive for political leaders to identify new ways in which to advance this agenda in international life.

The constructivist approach to international politics also holds that the character of the domestic social order has a pronounced impact on state conduct in the international arena but identifies a different mechanism of influence. According to this school of thought, states need to be viewed as legitimate by those whom they claim authority over and purport to represent. In light of this, beliefs about the social and moral purpose of the state, which arise first in the domestic context, tend to be shared by those in power and have a significant influence on the ends that they promote.[20] The construction of a wide-scope division of labour would, I have argued in the previous chapter, reflect a shift in public understandings of the social purpose that political institutions are

[18] Moravcsik, 1997, 513
[19] ibid. 518
[20] On this point, Christian Reus-Smit holds that 'domestic and international structures and processes are two faces of a single social and political order' (Reus-Smit, 1999, 169).

designed to serve.[21] It would signal expansion in the scope of moral values that are understood to comprise the legitimate object of political action. If this kind of transformation could be brought about at the national level, then it too could be expected to influence the content and character of international regimes that states were prepared to establish and sustain.[22]

These arguments lend weight to the view that the establishment of a wide-scope division of labour at home would also galvanise support for the creation of new supranational institutions. Indeed, this foundation might even provide sociological support for transition to more ambitious redistributive schemes (if these were judged to be desirable on a global basis). In light of this, the current proposal functions as a bridge to still better institutional arrangements, variously conceived. Beyond this, it may in fact be the most likely way in which this kind of change could come about. One alternative would be for existing international institutions to drive change in this area: international organisations could try to compel affluent nations to take a more proactive stance towards poverty alleviation, or to expand their own remit in this area. However, they are unlikely to succeed; the asymmetry in power relations between these organisations and their members makes it difficult for the former to exert leverage over the latter. Another alternative would be for transnational coalitions of civil society activists to try and circumvent the state and put pressure on international organisations directly. Yet, here again, we encounter the obstacle of state power. While international organisations have some autonomy *qua* organisations, it will be extremely difficult to undertake substantive reform without the consent of powerful states.[23]

Finally, the current proposal has one other feature that requires us to take seriously. The arrangement it describes represents a comparative improvement on the status quo. This remains true even without further reform of the kind that has been envisaged. Viewed in a transitional light, this is not an essential quality of interim arrangements that aim to move us closer to the ideal. Things may have to get worse before they can get better.[24] However, given the existence of deep uncertainty about whether these higher ends can ultimately be reached, it is an important virtue nonetheless.[25] In this context, the wide-scope division of labour arrangement seems to be an appropriate mid-range target for cosmopolitan political theory. Before we can reach an all-things-considered judgement

[21] See Chapter Four, Part III.
[22] Indeed, John Ruggie notes that 'international regimes are often the extension of domestic authority relations' (Ruggie, 1982, 385).
[23] Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, 900
[24] Simmons, 2010, 23
[25] Sen, 2010

about the virtues of this proposal, we need to know more about whether it meets the standards of accessibility, achievability, and moral acceptability that have been set out so far.

II. The Process of Transition: Structures, Agents, Opportunities and Constraints

In order to make progress on this front, we need to answer a number of questions concerning the possibility of transition from one state of affairs to another, the prospects for success (when a given strategy is attempted on its own or in conjunction with others), the moral acceptability of this course of action, and the expected value of this proposal in comparison with alternative arrangements that we are in a position to try and bring about. This, in turn, requires a firm grasp of the way in which social and political transformation occurs and of the factors that facilitate or frustrate this outcome. An assessment of this kind has four main stages. These stages structure the following investigation.

To begin with, it is important to develop an accurate account of *existing institutions* and of the forces that sustain them. Sometimes, the ideas contained by a proposal are new. When this is the case, the gap between an ideal and current practice may be accounted for simply by noting that no agent has previously sought to bring about the change in question. However, the beliefs and practices that make up the status quo also draw support from powerful elites and from the propensity of individuals to take their behavioural and epistemic cues from one another. Taken together, these factors help to explain the reproduction of a given social order over time.

With this diagnosis in place, the second stage is to identify prospective *agents of transition* who could act as an impetus, or catalyst, for change in this context. Of course, it is possible that desirable outcomes will occur independently of efforts to bring them about; historical accident and changes in the material circumstances of life sometimes operate in a fortuitous way. However, we cannot afford to put too much faith in optimistic claims about how the future will unfold. There are limits to what we can know about such matters. Furthermore, even when there is some evidence of a general trajectory, moral progress has tended to be a painfully slow affair.[26] In light of this, it is important to identify actors who possess both the capacity and the motivation to pursue political change. Those who lack the power to influence outcomes, either on their own or in conjunction with others, are

[26] Pinker, 2012; Singer, 2011a; Crawford, 2002

practically – but not morally – irrelevant. While those who possess the capacity but not the motivation to act, contribute to the accessibility but not to the achievability of a political ideal.

On the assumption that there are agents who display the requisite combination of properties, the third task is to look more closely at different ways in which they might *bring about the change in question*. On some occasions, the relevant course of action is obvious and direct. This will be the case if there is an agent who harms others by accident and who also possesses the capacity to refrain from doing so. On other occasions, the situation is more complicated. Agents of transition may need to dismantle an existing practice or to construct new types of institutional regime altogether. When this is the case, it may be necessary to mobilise secondary actors who can then help to achieve this outcome by drawing upon further resources that they command.

Finally, with this understanding in place, we need to examine the opportunities and constraints that agents of transition face when attempting to implement a specific strategy of reform. These considerations bear upon the prospects of success. Many of these factors operate at a structural level. The constraints that are imposed by the general political, social and economic situation often bear decisively upon efforts to alter existing institutional arrangements. Indeed, the 'opportunity structure' that agents face is not always conducive to change.[27] At the same time, agents of transition must be ready to take advantage of these openings and opportunities when they occur. To this end, they must organise effectively and develop a mode of engagement that is suited to the environment that they face. With this kind of fine-grained understanding in place, it will then be possible to arrive at qualified judgements about the possibility, probability and morality of transition.

III. Extreme Poverty and the Status Quo: Explaining Political Failure

Let us begin, then, with consideration of the present state of play. Opinion polls suggest that the vast majority of affluent people support efforts to tackle extreme poverty overseas.[28] In order to perform this function effectively, wealthy nations would have to improve the quantity and quality of the assistance they provide. They would also have to take steps to end their own harmful

[27] Dryzek, 1996, 113

[28] In one recent sample, around 62% of the British public agreed with the statement that 'it is our moral obligation as human beings to help the poor in the world' (Lindstrom and Henson, 2011, 6). Other studies, commissioned prior to the current period of fiscal austerity, found even stronger support for action designed to address world poverty (*see* Chapter Three). And polls conducted by the United Nations have shown continuous majority support for overseas development aid in almost all donor states for a number of decades (Lumsdaine, 1993, 140-143).

practices that perpetuate this condition. In the world today, this is not the case, as most states fail to deliver on the international commitments that they have made.[29] Large amounts of aid continue to be directed away from humanitarian objectives in order to serve other ends,[30] and harmful economic practices continue to go unchecked.[31] As a result of this, there is a gap between the status quo and the arrangement that the wide-scope division of labour prescribes. This fact can be explained in at least three different ways. The first explanation centres upon the role of powerful economic interest groups and the influence they have on policy in this area. The second holds that states have fixed priorities that take precedence over poverty eradication. The third points to the role played by public opinion, maintaining either that support for poverty eradication is superficial or that politicians are shielded from public opinion in a way that is specific to this domain. This section considers each account in turn.

According to the first type of explanation, efforts to tackle extreme poverty fall short because democratic opinion is obstructed by *economic elites* and by *special interests*. These groups have no claim to special treatment in this context. Nor do they have an interest in maintaining the condition of extreme poverty *per se*. However, they do stand to gain from the continuation of practices that harm the global poor. Furthermore, these actors possess the resources that are needed to influence political outcomes and block progressive reform in this area. There is some evidence of this dynamic operating on a sector-specific basis: pharmaceutical companies have historically played an important role in the construction of an intellectual property regime that prevented those in poor countries from producing or purchasing generic drugs; the agricultural lobby in economically developed countries continues to exert a powerful influence on trade negotiations, protecting the subsidies that accrue to them in this context;[32] and multinational corporations have often pressed for low levels of regulation in the extractive industries and elsewhere. Nonetheless, this kind of explanation is incomplete. Crucially, it does little to explain why the quantity and quality of ODA

[29] Very few states have met the international target of providing 0.7% of GNI to developing countries each year. This remains true, even though the figure was first agreed upon over four decades ago and 'has been repeatedly re-endorsed [by these countries] at the highest level aid and development conferences' (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2013).

[30] Indeed, one recent study found that ODA, allocated on a bi-lateral basis, is often completely insensitive to levels of human need in recipient countries (Alesina and Dollar, 2000). Beyond this, aid continues to be dispensed in a way that is deeply problematic. Many donor agencies are affected by a 'disbursement culture': they are eager to allocate the funds that have been assigned to them and unwilling to invest in research concerning the effectiveness of the activities that they sponsor (Woods, 2006, 180).

[31] Pogge, 2002; Pogge, 2010; Kar, 2011; Kar and Cartwright-Smith, 2010; Ndikumana and Boyce 2008; Narlikar, 2002, 175-177, 182

[32] Gawande *et al.*, 2006; Grossman and Helpman, 2002

provided to developing countries has tended to be so poor, given the limited concern displayed by these groups with the aid regime itself. Beyond this, some measure of progress has been made in each of the aforementioned areas: the international community has now affirmed the right of developing countries to circumvent medical patent law in certain cases; the central international trade dispute now concerns the ability of developing countries to subsidise their own emerging industries; and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) has established a code of conduct for corporations operating in this sector, albeit one without an enforcement mechanism. While the influence of powerful economic lobbies is an important factor in explaining the current practice, the rigidity of the constraints that these interests generate should not be overstated.

The second explanation holds that efforts to tackle extreme poverty often fail because the *leaders of modern states* must remain attentive to other political objectives if they are to remain in power over time. According to this approach, governments are constrained in what they do by their need to induce investment and to preside over economic growth.[33] Indeed, failure to manage economic policy successfully leads to the contraction of tax revenues and to rising unemployment – developments that place pressure on public services and tend to induce a political backlash against whoever is in power.[34] Beyond this, states also need to participate successfully in the international arena – they need to guarantee the security of their citizens and to attract investment for reasons already set out.[35] These imperatives impact upon the amount of aid that governments provide, and also upon the uses to which aid is put. In the first instance, resources that should be set aside in order to meet international targets for combatting poverty are frequently redirected and used to serve domestic ends. In addition to this, aid is often used to cultivate political and economic relationships, a factor that has been one of the primary reasons for its limited effectiveness to date. Yet, on the account provided so far, the nature of these imperatives remains somewhat vague. While many scholars have pointed to the anarchic nature of the international system or to competitive pressure from international markets in order to explain these priorities, this political agenda is also pursued in democratic societies because of the belief that it reflects the attitudes and wishes of the electorate. As such, it draws support both from without and from within. On the domestic side of the equation, citizens have an immediate concern for their own welfare. This translates into the

[33] On this point, John Dunn writes that, 'the Law of the Market and the imperatives set by participation in international trade… principally fix the range of possibilities for modern societies' and that as a result of this, 'in the routine politics of any… modern state the issue of what is economically possible and feasible is not merely the most prominent, but also the most consequential, matter at stake' (J. Dunn, 1990*,* 1, 6).
[34] Dryzek, 1992, 522
[35] Waltz, 1979; Strange, 1996

demands they make of those in power and informs their electoral behaviour. In contrast to this, it is not yet politically costly for governments to fail to tackle extreme poverty.[36] Given the existence of opinion polls that suggest a high level of public concern for poverty eradication, the political marginality of this agenda needs to be accounted for.

The third explanation of political inaction holds that *public beliefs and attitudes* are not as they first appear to be, and that public opinion actually limits the potential for political reform in this area. On this interpretation, people register support for efforts to tackle world poverty (in opinion polls and in focus group discussion) because it represents a costless way for them to affirm their own character and moral virtue. However, beneath the surface, affluent people actually adhere to a powerful set of countervailing beliefs and attitudes. These views then make them reluctant to shoulder the costs that a more robust approach would bring with it. Of particular importance in this regard is the widespread belief that one's fellow citizens take special *priority* over those living abroad.[37] Reasoning in light of this belief, citizens sometimes conclude that it is morally permissible or even required for the state to pursue small gains in their own welfare at the expense of assisting those whose lives are threatened by malnutrition and disease. Furthermore, even when people judge that assistance is warranted, they tend to view this matter primarily in terms of *charity*. This view sees aid as a gift from a 'powerful giver' to a 'grateful receiver'.[38] It is something that goes primarily to poor, dark and needy people living in distant places. This idea of charity is problematic because it tends to cast assistance in a voluntary light. At the end of the day, the giver must always decide whether to give, and a gift always is the sort of thing that must be freely given.[39] This conceptual frame also undermines the idea that poverty eradication is a legitimate target of collective action. An act of charity is usually thought of as a matter of personal conscience and as something that is best done in a private capacity. Finally, the charity paradigm narrows the focus of public attention, leading to a concern with the amount of aid that is provided but little else beyond this. It leads

[36] On this point, Mark Otter notes that public support and government spending on aid often diverge because, 'aid is seldom a domestic political issue: put simply, there are no votes in foreign aid' (Otter, 2003, 116).

[37] In Chapter Three, I argued that feelings of national partiality do little to explain *individual* failure to assist. It is not the case that affluent people do not give money to international causes *because* they contribute such a large amount of their private wealth to organisations that work to improve the condition of their fellow countrymen. However, this idea does bear in an important way upon public discussion about the purpose and priorities that the *state* should serve.

[38] Darnton and Kirk, 2011, 248

[39] This is a claim about what people think about charity, not about the best philosophical interpretation of the concept. On the idea that the choice of end is discretionary in this context *see* Pogge, 2002, 197-198.

citizens to overlook the possibility that they are causally implicated in the plight of people living in absolute poverty, or that they have other weighty reasons to assist.

The popular aphorism 'charity begins at home' brings both sets of beliefs to the fore in a lucid way. Taken together, these beliefs work to diminish empathy on the part of the population by stressing the existence of deep and non-contingent differences between wealthy citizens and those living in other parts of the world.[40] They also provide support for the 'just world assumption' in international life. According to research from experimental psychology, people have a natural propensity to believe that the world is a just place: one in which virtue is rewarded and in which innocent people do not suffer. When events in the world confound this expectation, and action cannot be taken to address this state of affairs, a common response is to blame the victim for his or her misfortune.[41] In the case of extreme poverty, this propensity sometimes leads people to assert that those living in this condition are lazy, immoral or corrupt. Both moral nationalism and the idea of charity reinforce this impression by giving support to the notion that the material order corresponds to a wider moral hierarchy – one in which those who are worthy succeed, and in which those who are not depend upon the charity or goodwill of others.

As a result of this, public attitudes to poverty eradication are less clear-cut than they first appear to be. Indeed, politicians may be rewarded for practising a degree of dissimulation in this area. By ostensibly taking action to improve the condition of those living in extreme poverty, while actually using these resources to promote a different political and economic agenda, they can assuage the conscience of affluent people while also securing – for these same people – the returns that a more self-regarding approach to trade and development brings with it. According to a more moderate version of this thesis, those who live in affluent countries are, in fact, concerned about the eradication of extreme poverty; however, they do not care enough for it to bear upon the choices they make at election time. And whatever we think about the integrity of public attitudes to world poverty, it is certainly the case that it is difficult for ordinary people to assess the effectiveness of state-led poverty reduction initiatives. Any impact that these activities have is usually mediated through complicated causal processes, occurs in distant places, and is beyond the purview of national media coverage. Taken together, these observations suggest that the difficulty of sanctioning or rewarding governments for action in this area, in conjunction with a general willingness on the part of affluent people to be deceived about the beneficence of policies already in

[40] Ignatieff, 1999, 97
[41] Hafer and Begue, 2005

place, leaves members of the executive and legislative branches of government unwilling to take steps which they are otherwise well-placed to take.

IV. Agents of Transition: Corporations, Governments, NGOs and Citizens

With this preliminary diagnosis in place, we now need to consider how, and by whose agency, political change could come about. To this end, it is important to identify actors with the capacity to affect outcomes in this area. We also need to look more closely at the incentive structure, which shapes their behaviour, and at their internal motivational states. The central interest here is to identify agents who are capable of affecting the transition to the wide-scope division of labour ideal. However, a rough measure of capacity is provided by the resources that actors have at their disposal and by their ability to influence events across a range of areas. With regard to agent motivation, the challenge is to show how agents who are already motivated to pursue this end could do so more effectively, or to identify new agents who could be moved to act in support of this outcome. This kind of potential is more likely to exist if an agent has prudential reason to pursue the end in question, or if they have a more general moral sensibility that remains as yet untapped for this purpose. This section considers four prospective agents of transition and looks at the role that they might play in the context of poverty eradication. More precisely, it focuses on action by multinational corporations, by sovereign states, by the citizens of affluent nations, and by international NGOs.

Those who obstruct the cause of poverty eradication could aid this process simply by ceasing to do so. Furthermore, these actors could often achieve this effect without relying on the support of a different class of agents. This is true of many of the lobbies and private interests groups, whose role has been discussed in the previous section. Certain coordination problems may still remain to be addressed. However, these agents could, in principle, dismantle the practices that they currently choose to sustain. The major challenge that arises in this context concerns the incentive structure that bears upon their choice of conduct. Indeed, we have already said that these actors do not usually intend to harm those living in extreme poverty. However, in the case of multinational corporations at least, they do aim to maximise their profits and to ensure high returns for shareholders. On some accounts, this is their constitutive aim: the central purpose that defines who they are and all that they are capable of. If this is correct, and this profit motive is also set

against the path of transition, then the idea that reform could be driven by this sector should definitely be discarded.

However, as Onora O'Neill notes, this interpretation of corporate motivation is 'sociologically simplistic'.[42] To start with, many multinational corporations need to avoid moral stigma if they are to remain competitive in commercial terms. Beyond this, there may also be a financial dividend that attaches to the perception that a company has taken moral leadership in a given area. In the textile and garment industry, a number of corporations have sought to draw attention to the fair labour practices that they employ. Furthermore, the cost of altering existing procedures may not always be great in size. When harm results from negligence or lack of foresight, rather than from the intentional pursuit of policies that require this outcome, the relevant adjustments may be easy to make. As such, there is reason to hope that further progress can be made in this area. At the same time, it would be naïve to think that multinational corporations are likely to serve as the primary drivers of political reform in this context. To begin with, these agents lack the capacity to change the structure of the aid regime, which is one of the major things that the wide-scope division of labour requires. Furthermore, their willingness to modify conduct in light of moral considerations continues to be both reactive and contingent. There is little evidence that these organisations will do what they can do to tackle extreme poverty purely of their own volition. In light of the above, we need to look elsewhere.

The governments of wealthy nations are powerful. Their leaders can draw upon significant legal, military, economic and cultural resources in service of the ends that they deem important. This capacity to affect outcomes has made them an attractive candidate for the role of agent of transition in a variety of contexts. Theories that posit this role for states have tended to assume that they can be motivated to act morally, or at least to modify their conception of interest in such a way that it takes account of moral considerations.[43] Indeed, both liberal and constructivist theories of international relations identify ways in which this could come about. However, these accounts also suggest that this propensity is contingent upon the character of domestic institutions, and upon support for these moral objectives at a societal level. In a democratic political system, those in power are accountable to the population for the decisions that they make. Furthermore, politicians incur political risk by departing from the status quo.[44] This is a problem in the present context. For while

[42] O. O'Neill, 2001, 192-193
[43] Rawls, 1999a, 23-30
[44] Although perhaps not as much as we commonly think (Westen, 2008).

leadership on an issue may generate a political dividend further down the line – if the public later come to see this action as having been in their own individual or collective best interest – there seems to be little hope that this kind of return will attach itself to more drastic efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. The benefits of a wide-scope division of labour would accrue primarily to non-citizens. Indeed, the values that it serves are significantly other-regarding and are likely to be viewed in this way unless the affluent come to conceive of their own interest in significantly moralised terms. As a result of these dynamics, politicians are constrained: those in power have little incentive to forge ahead and take the measures that are needed in order to realise the wide-scope division of labour ideal.

These considerations lend support to the idea that the impetus for change must come from affluent populations themselves. Although moral leadership by commercial organisations or political representatives would be welcome in this area, it is unlikely to occur without greater public vigilance and support for measures to tackle world poverty. Nonetheless, an approach to transition that requires the public to take the initiative also encounters serious problems. Most obviously, the approach in question seems to beg the question: it assumes that the public can be motivated to take action in support of the wide-scope division of labour, when this lack of motivation is the very obstacle that needs to be overcome. A plausible account of transition needs to identify an agent that is prepared to *initiate* change from one state of affairs to another. It must identify some individual or group who could perform this function without requiring 'motivational bootstrapping' of the sort that the preceding accounts seem to require. In addition to this, one might also wonder whether the public can sensibly be deemed an agent of transition in its own right. At the present moment, public attitudes to poverty eradication display significant variation. However, even if cosmopolitan beliefs and attitudes were held in common by a large number of people, this would not necessarily be enough to render them capable of agency. Some measure of organisation and a decision-making process are needed before a collection of individuals develop the capacity for intentional action.[45]

Taken together, these considerations suggest that NGOs and anti-poverty campaigners have an important role to play. In most affluent countries, there is already a constituency of people who are committed to the goal of poverty eradication and who are prepared to take action in order to bring this outcome about.[46] NGOs and other civil society groups provide these people with the kind

[45] French, 1984

[46] In 2008, 21% of the British public could be classed as 'active enthusiasts' about international development, these people support new efforts to combat poverty at an individuals and a collective level (MORI, 2008).

of organisational framework that is needed to mobilise effectively and to take strategic action.[47] For these organisations at least, the question of motivation does not arise with the same degree of force: they are already committed to the eradication of world poverty at a general level. In fact, this is *their* constitutive aim. Beyond this, these organisations possess the capacity to effect outcomes in this area.[48] The largest NGOs have substantial financial means at their disposal with annual budgets that exceed half a billion dollars a year.[49] These organisations also possess expertise in the field of poverty eradications and they control a sophisticated communications apparatus that could be used to engage new segments of the population. If these agents are able to build up support for the notion that government action is needed to address extreme poverty, and to persuade the requisite number of people to support the political programme discussed so far, then it is likely that the democratic process (in conjunction with the more general desire for moral approval) would prompt the leaders of affluent nations to implement reform in this area.

Finally, other actors may also have a contribution to make. There are often epistemic communities or factions within government who support further measures to address extreme poverty, even when they have little impact on overall policy.[50] Public support could empower these agents to take the initiative. Indeed, even when they are not powerful enough to effect political reform directly, they could try to cultivate support for the wide-scope division of labour approach in more surreptitious ways. Cosmopolitan reform of the education system could, for example, make it politically rewarding to introduce institutional measures to tackle extreme poverty further down the line. Furthermore, this kind of education reform would not necessarily require motivational bootstrapping. People may want their children to receive this kind of moral education, even if they themselves have a more ambiguous attitude to the use of tax revenue to assist people living overseas. Indeed, many of us want our children to be better than we manage to be – morally speaking. At the same time, there is little evidence that this kind of reform will be introduced without greater pressure from civil society. Investment in development education is extremely low in almost all affluent countries and education policy appears to be moving in the opposite direction in the majority of cases. Indeed, the governments of both Britain and France have recently enacted educational reforms that emphasise specific national achievements and lend credence to the idea of a glorious imperial past. These facts suggest that the groups within governments, which have been alluded to

[47] McAdam *et al.*, 1996, 3-4
[48] Fuller, 2005, 294
[49] Riddell, 2007, 9
[50] Haas, 1992

here, do not yet exist, or else they lack the capacity to implement the programme currently under consideration. Even when these agents do exist, they seem destined to play an auxiliary role in the process of transition.

V. The Pathway of Transition: Norm Entrepreneurs, Advocacy and World Poverty

Despite extensive campaigning around the cause of poverty eradication, and the use of sophisticated psychological methods in this context, recent studies suggest that public attitudes to this issue have changed little since the 1980s.[51] The path of transition envisaged so far holds that change in beliefs and attitudes to poverty must come about. Given this situation, we need to know whether the future could be different from the past. We need to think seriously about whether there is an achievable route from where we are now to a state of affairs in which the wide-scope division of labour obtains.

In order to make progress in this area, it is important to explore the strategies, opportunities and constraints that anti-poverty campaigners must address when trying to bring about this kind of social change. Viewed from a historical perspective, their task resembles that faced by other emancipatory social movements. These organisations must function as 'norm entrepreneurs', challenging existing frameworks of belief and replacing old standards of behaviour with new norms that provide support for the causes that they promote.[52] At the same time, the present task differs from its predecessors in important ways. The movements to end slavery, to end colonialism and to expand the franchise (on several occasions), were all concerned primarily with the abolition of harmful and exclusive practices. While the eradication of extreme poverty also involves measures of this kind, it goes beyond this by requiring the creation of new institutions where these do not already exist.[53] In one sense, this task of construction is easier to achieve: no actor has an interest in the condition of extreme poverty that is analogous to those that were vested in the plantation system, in the colonial enterprise or in the political exclusion of certain groups. At the same time, the task of construction is made more complicated by other factors: the existing wrong is sometimes less visible because it stems from an omission, and the end goal is often less determinate because of variation in

[51] Darnton and Kirk, 2011, 25

[52] Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998

[53] This distinction is only a matter of degree: the abolition of harmful practices often requires the construction of new regulatory regimes.

the ideals to which people aspire. In order to show how NGOs could make progress in this area, this section provides a template for the path of transition.

According to a number of theorists, the emergence of new attitudes and beliefs tends to follow a specific pattern or *life-cycle*.[54] At the beginning of this process, agents of transition face a hostile environment in which they, the minority, confront countervailing norms that have a taken-for-granted quality in the minds of the majority of people.[55] These beliefs and attitudes draw support both from political and economic elites, whose interest they serve, and also from a variety of practices and routines which enable them to be reproduced on a social basis. More specifically, conformity of belief and opinion often results because people take their *epistemic* cues from one another: individuals tend to define and interpret situations partly as they believe that others understand them.[56] They also take their *behavioural* cues from one another: people tend to respond to 'peer pressure' and act in ways that are congruent with social expectations about a given role or situation.[57] Beyond this, existing social practices structure the way in which individuals *engage* with the world, influencing their views about what is natural, what is possible and what is just.[58] Each consideration lends support to the status quo.

New norms emerge, in this context, when small groups of people challenge the assumption that certain practices are in fact natural, or inevitable, or legitimate.[59] These groups are usually bound together by moral convictions, which make them resilient both in the face of social disapproval and in the face of practical obstacles that remain to be overcome.[60] In order to succeed, these groups must then organise effectively and develop arguments that render existing beliefs problematic.[61] More precisely, they may attempt to *radicalise* existing norms, demonstrating that they have significant and hitherto unacknowledged consequences, or to replace them with *new* understandings that allow people to make better sense of the situation that they face. On either approach, the major force at their disposal is *persuasion*: norm entrepreneurs have an effect because they are able to engage people and alter their behaviour by influencing the way in which they deliberate about an

[54] Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, 888
[55] A 'norm' is understood in this context to be a standard of appropriate behaviour for an actor with a given identity (Katzenstein, 1996, 5).
[56] Asch, 1955; Lichtenberg, 2004, 93
[57] The latter phenomenon can lead to a kind of 'collective conservatism' on the part of a community or society (Thaler and Sunstein, 2009, 58).
[58] Althusser, 1994; Giddens, 2012
[59] Crawford, 2002, 101-103
[60] Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, 896
[61] ibid. 899; Crawford, 2002, 57-58

issue.[62] To this end, it helps if the arguments that they advance have the intrinsic qualities of simplicity, specificity and generalisability.[63] The views they articulate must also be in some way continuous with the things that people already believe. Indeed, arguments that invoke premises that stray too far from the status quo risk being dismissed out of hand: they will not resonate or be meaningful in the minds of the people whom activists seek to persuade.[64] At the same time, the constraints imposed by this requirement are not steadfast. Commenting on this fact, Neta Crawford notes 'even if ethical arguments do not "naturally fit" within dominant webs of belief, advocates of new beliefs and practices can try to make them fit by re-interpreting the pre-existing webs of belief, or by fabricating plausible connections with analogical arguments.'[65]

Success in this area is determined both by structural opportunities and constraints which are beyond the control of individual norm entrepreneurs, and also by the choices that they make. In order to understand whether change could occur in a given context, we need to look at the strength of existing norms (and at the practices that underpin them). We also need to explore opportunities that arise in this context, either because there are tensions within accepted frameworks of belief or because external events and circumstance place pressure upon them.[66] Beyond this, we need to look at the power and capabilities of reformers. When social change is possible, success often turns on the ability of these groups to organise effectively and to identify arguments that have persuasive power in this context. If these factors can be brought into alignment with one another, new norms will slowly gain greater acceptance among the population as a whole. Furthermore, sociological studies suggest that, once a sufficiently large number of people embrace new norms, communities tend to reach a 'tipping point', beyond which pressure to conform drives rather than frustrates the cause of social change. At this point, new norms 'cascade' and gain widespread acceptance in a relatively short space of time.[67] The resulting consensus then gives rise to new forms of behaviour and institutional practice that serve to lock in social change.

Applied to the present case, the hope is that NGOs will be able to inculcate greater concern for those living in extreme poverty and that this will lead, via the democratic process, to the establishment of a wide-scope division of labour arrangement. The final two sections of this chapter

[62] Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, 895; Crawford, 2002, 10, 82-85
[63] Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, 906-907
[64] This is also true of the images that campaigners use. They must be placed in an appropriate narrative context if they are to have the desired effect (Sontag, 2004, 30-31).
[65] Crawford, 2002, 113; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, 897
[66] Wright, 2010, 26-28; Walzer, 1983
[67] Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, 895-96; Sunstein, 1996

explore whether this is likely to be the case, looking first at structural and then at agent-specific considerations.

VI. Structural Constraints and Opportunities: The Nation, the Market and Globalisation

The majority of affluent people believe that the welfare of their fellow citizens takes priority over that of people living abroad and also that the primary relationship between rich and poor is one of charity. These beliefs impede political reform designed to tackle extreme poverty. In order to evaluate the prospect for transition, it is important to understand why they obtain. Only by proceeding in this way will we know whether they are the sorts of thing that could realistically be surmounted or displaced.

Recent work in the field of psychology and sociobiology casts some light upon this situation. These theories suggest that altruism, understood as conduct that benefits another at cost to oneself, emerged first in kin groups and then (much less commonly) in the context of larger reciprocal communities.[68] In this regard, group-based partiality is part of our evolutionary inheritance. Attempts to extend the scope of concern beyond these boundaries may run up against more tribal aspects of our nature.[69] These theories also note that the human mind developed in the context of small-scale communities. As a result of this, human beings tend to make errors when thinking about global problems that concern those who are physically remote, involve large numbers of people, and require an understanding of complex (and often invisible) chains of causation.[70] Finally, research in this area casts light on the phenomenon of just world thinking. Viewed from the standpoint of evolutionary psychology, the propensity to believe that people get what they deserve, even in the face of contradictory evidence, works to diminish the feelings of anxiety and duress that would arise from a clearer view of the situation. This, in turn, makes it easier for agents to act and plan effectively over time.

For prospective agents of transition, these claims can make for depressing reading. If barriers to collective action are in some sense 'hard-wired', then they are likely to be difficult (or at least very costly) to overcome. Fortunately, therefore, the current explanation is incomplete. It does

[68] Singer, 2011a, 3-22

[69] On this point, Michael Walzer states that, 'tribalism names the commitment of individuals and groups to their own history, culture, and identity, and this commitment (though not any particular version of it) is a permanent feature of human social life. The parochialism, the moral thickness, that it breeds is similarly permanent' (Walzer, 1994, 81).

[70] Kahneman, 2012; Scheffler, 2001, 32-47

not tell us why one set of public attitudes to poverty prevails over another set (that would also be consistent with the parameters set out). Also, it cannot account for actual variation in attitudes to world poverty among people living in affluent countries.[71] In order to explain these phenomena, we must take into account the impact that different social practices have on public beliefs and attitudes. With this understanding in place, it may then be possible to identify certain dynamics and tensions that render public opinion in this area susceptible to change.

The social practices and institutions that structure individual conduct bear importantly upon the way in which people understand the world and their own place in it. This effect is particularly pronounced in the case of public beliefs about world poverty, given the indirect and tangential relationship that ordinary people have to international affairs.[72] More precisely, there is evidence that the practices of nationhood and of market exchange play an important role in sustaining many of the beliefs that have been deemed problematic so far. With regard to nations and nationhood, the idea that people share a significant and non-contingent bond with their fellow nationals (the majority of whom they will never meet) can be explained, in part, by the wide array of practices that bind them together.[73] These practices include the promulgation of a national language, the codification of education materials, the existence of a national media that focuses primarily on national events, and the creation of national holidays and memorials. Taken together, they help to sustain the idea of a national community.[74] They also do much to generate support for the view that the welfare of compatriots takes priority over that of people living in distant places.[75] Indeed, the cultivation of a special concern for community members is their point. Beyond this, the practices of nationhood also contribute to the sense of psychological distance that separates rich from poor at a global level. Viewed from a sociological perspective, one of the main ways in which the state manages to engender a sense of national unity among its population is by displacing negative sentiment onto a different and external Other.[76] Many of the regions that are currently afflicted by extreme poverty have served historically as the counterpoint to this aspect of nation-building in the

[71] To capture variation in opinion with regard to humanitarian and development-related matters, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) uses a segmentation model which distinguishes between six attitude types. These are: Active Enthusiasts, the Interested Mainstream, Distracted Individuals, Family First Sympathizers, Insular Skeptics and Disapproving Rejecters (TNS, 2010, 12).
[72] Schumpeter, 1967, 155-156
[73] Anderson, 1983
[74] Weber, 1976
[75] Commenting on this fact, David Axelsen concludes that, 'societal institutions reproduce and maintain the character of national identities and contribute significantly to the fundamental character of those who share a national identity' (Axelsen, 2012, 13).
[76] Walker, 1993, 183; Linklater, 1998, 46-76, 109-144; Sontag, 2004, 72-73

Western imagination.[77] Finally, these practices lend support to the view that there is a moral hierarchy among nations – one to which the world conforms. Among the affluent, affluence is taken to be the mark of virtue. Poverty is then taken to indicate lesser moral standing. This tendency is a negative extension of the belief that one's own nation is exceptional and particularly worthy of love and affection.

The market mechanism of production and exchange exerts a second important influence on public attitudes towards poverty eradication, hindering support for political reform in a number of ways.[78] To begin with, those who live and work in a market society often believe that they are entitled to what they receive though the process of market exchange.[79] They also often believe that each person retains moral discretion over the ends to which their money is used.[80] These broadly libertarian views support the idea that assistance should be understood as a matter of charity: that it is something that people must decide to do for themselves on an individual basis, that it is not something that the state can rightfully require people to do, and that it is not something that is required by justice or by a more demanding moral standard. In addition to this, there is considerable evidence that the discourse of the market and the monetisation of transactions lead people to be less altruistic in general.[81] Indeed, the market is often justified on the grounds that it leads to the most efficient allocation of resources and that this is beneficial for all. The single-minded pursuit of private gain is understood, within this context, to be both a legitimate and rational response to the preferences that people hold. Yet, people who internalise this message are also likely to display diminished levels of support for public action that is designed to secure altruistic ends. Finally, the market experience tends to cultivate a heightened sense of self-attribution among those who prosper in this environment.[82] These people are likely to assume personal responsibility for the success that

[77] As Judith Lichtenberg notes, the idea of distance is often a misleading metaphor; the real issue is the relationships that are strongly although contingently related to it (Lichtenberg, 2004. 86-87). The populations of Africa and Asia have typically served as a counterpoint for this aspect of nation-building in the Western imagination (Said, 1978; Gellner, 1983).

[78] The market is sometimes held to be a universalising force: rather than respecting bounded forms of group identity it promotes contact between all who engage in the process of exchange and applies the same procedural norms to everyone within this context (Haskell, 1985a; Haskell, 1985b).

[79] Murphy and Nagel, 2002, 31-36

[80] On this point Murphy and Nagel write that, 'at the everyday level of what it feels like to live and work in a capitalist economy, the sense of entitlement to net income is firmer [still], we are inclined to believe that what we have earned belongs to us without qualification, in the strong sense that whatever happens to our money is morally speaking entirely a matter of our say-so' (ibid. 34-35). Vohs *et al.*, 2006

[81] Recent experiments suggest that even tacit cues designed to remind people of the process of market exchange make them more self-regarding in terms of what they are prepared to do for others and the type of causes that they support (Vohs *et al.*, 2006).

[82] Lane, 1991, 11-14

they have had and to discount the role of luck in the production of unequal life chances. As a result of this, people often believe that the market gives to each person what he or she deserves.[83] This, too, can increase the propensity towards just world thinking, both at the societal level and when thinking about global problems.[84]

Taken together, this two-track explanation, which accords weight to both psychological and environmental factors, provides us with cause for both optimism and concern. On the one hand, there is no one-to-one correspondence between public attitudes to extreme poverty and propensities that are latent within our nature. On the other hand, existing attitudes are closely tied to the effect that entrenched social practices have on popular views about what is acceptable and about what is just. The salient question in this context is whether opportunities exist that norm entrepreneurs could exploit or leverage in support of the cause of poverty eradication. There are two major developments that suggest that this might be the case. Firstly, economic globalisation has put pressure on the sort of moral nationalism that the priority thesis embodies. Secondly, the recent economic crisis has weakened support for market orthodoxy and for related notions of entitlement and desert. The remaining part of this section considers each factor in turn.

The expansion of global markets and the rise of modern telecommunications have led to greater interaction between affluent people and those living in impoverished societies. While the forces of globalisation have sometimes generated greater insularity among those who feel threatened by the process, these developments have also created new incentives for affluent people to think about the way in which their own lives are intertwined with the lives of those who live in distant places.[85] Increased exposure to their condition makes it harder for affluent people to engage in certain forms of 'blocking out'.[86] They are forced to confront the fact that the problem of extreme poverty exists and that it has a moral dimension. This is important because, at a general level, people desire to live in a way that can be justified to others. Indeed, this is on some accounts the most basic form of moral motivation.[87] Furthermore, moral considerations tend to be accorded greater weight in practical deliberation when people believe there is chance that they could *actually* be called upon to justify their conduct *to* those upon whom it impacts. In the present case, it is still unlikely that those living in affluent societies will come into contact with people living in extreme poverty directly:

[83] Murphy and Nagel, 2002, 36
[84] For the societal level *see* Lane, 2001
[85] Clark, 1997
[86] Judith Thomson speaks about the phenomenon of 'walling off' that occurs in this context (Thomson, 1990, 25-29).
[87] Scanlon, 1998, 153-158

those they interact with through business transactions, call centres, and tourism, are not the poorest of the poor. However, this kind of contact may serve as a mental proxy for interaction with people who are very badly off indeed. Furthermore, if they were asked to justify their present conduct to those living in extreme poverty, most people who live in affluent societies would have little to say by way of reply.[88] This is a painful thought and one that might motivate support for schemes that make moral responsibilities less burdensome and easier to fulfil. Indeed, moral motivation has often played an important historical role in bringing an end to harmful practices.[89]

In addition to this, the emergence of a global media and of transnational civil society networks has made it meaningful to speak of global public opinion. Exposure to this phenomenon creates an additional prudential reason for affluent people to alter their conduct on a collective basis. Human beings are often motivated by the desire to be esteemed by others. At a collective level, they desire to be part of a nation or community that is respected and admired by those with whom they interact. Yet, as this community of peers expands in size, the standards against which conduct is evaluated changes in subtle ways. Importantly, behaviour that may have seemed morally adequate at a certain point in time can come to seem inadequate or shameful in this new environment.[90] This is particularly likely if other actors consistently display a degree of virtue that our own conduct does not match, or if they have renounced harmful practices that we ourselves still partake in. In the present context, the moral leadership displayed by some countries with regard to efforts to eradicate poverty makes inaction by other wealthy nations the locus of legitimate disapprobation. The knowledge that their own country is falling short by international standards may also lead people to support the kind of reform that has been envisaged here in the domestic context.

Finally, the beliefs surveyed so far are also under strain for more contingent reasons. Indeed, there is some evidence that the on-going economic crisis, in much of Europe and North America, has diminished faith in the market mode of allocation among the inhabitants of these countries.[91] While it is too early to say for sure, the fact that so many people have lost their jobs because of a crisis that originated in the financial services industry may have reduced support for the notion that market outcomes track individual desert (and for this thesis in general). In addition to this, the need for a political solution to the problem of market instability has become increasingly apparent given the devastating impact that limited regulatory oversight has had for the lives of

[88] In fact, many justifications seem particularly flimsy in this context *see* G.A. Cohen, 1991
[89] David Lumsdaine, 1993, 30-72; J. Cohen, 1997, 94-95; Pogge, 2002, 211
[90] Appiah, 2011, 88-89, 92, 178-179; Tannenwald, 2007
[91] Pew Research, 2010

ordinary people.[92] This is important in the present context because those who live in serious poverty also suffer from exposure to international markets and price fluctuations. Furthermore, there has historically been a strong connection between support for welfare measures, designed to address the problem of exposure to economic risk at home, and support for measures designed to tackle extreme poverty abroad.[93] The current crisis could serve as an impetus for cosmopolitan reform by heightening the sense that there are certain problems that we all collectively face.[94] The vulnerability of those living in extreme poverty could then be recast in a way that would help inculcate greater feelings of solidarity with them, broadening public concern so that it includes issues such as trade policy and financial regulation, as well as the amount of aid that governments provide.

Of course, none of this follows automatically either from the circumstances that we now encounter or from the events that have unfolded. Nations and markets continue to be robust features of the world in which we live, citizens continue to radically discount the value of the lives of foreigners in comparison with co-nationals, and the most immediate effect of economic stagnation has been to increase popular support for restrictions on immigration and cuts to foreign aid. These considerations provide us with cause for serious concern. At the same time, the wholesale reform of political and economic institutions is not needed in order for a wide-scope division of labour to be established and placed upon a firm footing. What matters here is that new cosmopolitan attitudes are able to emerge. In order for this to be the case, the influence that the practices of nationhood and market exchange exert on public attitudes to poverty must be constrained. This is a more modest aspiration and one that there is reason to think might be possible to achieve. The situation is not hopeless. However, success in this area is likely to depend heavily upon the skill and capacity of NGOs to influence public debate.

VII. Strategic Constraints and Opportunities: Justice, Persuasion, and the Need for Organisation

In order to succeed as norm entrepreneurs, NGOs must compete successfully with a wide range of commercial and political interests for the attention of those whom they seek to persuade. To meet this objective, they are compelled to draw upon modern forms of mass communication and

[92] Angelides, 2011, xviii
[93] Lumsdaine, 1993, 217; Therein, 2002, 452
[94] People living in the developing world also suffer from exposure to the volatility of international markets and from the downward pressure on wages generated by the mobility of international capital.

to develop broad-based national campaigns that reach as many people as possible. However, the price of using these methods is diminished control over the message that people receive. In the absence of a return to the more artisanal methods of the past, important decisions, therefore, need to be made about the content of the message that campaigners seek to further. This section looks at the type of argument that NGOs are in a position to make about world poverty, exploring the role that claims about justice could play in this context. It also draws our attention to a number of organisational obstacles that these actors encounter. In order to function as agents of transition, new arguments and new forms of coordination are needed.

We have already said that normative argument does not take place in a discursive vacuum. New arguments must resonate with existing constellations of belief and value if they are to have influence. At the same time, existing norms do not always contain within them the resources that are needed to support the cause of political change. One of the main ways in which social transformation occurs is by providing people with new frames of reference, which replace old norms and allow them to make better sense of the situation that they are confronted by. This tension, between old and new, is manifest in contemporary efforts to develop public support for an anti-poverty agenda. Indeed, NGOs must choose whether to work with existing ideas of charity and priority, modifying them in ways that serve the cause of reform, or whether to try and replace these frames with an altogether different set of beliefs and attitudes. Crucially, the two approaches are unlikely to be effective if they are pursued simultaneously. Reformers cannot endorse existing norms while also insisting that they are flawed and that they should be superseded. In light of this, we need to know whether a strategy of *cooptation* or *confrontation* is more likely to succeed in the present context.

There is considerable evidence that a strategy of cooptation has been favoured to date. Taking the idea of charity first, NGOs have tended to accept that the provision of assistance to people living in extreme poverty is best understood as a matter of individual conscience and that it is something that should take place on a private and voluntary basis. Working within the confines of this paradigm, they have then sought to escalate levels of private philanthropy by developing fundraising materials that draw heavily upon the 'single identifiable victim effect', and by ensuring that there are a wide array of low-cost opportunities for affluent people to signal support for this

cause.[95] The first approach aims to mobilise existing heuristics and biases in support of poverty eradication by making the plight of people living in this condition more psychologically salient.[96] The second approach accepts that people have only finite levels of moral motivation and aims to avoid taxing this fragile resource by making it easier to donate in the form of monthly contributions. Taken together, these methods have allowed NGOs to expand their revenue-base at a time when charitable donations (as a percentage of household income) are in long-term decline.[97] At the same time, political leaders (from both ends of the political spectrum) have sought to use nationalist sentiment to inculcate support for the provision of overseas aid. The main way in which they have done this is by arguing that the provision of assistance can secure 'win-wins' – both for those living in extreme poverty and also for the public at home.[98] In this way, international efforts to combat poverty should not be understood in zero-sum terms because they will generate a prudential dividend for affluent people, in the form of access to new markets and better security in the future.

These approaches risk frustrating the cause of wider political reform for a number of reasons. To begin with, appeals that draw heavily upon the charity frame provide tacit support for the view that there is a moral hierarchy, which structures the relationship between giver and receiver, and that that assistance can be understood as a form of market transaction. These attitudes are problematic for reasons that have already been discussed. Speaking on this point, Martin Kirk notes that, 'if as mounting evidence suggests, one of the barriers to systemic change is the ubiquity of the charity frame and the values of individualist power and achievement that underpin it, then anything that validates and strengthens that frame and those values becomes profoundly problematic.'[99] Similar problems arise in the context of appeals to national interest. To begin with, the mention of individual or collective self-interest tends to serve as a 'red flag' in practical deliberation: it leads people to question whether overseas aid delivers prudential returns (and to hope that it does) even when they had not previously worried about whether this was the case.[100] In addition to this,

[95] This effect refers to the tendency for people to respond more dramatically to situations in which an identifiable victim is singled out, as opposed to those that focus upon vaguely defined targets or groups (Small *et al.*, 2007).
[96] Peter Singer has outlined a number of other ways in which these heuristics could be harnessed in order to create a 'culture of giving' (Singer, 2010, 63-78). See also, Lichtenberg, 2009, 242-256
[97] Putnam, 2000, 123
[98] On 11 November 2011, the British International Development Secretary, Andrew Mitchell, spoke of the need to identify this kind strategic overlap when developing programmes in this area.
[99] Commenting on this tendency, Ian Smillie argues that, 'Most Northern NGOs are not in business to present their donors with ideas or to educate the general public. Essentially they offer small feel-good opportunities to 'do something useful' for busy people living in a crass, materialistic world.' (Smillie, 1999, 73). Kirk, 2012, 256
[100] Pettit, 1998, 68-69

arguments to the effect that aid is important for national security or the promotion of trade tend to be disbelieved. The risks or gains involved are often judged to be too small and remote to be of real concern to affluent people.[101] Taken together, these approaches provide tacit support for the status quo, foregrounding a concern with material and parochial interests over and above the welfare of people living in a condition of extreme poverty.

Given the above, we need to consider whether there are alternative values that could provide support for transition to the wide-scope division of labour. I believe that two considerations in particular stand out. The first is that the vast majority of people already view the problem of world poverty as a *moral* issue, albeit one that they are not motivated (or do not know how) to address.[102] The second is that they also tend to believe that it is *unfair* that some people have so much while other people around the world are left without enough to get by. These beliefs come to the fore in focus-group discussions, where there is a tendency for other issues to be 'dwarfed by discussion in which gross inequity between peoples and nations [is] seen as simply "not right".'[103] While we cannot take the force of these claims at face value, the fact that they repeatedly appear in public discussion of poverty does suggest that justice-based arguments *resonate* in the present context. This is not surprising. After all, we have already noted the powerful aberrant effect that the desire for justice can have in the case of just world thinking. The justice motive is also something that agents of transition can seek to harness in other ways. Importantly, the concern they express in this context suggests that the affluent subscribe to views about fairness that differ markedly from those considered earlier in relation to the market and the nation. They do not believe that what is just is simply a matter of what people receive through a system of voluntary market transactions, nor do they believe that arguments about justice lack meaning when extended beyond national borders. Justice is also, in their view, concerned with meeting human need on a much more universal basis. This conviction serves as a weighty counterpoint to the norms and perspectives considered so far.

There is something paradoxical about the use of justice-based rhetoric in order to advance the process of transition. We have already said that the wide-scope division of labour ideal aims to help people discharge duties of humanity more effectively. These duties are owed to those living in extreme poverty in virtue of the fact that their lives have value and that this value is worthy of respect.[104] However, in order to motivate people to act in line with these duties, and pledge support

[101] Glennie *et al.*, 2012 16; Dietrich, 2007, 282
[102] Lindstrom and Henson, 2011, 6
[103] Glennie *et al.*, 2012, 16
[104] *See* Chapter Two.

to the institutional ideal in question, the current approach suggests that we need to raise the stakes further. It is only by publicly invoking claims of justice, as well as those of humanity, that the goal of addressing extreme poverty is likely to be served. This justice claim can be construed in many ways and has not been defended in this thesis. Nonetheless, there is a vast literature that anti-poverty campaigners can draw upon to support the view that the type of extreme poverty we now confront is a form of serious injustice. More precisely, this argument can be made in at least three different ways.

To begin with, NGOs could develop the idea that rich and poor countries are a part of a *cooperative undertaking for mutual advantage* to which requirements of justice conventionally apply. Indeed, this kind of venture could be held to exist on at least three different levels. Firstly, requirements of justice could be held to apply to the joint venture of assistance, to the collective undertaking by *donor nations* to address the problem of extreme poverty on an international basis.[105] Justice requires that partners do their fair share in meeting goals they have mutually affirmed. Applied to this context, rich nations ought not to free ride on the beneficence of wealthy actors in order to see these international targets achieved. Secondly, requirements of justice could be held to apply to the *development partnership* that exists between donor states and the low-income countries that they assist.[106] It is important to note in this context that wealthy nations also stand to benefit, albeit not to the same degree, from success in addressing global poverty. They will benefit from new economic opportunities, improved security, and from the development of a spirit of reciprocity, which is needed to address major international problems such as that posed by anthropogenic climate change. In this context, justice may require the disbursement of aid in a fair and equitable way. Thirdly, economically developing countries are already part of an *international legal and economic framework* to which they contribute and which they help to sustain.[107] These systems have a profound effect on their ability to prosper and they are difficult or very costly to exit. Developing countries may be entitled to receive a dividend as part of the social order that they help to constitute. At this level of abstraction, the suggestion is there is a global basic structure in which claims of distributive justice can be grounded.[108]

[105] Rubenstein, 2009, 530-532

[106] Martin Kirk seems to express this view when he writes that the new understanding of aid and development, 'should describe a worldview based on shared prosperity in which basic standards of fairness are a common good and mass poverty a moral and practical wrong' that is recognised by all (Kirk, 2012, 249).

[107] A possible exception to this claim holds true for certain outlaw states.

[108] Beitz, 1999, 143-154

Secondly, for those who believe that the stress on mutual advantage is difficult to defend in practice, it is possible to appeal to a norm of *non-exploitation* in this context.[109] According to this kind of argument, it is unfair for wealthy nations to use their superior power and resources to exact concessions from impoverished nations that these nations would not consent to in the absence of coercion. This kind of argument is less empirically demanding than those considered above because it requires only interaction, not cooperation, before it applies. An exploitation-based argument can be made with regard to existing institutions that are deemed to be exploitative. In the field of economic justice, this charge has been levelled at the rules that structure the trade system, the intellectual property regime, and the activities of international financial institutions.[110] It can also be made with regard to the effects of historical injustice in the form of colonialism and slavery.[111] Studies from experimental psychology suggest that people already believe that it is wrong for economic agents to exploit unusual market power for commercial advantage.[112] In addition to this, when exploitation has occurred in the past, common sense morality holds that compensation is called for. The challenge for NGOs is to make both types of harm salient enough to serve as the locus of moral disapprobation. Nonetheless, it remains an open question whether exploitation-based arguments contain the conceptual resources that are needed in order to anchor support for the full programme of political reform that the wide-scope division of labour requires.

Finally, anti-poverty campaigners could develop a justice-based argument that focuses upon the vast differences in *unchosen life chances* that people face from birth.[113] This account would build upon the core intuition that it is unfair that a child born into one society can expect to face a life riven by scarcity, illiteracy and disease, while a child born in another society will face none of these problems (and is likely to possess a superabundance of material goods). According this argument, it is unjust that moral arbitrary factors should have such a profound impact upon the ability of people to meet their basic needs, and that this kind of inequality is something we should take steps to address. This claim about injustice most clearly tracks the opinion expressed by participants in focus group discussion. It is also the least empirically demanding of the three considered so far, requiring only that people possess the *capacity* to make the world more just in some small way. Yet, concerns remain that this argument lacks the kind of emotive force that is needed to successfully engage

[109] Goodin, 1992, 62-82; R. Miller, 2010, 61-70
[110] Pogge, 2002
[111] Butt, 2008
[112] Kahneman *et al.*, 1986
[113] Caney, 2005

public support for poverty eradication.[114] The sense of responsibility generated by this kind of brute luck argument is often fairly abstract. Viewed in this way, it is still easy to think of unfairness as something that exists in the world 'out there' and not something that is intimately connected with one's own choices and behaviour.

Which of these arguments turns out to be the most persuasive is largely an empirical matter. Indeed, reason by itself is unlikely to be enough in this context; the emotional resonance of these claims is also important and needs to be looked at in greater detail.[115] Still, a number of things are already clear. Firstly, if justice-based arguments are used in this way, then NGOs must also present affluent people with a list of concrete and credible steps that they can take in order to address the kind of injustice that they identify. Failure to do so, having already primed the justice motive, would be particularly dangerous given the propensity towards victim-blaming that arises when people are confronted by forms of injustice which they believe they can do nothing about.[116] In addition to this, it is important to avoid certain kinds of moralism. The tendency to feel guilt about moral failure is a powerful emotion and one that has purchase in this context. However, it is also a sentiment that it is better to tap into in a more circumspect way. Affluent people already adhere to powerful rationalisations of their own individual inaction in relation to the problem of extreme poverty.[117] If campaigners are to succeed in this context, they cannot afford to activate these psychological defences on the part of those whom they seek to engage. If these outcomes can be avoided, there is reason to hope that ethical argument can help to mobilise support for government action to tackle extreme poverty and bring about institutional change.[118]

Finally, in order to make the case for political reform effectively, NGOs need to address a number of organisational obstacles that have hampered their effectiveness to date. We have already noted a tension between the communication and fundraising techniques that these organisations employ and the type of argument that they may need to advance. This is a conflict between the medium and the message, underwritten by the *competing ends* that these agencies try to serve. At the same time, progress in this area is also impeded by harmful forms of competition between NGOs for the money and attention of the people who they seek to persuade. When trying to reduce their reliance upon images that reinforces the charity frame, or low-commitment and low-impact forms of

[114] Gilabert, 2012b, 143
[115] Rorty, 1993, 122-23
[116] Hafer and Begue, 2005, 149-150
[117] *See* Chapter Three.
[118] J. Cohen, 1997, 131-132

public engagement, these actors encounter a *collective action problem*.[119] Conscientious organisations that try to take the lead in this area risk having their efforts undercut by less reputable organisations who claim to be able to deliver a similar service for a much cheaper price and who have few scruples about using exploitative pictures in order to further their institutional goals. Today, this kind of competition has seen the proliferation of extremely low-end estimates about the price for which a life can be saved or assistance provided – claims that diminish the overall credibility of organisations working in this area and that lead people to believe that the service being provided is only worth so much.[120] In order to address this problem, new forms of regulation are called for.

Beyond this, a further challenge for NGOs is to balance the competing demands for inclusivity and for greater levels of organisational cohesion. As this chapter has made clear, beliefs and attitudes to world poverty tend to vary across the population. One result of this is that a single message is unlikely to appeal to everyone: NGOs may need to embrace different perspectives if they want to be heard. At the same time, these organisations also need to maintain high levels of energy and cohesion among their core support. Adherence to a single principled argument is often the best device for this purpose. Therefore, efforts to accommodate different viewpoints sometimes backfire, with support flaring up for a short period of time and then dissipating rapidly after that. In order to avoid this outcome, NGOs need to try to draw a clearer distinction between strategic compromise (which is a necessary part of political life) and moral agreement (which is not). By proceeding in this way, it may be possible to win over the support of new constituencies of people by identifying convergence or affinity of aims, without weakening their commitment to the moral principles that they affirm.[121] Yet this is a fine balance to strike in practice. Efforts to recruit new allies must, therefore, be based upon a realistic appraisal of the ways in which support from different groups would help to bring about reform of the kind that is required by this pathway of transition.

Conclusion

[119] Horton and Roche, 2010, 8, 222

[120] Martin Kirk highlighted this aspect of the problem in an interview conducted on 15 March 2012.

[121] Viewed from a wider perspective, 'the right- and left-wing interpretations of aid bring together two types of argument: moral principles and cost-benefit analysis' (Therein, 2002, 460). Both ideological orientations suffer from certain limitations. Whereas the former focuses on the intention of actors, sometimes to the detriment of outcomes, the latter tends to be excessively self-regarding. A focus on the effective fulfilment of moral responsibilities combines valuable elements of both worldviews.

This chapter has focused primarily upon the idea of a wide-scope division of labour designed to help eradicate the condition of extreme poverty, asking how, if at all, an institutional arrangement of this kind might be brought about on a national basis in places where it does not already exist. To this end, it has looked at both the theory and practice of transition in greater detail. Viewed from a theoretical perspective, the chapter has suggested that the division of labour proposal is best understood as a component of non-ideal theory – as an interim arrangement that is designed to move us closer to a more ideal state of affairs. At a minimum, therefore, the proposed arrangement must be accessible. If it is to command widespread support it must also be achievable in morally permissible ways. In order to establish whether the division of labour proposal meets these conditions, the chapter proceeded in four broad analytic stages.

Firstly, it examined the status quo, exploring the failure of wealthy nations to take morally adequate measures to address the problem of extreme poverty despite high levels of public support for action in this area. In order to explain this phenomenon, it looked at the way in which economic and political elites prevent reform from being undertaken in this area. It also suggested that public support for the eradication of extreme poverty is less robust than it first appears to be. Indeed, the perception that compatriots take priority, and that assistance is a matter of charity, is widespread. So, too, are information barriers that make it difficult to assess the merits of existing initiatives in this area. With this understanding in place, the chapter then looked at a range of agents who could potentially affect transition to the division of labour ideal. It argued that NGOs, and their supporters, have an important role to play driving reform in this area. These groups have significant resources available to them and are also willing to take action. Developing this insight further, the chapter then looked at the process by which civil society organisations have managed to change public opinion in the past. Success in this area often turns, in practice, on the presence of norm entrepreneurs who are able develop arguments and modes of organisation that support this purpose. Finally, the chapter looked at the different opportunities and constraints that NGOs encounter when performing this role in relation to public beliefs about world poverty. A major challenge that they face is to try to contain the effect that nationalism and the market have on public perceptions of world poverty. In the final section, I suggested that a justice-based argument could prove useful when it comes to reframing the debate and motivating action.

In light of all this, it makes sense to ask whether the wide-scope division of labour meets the achievability condition that has been set out, or whether it represents yet another unsuccessful foray

into the realm of non-ideal theory. This remains a difficult question to answer. The wide-scope division of labour arrangement is clearly accessible: there are a number of ways in which it could be brought into existence. I believe that it is also achievable: the path of transition, which has formed the focus of this investigation, is one that stands a reasonable chance of success. Of course, the current economic climate is not auspicious for this kind of undertaking. However, opportunities for change do exist. As a result of this, efforts to alter public attitudes in this area are not part of a hopeless undertaking. At the same time, powerful practices that prevent the development of more cosmopolitan attitudes remain in place. Both the nation and the market are entrenched features of the world in which we live. Consequently, it remains possible that the best efforts of norm entrepreneurs will come up short.

Beyond this, we might also wonder whether the path of transition that has been envisaged here is morally acceptable. After all, I have argued that norm entrepreneurs should invoke justice claims, in a somewhat instrumental fashion, in order to motivate support for an institutional reform that would lead people to discharge their more basic humanitarian duties effectively. NGOs may need to invoke one moral standard in order to get people to conform to another. Yet, this approach is only morally problematic if arguments about injustice lack independent justification. This is not the case. There is good reason to believe that injustice is a pervasive feature of the world that we collectively inhabit. By providing people with justice-based arguments, we encourage them to aim high so that there is less chance that basic needs will go unmet or basic rights unfulfilled.

This is not the last word on the matter. For the division of labour proposal is only *one* way in which we might move closer to an ideal state of affairs in which extreme poverty became obsolete and duties of humanity were adequately fulfilled. There are other ways in which this higher aspiration might be brought about. If we are concerned primarily with the agency of the affluent, then change in the conduct of wealthy nations is most likely to come about because of change in the character of domestic public opinion. The path of transition passes *through* these states, via the kind of institutional reform that has been envisaged so far. However, there is also scope for action by those who currently live in extreme poverty and by their political representatives. The major problem encountered by these actors is a lack of capacity and organisation. Indeed, if it were easy for these people to improve their own condition then they would have done so already. However, as the character of the world economy changes, new opportunities for action arise. Many economically developing countries are now taking the lead in efforts to eradicate extreme poverty within their

borders.[122] Given the possibility that people need only temporary assistance to help them move out of poverty traps, there is also reason to hope that existing efforts to build capacity at the local level will pay dividends in the near future – empowering people to improve their own lives.[123] Indeed, for the victims of injustice, the co-incidence of morality and self-interest comprises a powerful motivational nexus, one that can drive forward the anti-poverty agenda.[124]

Finally, while the issue of moral permissibility has not been at the heart of this chapter, it may matter more in the context of action by people who live lives affected by extreme poverty. Given the moral wrongfulness of many of the practices that they are subjected too, there may well be morally acceptable and progressive transgressions that they are in a position to commit, but which they have not yet taken advantage of on a significant scale.[125] The existence of these avenues also bears upon the eliminability of extreme poverty and the achievability of a more just global order. Collective action by this multitude of people could, in practice, open up quite different paths to a better future. Taken in conjunction with the potential for reform inside affluent societies, the prospects for success in the fight against extreme poverty look considerably brighter.

[122] Banerjee and Duflo, 2011, 5
[123] Sachs, 2005, 64-66
[124] Scheffler, 1992, 140
[125] Caney, forthcoming

Thesis Conclusion

This investigation has examined the failure of affluent people to do more to assist those living in extreme poverty at the present moment in time. To this end, it has built upon the notion that inaction in the face of the widespread and preventable suffering of others is problematic in at least two distinct senses. On the one hand, inaction is morally troubling (the Moral Problem). On the other hand, it is also difficult to explain (the Explanatory Problem). Yet, given the need to respond to the plight of those living in a condition of extreme poverty, and the fact that the conduct of affluent people contravenes certain basic moral requirements, an omission of this type is something that needs to be explained. In order to cast light on these matters, the preceding chapters have addressed the structure of practical reason, the weight and nature of reasons to assist, the deliberative psychology and circumstances of affluent people, and the role of political institutions in directing and shaping individual conduct. We are now in a position to draw together the findings from each area of inquiry. In this conclusion, I aim to say something more concrete about the explanation of inaction, its moral character, and about the steps that can be taken to address this state of affairs.

I. Explaining Inaction

According to most theories of practical reason, it cannot be the case that an agent is fully informed and rational but fails to do what he or she has decisive reason to do. A person who deliberates under these conditions will reach correct conclusions about what he or she has most reason to do, all-thing-considered, and will be motivated to act accordingly. I have argued that there is good reason to believe that an account of this type is correct. The core hypothesis reflects our sense that human beings are at some level able to examine, moderate and adjust their behaviour in light of an understanding of the things that matter to them. Nonetheless, this belief about the type of creatures that we are appears at times to sit in tension with the patterns of conduct that we actually observe. In the case of many affluent people, particularly those who choose not to assist people living in extreme poverty when they could do so at little cost to themselves, it seems that agents who are rational and informed fail to do what they have most reason to do. I have argued that this impression must be mistaken. If the account of practical reason is correct, then it must be

true that the people in question lack decisive reason to assist, that they lack important pieces of information, or that they are rationally deficient in some procedural or substantive respect. The first chapter held that our ability to explain inaction, both past and present, turns on our ability to identify factors of this kind.

In order to make progress in this area, the second chapter considered the truth of the Decisive Reasons Claim. According to this claim, a large number of affluent people have decisive all-things-considered reason to assist those living in extreme poverty by allocating resources to the best performing aid and development organisations. According to this claim, it is contrary to reason that they fail to do so. The second chapter also addressed the claim that affluent people are required by morality to do more than they do at present and that failure to assist is morally wrongful. I argued that people living in affluent societies typically occupy one of three *normative positions*.

Firstly, there are those who have *sufficient moral reason* not to contribute resources to poverty alleviation and to use their own personal resources in other ways. This is most likely to be the case if the personal costs that they would incur by assisting are serious. People who are in this position can draw upon the idea of a moral prerogative or moral thresholds in order to justify their failure to do more. Furthermore, the circumstances that provide these people with good moral reason not to assist (such as the need to attend to certain ground projects or to loving relationships with other people) also typically provide them with sufficient all-things-considered reason not to do so at the present moment. Their conduct does not violate a moral requirement of beneficence that issues from a moderate account of morality, nor is it contrary to reason.

Secondly, there are those who *lack good moral reasons* not to assist but who have *sufficient non-moral personal reasons* to act in other ways. For this class of actors, the requirements of morality and the requirements of reason do not coincide. What they would forgo, in the event that they chose to do more, is not enough to morally justify inaction. However, the cost of assisting does make their reluctance to do more rationally intelligible given a proper understanding of the situation that obtains. People who would incur moderate costs by using their resources to assist those living in extreme poverty are in a situation where they are morally required to act but also have sufficient all-things-considered reason not to do so.

Finally, there are those who are *required by both morality and reason* to do more than they do at present in order to address and alleviate extreme poverty. For this category of person, neither moral nor non-moral personal considerations provide them with sufficient reason not to act. The

cost of doing more would, for these people, be trivial or non-existent. Their conduct is morally wrongful and they also fail to respond properly to other normatively laden aspects of the world in which they live. This is true, I have suggested, of a large number of people. After all, we live in a world where very low rates of direct assistance coexist alongside huge expenditure on the acquisition of luxury goods and services. The conduct of people who fall in this third category is highly problematic. While we can, in principle, explain the conduct of the first two groups by pointing to sound moral or non-moral reasons for action, this is not true for the final group of agents. In light of what has been said about practical reason, it must be the case that these people at least make rational errors when thinking about poverty or that they are in some way misinformed.

As a result of this finding, the third chapter examined the actual deliberation of affluent people, focusing primarily upon the way in which those who have decisive reason to assist think about the problem of world poverty. More specifically, this section examined the beliefs that affluent people living in Britain and the United States have about the world in which they live, their beliefs about value, the way in which they deliberate about the problem of world poverty, and their motivation to act or lack thereof. I argued that single-factor explanations that identify obstacles operating only in one of these explanatory domains tend to fall short when it comes to explaining inaction.

More compelling accounts of inaction are compound in form, drawing attention to the way in which different types of impediment interact with one another to defeat action in this area. Crucially, I suggested that the personal cost of allocating additional resources to aid organisations tends to loom large in the minds of affluent people, taking on inflated significance and affecting the judgements they make about the best possible course of action. In order to explain this phenomenon we can, in turn, point to a number of false beliefs that people entertain about the extent to which their own lives would be worsened by providing assistance, to forms of cognitive bias that exacerbate this effect, and also perhaps to the tendency to accord unreasonable priority to one's own life and aspirations in relation to those which belong to other people who live in a condition of serious need.

The expected benefit of assisting is also diminished by a similar set of factors. In practice, concerns about the effectiveness of assistance tend to run wild, while concern for those who comprise this unknown mass of distant people often gives out altogether, further tilting the perceived balance of reasons against action taken in order to address poverty. As a result of these

factors, inaction appears rational from the standpoint of the deliberating agent. Indeed, the majority of wealthy people who do not assist those living in extreme poverty *believe* that they are acting in a way that best serves their own interest (or the interests of those they care about) and also that *this is something they have sufficient all-things-considered reason to do* under the circumstances that obtain (even though this is not the case). In short, deliberation about the plight of those living in extreme poverty is commonly impeded both by false beliefs and by failures in rationality. Taken together, these factors explain inaction of the type that we now confront.

What is far less clear is that people in this third group believe their present course of action represents a morally good or praiseworthy way to live. There is, of course, considerable variation among the moral beliefs of those in question. This fact makes it difficult to generalise about attitudes in this area. However, I would suggest that the propensity of people to make claims about world poverty that they know at some level to be false, when they are asked to account for their conduct in this area, hints at the existence of a bad conscience around this matter, or at least recognition of the fact that there may be a moral case to answer for. If this is correct, then while some people (perhaps those who embrace a strong form of libertarianism) believe that their inaction is morally justified, many others recognise (perhaps implicitly) that their current conduct displays a degree of moral weakness. They believe that they have sufficient reason either to pursue private ends or to assist. However, these people choose the non-moral course of action over that which they think morally best. The conduct of these people is, in reality, perhaps less good than they would like it to be.

This account leaves open the question of how best to explain the conduct of people living in affluent societies who, unlike those who occupy the third normative position, actually have sufficient moral or non-moral reason to act in other ways. These people are typically poorer or have greater commitments than those who could assist at little cost to themselves. Furthermore, we have already said that their conduct could, in principle, be explained without an appeal to false belief or rational error. This would be the case if the normative considerations that count against assistance were, in fact, what motivated behaviour of a different kind on the part of these actors. I would now like to suggest that this is likely to be true in one sense, but not in another. Importantly, many of the impediments to action identified so far are broad-based, affecting judgement over a wide range of areas. The impact of different types of heuristic and bias on practical deliberation is in large part a product of the way in which the human mind has developed over many millennia. In addition to

this, many of the beliefs that concern us here are, to some extent, the product of different social norms that prevail inside the societies that affluent people inhabit. Thus, while the relative wealth of a person (and hence cost to them of assisting) may bear upon the type of bias they exhibit and the kind of errors they are inclined to make, it would be very strange if only those who can provide assistance at little cost (and therefore have decisive reason to assist) are afflicted by impediments of this kind.[1] It is more likely that those who have sufficient moral or non-moral reason not to assist also fall prey to these mistakes. For these people as well, the cost of assisting looms large relative to the benefit of so acting. Yet, in their case, the overall effect of these factors is somewhat different. In the previous case, which concerned those who have decisive reason to assist, distortions of this kind lead them to believe that this is not the case and to act in other ways. In the present case, the people in question already have sufficient non-moral or moral reason to act in other ways. Nonetheless, these effects continue to influence the way in which they understand their own conduct in this area.

Firstly, believing the cost of assisting to be greater than it is, many people who have only sufficient all-things-considered reason not to assist believe that they also have sufficient *moral* reason to act in other ways. Adhering to an inflated understanding of what they would forgo by so acting, they believe that their conduct is *morally justified* even when this is not the case. Secondly, many people who already have good moral reason not to assist (those for whom the cost of assistance is greatest) believe that they are *more secure* in this position than they actually are. These people tend to believe that they would have to be many times wealthier, or have many fewer commitments, before morality could call upon them to help out, even though this judgement is mistaken. The net result of this is that people who occupy both the first and second normative positions tend to act in ways for which there is sound normative reason. However, they often misunderstand the character of these reasons. Believing them to be weightier than they actually are (in contradistinction to those generated by the lives of people living in extreme poverty), people who occupy one of these two positions often accord them justificatory power that they do not possess, or accord them justificatory significance that is correct but overstated. As a result of this, an explanation of inaction that takes a wholly ideal form (positing that those in question are both fully informed and full rationality) may be quite inaccurate, even in cases of this type.

[1] The evidence suggests that poorer people living in wealthy societies are less susceptible to Just World Thinking and other types of desert-centred hypotheses. However, they are more likely to believe that a large amount of government resources are allocated to poverty alleviation and tend also to be less cosmopolitan in their normative outlook (Lane, 1991; Hochschild, 1986; WorldPublicOpinon.org/Knowledge Network, 2010).

Taken together, this is how the Explanatory Problem is to be solved. The best account of why people living in affluent societies fail to do more to assist people living in extreme poverty is invariably non-ideal in form. Those who have decisive reason to assist believe that they have sufficient reason to act in other ways when this is not the case. And, some of these people (along with some of those who actually have sufficient non-moral personal reasons not to assist) also believe that their conduct is morally justified when this is not the case either. At the same time, it also seems likely that many people do not entertain beliefs of the latter kind. These people believe that the pursuit of personal ends at the expense of those living in extreme poverty is a rational response to the world as it now is, but they are not convinced about the morality of inaction. As a result of this, they may encounter the problem of bad faith to a greater or lesser degree. I will shortly say something more about the way in which this explanation of inaction affects our evaluation of the conduct and character of affluent people. However, before moving on to address this issue, it might be objected that the present account is problematic in at least two ways.

The first objection holds that the present explanation of inaction is *incomplete*, that it has identified obstacles to action but that it has not provided a compelling account of the reason why these obstacles obtain. Indeed, little has been said about how it is that affluent people come to have the beliefs that they have or about why they deliberate in the way they do. What is needed, the critic suggests, is a fuller account of the *explanans*. Unless we know more about how false beliefs and rational errors arise, we cannot say much about what (if anything) is to be done about this state of affairs. While it is true that all explanations must come to an end somewhere, the critic challenges the notion that the correct place to stop is here. In order to address this concern, and to map out the path ahead, the fourth and fifth chapters of this thesis developed an account of why it is that the problem of world poverty *appears* to affluent people in this way. Broadly speaking, this diagnosis highlighted the role played by two sets of factors: the influence of psychological dispositions, which stem from the character and development of the human mind, and the influence of institutions and social practices that structure the lives of people living in affluent societies. The inclination to be loss-averse, to be risk-averse and to discount the importance of outcomes that affect groups of distant people can all be understood primarily in terms of the first sort of consideration. In contrast to this, certain types of group-based partiality and individualism are given their distinctive character by the institutions of nationhood and of the market. While these considerations should not be understood in a deterministic way, they make it more likely that affluent people will view the matter

of assistance in terms of a trade-off between morality and personal interest. Taken together, these factors represent obstacles to action that need to be overcome.

The second objection is quite different. It holds that the current explanation is still not completely satisfactory because it does not render the conduct in question transparent when examined from the standpoint of the deliberating agent. What we have shown is that affluent people often believe that they have *sufficient* reason either to assist those living in extreme poverty or not to do so (whether this is true of not), and also that there are certain phenomena that explain why this is the case. However, we have not yet have explained why, when faced with a choice between two options that are both judged to be rationally eligible, affluent people so consistently choose to pursue personal ends at the expense of those living in extreme poverty. As a result of this, the overall structure of the explanation is somewhat *underdetermined*. In order to make progress on this front, the critic argues that we also need to know why it is that these people choose to act in one way and not another in a situation where reason appears to be blind. This observation does not detract from the value of what has been said so far. However, the point that it raises is, in many ways, well-founded. A more complete explanation of inaction would account for this aspect of the phenomenon as well.

There are a number of ways in which we might try to make progress in this area. One approach would be to deny that situations in which an agent has sufficient reason to act in more than one way ever arise. We would then have to amend our understanding of human rationality and conduct in order to take this into account. However, given the phenomenon of imprecise comparability between reasons (and its effects which were discussed in Chapter Two), it is hard to see how an approach of this type could succeed. Alternatively, one might hold that human beings are equipped with a will or volitional capacity that enables them to choose among the different actions that they believe they have sufficient reason to perform.[2] This is the classical conception of human agency. According to this model, the operation of the will is usually constrained by reason, but it also has an independent role to play in the psychology of action. Building upon a model of this type, we might then hold that many people fail to assist those living in extreme poverty because they believe that they have sufficient reason to act in other ways *and also* because they want, or choose, to do so. To endorse a position of this type would not require us to return to a subjectivist understanding of reasons. The mere fact that people choose to pursue personal goods and ends does

[2] Raz, 1999, 47

not, on this account of agency, necessarily provide them with reason to do so. Rather, the will serves in this context only to 'tip the balance in favour of other ends once reason has run its course.'[3]

This approach seems to be an improvement on the account developed so far because it allows us to say something more about inaction. Indeed, the resulting explanation might be judged to be more complete for that reason. In addition to this, the idea that there are volitional states directly subject to our control is attractive for other reasons. It makes it easier, for example, to account for the possibility of akratic action in general.[4] However, it is also possible that the benefit generated by incorporating this notion of the will in an explanation of inaction is largely illusory. Crucially, the notion that affluent people *will* one course of action rather than another, without a further account of why this is the case, risks doing little to enrich our understanding of their situation. Indeed, while the will plays a role in this context that is quite distinct from the role that desire plays in the subjectivist account of motivation, we might wonder whether its explanatory power is blunted by charges that parallel those levelled so forcefully at the subjectivist account in earlier discussion. Indeed, if people choose one option rather than another, the objection holds that we still need to know why it is the case. The fact of choice by itself explains little. In the absence of a more sophisticated theory of the will, it may be best to remain agnostic about the role of this sort of entity when explaining failure to assist people living in extreme poverty.

II. Evaluating Inaction

The preceding discussion has focused primarily upon the explanation of inaction in the face of extreme poverty in the world today. To this end, it considered the truth of the claim that affluent people have decisive reason to assist and also that they are morally required to do so. These claims are also important in another way. They bear upon the way in which we evaluate the conduct and character of affluent people. Having surveyed the evidence in this area, and considered a wide range of moral theories (albeit those that foreground the idea that morality requires equal concern or respect for the life and well-being of other human beings), I argued that many people who could assist people living in extreme poverty, but who do not do so, have a moral case to answer for. As a result of this, we encounter the Moral Problem – that current inaction may be a wrong of very great magnitude indeed. Pursuing this line of inquiry further, we might wonder whether affluent people

[3] ibid. 67
[4] Wallace, 1999, 238

are *morally responsible* for the harm that results from inaction, and whether it makes sense to blame them in this context. This section looks at these points in turn. Firstly, it considers what, if anything, affluent people might be morally responsible for. My concern here is with *substantive* moral responsibility and the question of what people are morally required to do for one another. I will then consider the question of responsibility as *attributability*.[5] Even if affluent people are morally required to do more than they do at present, there are a number of preconditions that must be met before negative moral appraisal of an agent is appropriate. We will want to know, for example, what the agent believed about his or her action and whether or not the action in question was under the agent's control. Finally, I consider the question of *blame* in greater detail. Indeed, it is important to note in this context that, even when an agent is responsible for a wrongful action, the decision to blame that person is not always the morally best course of action to undertake.[6]

The second chapter of this thesis showed that many affluent people have morally decisive reason to provide life-saving assistance to those living in extreme poverty. I argued that, prerogatives or thresholds notwithstanding, those who do not yet incur moderate costs in service of this end are morally required to do so. Inaction under these conditions is morally wrong. There is also a sense in which affluent people can be said to harm those currently living in extreme poverty. This may compound their moral responsibility for the resulting loss. To see why this is the case, we must recognise that the notion of harm and benefit used in this context are essentially comparative notions.[7] In order to know whether harm has resulted in a given instance, it is important to establish whether or not a person is better or worse off than they would have been in some alternative state of affairs that the agent was in a position to bring about. In the present case, one salient comparison is with a state of affairs in which each individual affluent person chooses to assist on a greater scale. In this world, disease would be treated, education made available, and millions of deaths averted. The losses that those living in extreme poverty suffer often bear this important counterfactual relationship to the inaction of affluent people. The harm that results from inaction in this area is, therefore, one that we may want to hold agents who are suitably rational and informed accountable for.

That said, the claim that individual affluent people are responsible for the death and suffering of people living in extreme poverty is also, in other ways, too strong. Affluent people are

[5] For this distinction *see* Scanlon, 1998, 248-249
[6] This is true on the common view that attributions of blame involve an expressive or communicative act.
[7] Pogge, 2002, 16

not the only agents who bear this counterfactual relationship to the present state of affairs. Indeed, we may doubt that they bear primary responsibility for outcomes in this area. Extreme poverty has, we have already noted, many causes. Those whose lives that are diminished or cut short by material impoverishment are frequently also people who are failed both by their own governments (who distribute resources inequitably if at all) and by other states and organisations (who adhere to practices and norms that are detrimental to their interest). The common thought that these actors are *more* substantively responsible for the effects of extreme poverty than the people whose conduct we have already considered can be understood in a number of ways. In the first instance, it might be thought that the causal contribution that these actors make to the present state of affairs is quite different from that which follows from inaction on the part of affluent people. In the case of these agents, their acts are events that *cause* the outcome in question. The contribution that they make is actual as opposed to merely counterfactual: they harm people living in extreme poverty *by what they do*, rather than by simply failing to assist. Yet, this interpretation is problematic insofar as it is susceptible to deflationary revision. Indeed, we could easily say that governments omit to allocate resources in a way that combats extreme poverty within their own territorial jurisdictions, or that wealthy nations simply fail to offer developing countries fair terms of cooperation and exchange in trade negotiations. If it is the act itself that matters in this context, then the claim that these agents bear primary responsibility for extreme poverty loses much of its force.

Alternatively, we might think that the responsibility of these actors is greater than that of individual people (who are in a position to assist) because they have greater *capacity* to remedy this situation and because they have a different kind of *relationship* to people living in extreme poverty. On this view, the relevant morally salient fact is not the actions-omissions distinction. What is particularly bad about state corruption and the theft of national resources is that those in power have a special responsibility not to behave in this way and to attend adequately to the needs of their own population. This is the basis of legitimate government: states that fail at this most basic level do not abide by the terms of the social contract. When they have the capacity to act otherwise, it is unjust that they fail to do so. Beyond this, it is also plausibly the case that powerful nations have a stringent duty not to exploit those who are in a position of weakness. This principle is also often violated in international affairs. Of course, affluent people are also often the indirect beneficiaries of coercive behaviour by powerful states. However, in cases of this kind, some measure of additional responsibility must attach to the political representatives themselves: benefiting from exploitation

and the decision to exploit are not one and the same thing. The correct assignment of moral responsibility takes account of these facts. Beyond this, we are only responsible in the substantive sense for what we ought-morally to do. If governments fulfilled their moral responsibilities, then the moral requirement that applied to individual affluent people would be far weaker. It is antecedent failure by states that gives rise to such extensive duties to assist. Their failure also makes the eradication of extreme poverty harder to achieve. In light of this, affluent people shoulder some responsibility for the plight of those whom they do not assist. However, substantive responsibility for this outcome does not belong to them alone.

Before we know whether this type of substantive failure can be *attributed* to affluent people in the way that judgements of moral responsibility and blameworthiness require, we also need to address the role played by a further set of considerations. These factors concern the extent to which conduct in this area can be properly said to be under the control of non-acting affluent people. In theory, negative appraisal of an agent is only appropriate in cases where that person has not governed him or herself in a way that is permitted by justified moral principles.[8] This is most obviously true when an agent pursues a wrongful course of action in full awareness of decisive countervailing moral considerations.[9] It is also true in a second kind of case: negative moral appraisal is appropriate when morally wrongful action follows from a failure by an agent to form correct beliefs, or to deliberate seriously about a matter, despite recognition that something significant is at stake. By acting in a way that is careless or callous or reckless, the agent fails to take note of reason or reasons. This, too, is something that they can be held morally responsible for.

Commenting on this fact, Joseph Raz has argued that an action does not need to be guided directly by powers of rational agency in order for responsibility to obtain.[10] Rather, we attribute responsibility to people whose actions result from the successful or unsuccessful functioning of their powers of rational agency (so long as these powers are not suspended and the action falls within an area of expected competence).[11] In contrast to this, we do not hold people responsible for conduct that was not under their control because of conditions like hypnosis or serious mental illness.[12] The attribution of responsibility is significantly weaker in cases when a person is manipulated or coerced in such a way that their powers to affect the outcome are compromised.[13] When the connection

[8] Scanlon, 1998, 268
[9] ibid. 268-269
[10] Raz, 2011, 229-231
[11] ibid. 231, 242
[12] Scanlon, 1998, 278-280
[13] Miller, 2007, 91-92

between the agent and their conduct is impeded in one of these ways, then the behaviour in question can to some extent be excused.[14]

The question of attribution is important for the present investigation. To begin with, the preceding analysis suggests that failure to assist people living in extreme poverty is often a case of simple moral wrongdoing. According to the account provided here, many affluent people know that they ought morally to do more than they do at present, and they do not act even though they are aware of this fact. When this is the case a choice is made, and there are few factors that indicate diminished control on the part of the agent. No significant problem of attribution arises in this context. At the same time, there are also other cases in which affluent people fail to assist those living in extreme poverty because of their mistaken belief that inaction is morally permissible. When this is the case, what we need to establish is whether it is possible to endorse this normative conclusion without thereby revealing oneself to be negligent, callous or deluded. We need to know whether adherence to this kind of extremely permissive moral judgement is something that should be excused in a world where so many people living in extreme poverty go unaided.

The way in which we answer this question depends, in turn, upon our understanding of the obstacles that affluent people encounter when deliberating about world poverty. We have already noted that many of the beliefs and attitudes that exist in this area can be explained by some combination of evolutionary psychology and institutional socialisation. Yet, this does not mean that affluent people lack the capacity to respond to these factors in the way that the attribution of moral responsibility requires. Firstly, the constraints which they face do not provide a complete guide to conduct in this area: there is wide variation in the extent to which people *do* assist those living in extreme poverty. Indeed, some people assist at a much higher level than others. It is, therefore, unlikely that psychology and socialisation wholly determine conduct in this area, at least in the way that would be needed for responsibility attributions to become inappropriate. Secondly, when considered from the standpoint of the deliberating agent, it seems likely that many of the mistakes that affluent people make could be addressed with relatively little effort. False beliefs about how much of the national budget is spent on foreign aid are, perhaps, exemplary in this regard. They would be set straight by even the most cursory consideration of the evidence.

At the same time, there are also other cases in which the obstacles that the affluent encounter are more robust. The impact of certain heuristics and biases on deliberation about

[14] Austin, 1956, 3

assistance can be traced back to deeper psychological propensities that affect human judgement on a comprehensive basis. Even when people are aware of these distortions, they often struggle to avoid making this kind of mistake at the level of individual practical reason. Taken together, these considerations support a mixed verdict with regard to the errors of moral judgement that concern us. Affluent people bear some responsibility for the mistakes that they make in this area: at a general level, it is clear that they tend not look at or think hard enough about the problem of extreme poverty and their own relationship to it. At the same time, the imperfect operation of human reason is something they have limited control over: the impact these constraints have on deliberation about poverty is something that may, to a certain extent, be excused.[15]

In light of the preceding discussion, the notion that substantive responsibility attaches to the conduct of affluent people for their failure to assist retains a degree of force. This kind of omission is one of the sorts of things to which judgements of blame sometimes attach. A person is *blameworthy* if their conduct shows something about their attitudes towards other people that impairs one's relationship with that person.[16] Blame itself is appropriate when it is one's own relationship with a person that has been impeded by their conduct.[17] Understood in this way, Thomas Scanlon suggests that the attribution of blame comprises something more than an evaluation, but less than a sanction.[18] However, even when a judgement of blame is deserved, there remains the further question of whether it is wise *to* blame the person or persons in question. Indeed, this course of action may be foolhardy if it has negative repercussions that overshadow the benefits that a just allocation of blame brings with it. In the present case, which concerns the conduct of affluent people, the latter question looms large and requires closer consideration.

In practice, there is reason to believe that attempts to correctly apportion blame have not yet been made in the context of responsibility for extreme poverty. There is also reason to think that affluent people underestimate the extent to which blame attaches to their own conduct in this area.

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[15] This kind of assessment gives rise to a paradox. Those who do better in terms of forming correct beliefs, responding to value, and deliberating correctly, are also those to whom judgements of responsibility most readily attach when assistance is not forthcoming. Their perceptiveness and clarity of mind makes the attribution of responsibility to them less controversial. At the same time, people who do less well in this sense appear to purchase themselves some slack. Due to epistemic and deliberative error, attributions of responsibility are more difficult to make. People who are cognisant of this general dynamic may choose not to engage with the issue of extreme poverty for fear of learning facts that then compel action and that would make subsequent failure to assist more directly attributable to them. As a result of this, there is a general incentive to try and maintain a state of wilful ignorance and to look away.

[16] Scanlon, 2008, 128-129

[17] ibid.

[18] ibid. 122-123

This is because there are very few people who have both the incentive and the moral standing that is needed to speak authoritatively on this issue. Individual citizens who live in affluent countries are often poorly placed to criticise their compatriots for inaction, given that their own conduct also usually falls short of what morality requires in this area.[19] By broaching the topic of blameworthiness, an affluent person who speaks from this position of weakness risks being condemned twice over: firstly as a moral hypocrite and, secondly, as someone whose own failure to assist has become conspicuous to others.[20] Few people are prepared to expose themselves to this kind of public scrutiny and criticism. At the same time, those who live in extreme poverty frequently lack any means by which to apportion blame – even if they think it appropriate to do so. Indeed, there are few channels through which they can speak to the citizens of affluent countries and few ways in which to signal forms of moral disapprobation to them. Furthermore, neither these people nor their political representatives have much of an incentive to broach the topic of blame given their need to cultivate a strong relationship with powerful nations. In this context, the act of blaming could be expected to impact detrimentally upon the likelihood that they will receive assistance or other benefits in the future.[21] Taken together, these factors suggest there may be a 'conspiracy of silence' around the topic of blame.

This silence may be problematic given that the public allocation of blame has often played an important role in motivating new forms of behaviour. Beyond this, it is also possible that affluent people further damage their relationship with those living in poverty by refusing to accept responsibility for their own conduct and by refusing to blame others who fail them in this capacity.[22] Nonetheless, there is also very weighty prudential reason to treat the question of blame with care. Indeed, we have already noted that many people adhere to powerful rationalisations of their own personal conduct in this area. These psychological defences may be activated by even the tacit supposition that blame is appropriate in this context. Furthermore, these reactive tendencies represent a major barrier to the escalation of public support for the cause of poverty eradication. A major challenge facing agents of transition is, therefore, to try and advocacy strategies that

[19] Being in a position to offer a well-grounded moral truth does not suffice for being in a good position to condemn (Cohen, 2006, 121).
[20] To be a hypocrite is to apply a standard to others which my own conduct shows that I do not accept (ibid. 175-176). The force of this charge is diminished by recognition of one's own failure in this area.
[21] As Hattori notes, the practice of aid-giving can be construed as a gift relationship. It is important to this practice that those who receive aid respond with gratitude and affirm the beneficence of those who assist (Hattori, 2003, 233, 237).
[22] Unwillingness to blame members of one group impairs our relationship with the victims in a related but lesser way (Scanlon, 2008, 175).

circumvent these obstacles. It is important that they allow affluent people to feel positive about assisting. Thus, while blame may be appropriate in theory, it is not necessarily part of the best approach to take in practice. The resources that we need in order to push forward the process of transition are, I believe, to be found elsewhere.

III. Addressing Inaction

The problem that this investigation addresses arises at the level of the individual. It concerns various forms of misperception and rational error. It is also concerned with the limited altruism of affluent people – with the existence of only finite levels of moral motivation among the population taken as a whole. Together, these factors lead individual people living in affluent countries to do much less than they could to assist those living in extreme poverty. As a result of this, moral duties go unfulfilled. One way in which to tackle this problem is to address the various impediments to sound deliberation that arise at the individual level. It is important to identify and target the different errors that affluent people make, correcting for them and for the effect that they have on deliberation in this area. More specifically, I have argued that affluent people tend to overestimate the personal cost of assisting and to underestimate the good that could be achieved by acting in this way. As a result of this, there is an important *gap* between what they believe to be the case and the situation that actually obtains. It is possible that a clearer appreciation of the reality of the situation could help motivate assistance on a scale that has not yet been seen.

At the same time, there are also likely to be limits on what private philanthropy can achieve in this regard. To start with, extreme poverty is a complicated phenomenon. It stems not only from scarcity of resources, but also from the failure to allocate and use resources properly. It is also caused by a wide range of harmful practices that work to the detriment of the world's poorest people. The governments of both affluent and impoverished nations are heavily implicated in the production of this situation, and need to alter their conduct in significant ways if the problem is to be addressed. Beyond this, there may also be limits on the extent to which it is possible to cultivate altruistic sentiment among people living in affluent societies. The current state of inaction gains support not only from deep aspects of human psychology, but also from the existence of powerful social practices, such as the nation and the market, that serve to weaken public support for efforts to help people living overseas.

In light of this, the fourth and fifth chapters of this thesis argued that a more complete solution to the problem of individual motivation must also be political in form. It is important to design institutions that make it easier for people to discharge duties of humanity effectively, given the priorities that they hold and the motivational obstacles that they would otherwise encounter. This institutional approach serves as a complement to the more direct approach discussed above, which relies primarily upon the provision of new information and on efforts to address bias in the deliberation of affluent people. However, it also goes further than this first strategy, recognising that both the demands of morality and our own ability to comply with them are deeply affected by the nature of the social world in which we live, by the character of the political institutions that we sustain and by the contribution that other people make, or fail to make, towards the achievement of moral ends that we hold in common.

Developing this approach, the fourth chapter of this thesis argued that we should aim to construct an institutional division of moral labour between state and citizen, which would see domestic political institutions take on responsibility for discharging duties of assistance, thereby leaving affluent people freer to focus on their own personal goals in their private lives. This proposal represents an extension of the moral remit that the state is designed to serve. Rather than focusing solely upon international security, economic growth and the preservation of background justice within the domestic context, the state would also take action to secure certain basic moral ends on a universal basis. As a result of this, the proposed division of labour is wide in scope. In order to discharge these duties successfully, wealthy nations would have to honour the commitments that they have made in the field of poverty eradication, allocate aid in a more effective and transparent way, and bring an end to the harmful practices that they currently sustain. Measures of this kind may still not be sufficient to end extreme poverty: there is, as we have said, a need for political reform inside societies that are affected by extreme poverty as well. However, they would comprise an important and progressive step – one that would see the bulk of duties to assist successfully discharged by affluent people.

This institutional approach has important advantages over reliance on action by individuals alone. To begin with, this kind of arrangement has the potential to realise efficiency and fairness-related gains in the field of poverty eradication. The state is well-placed to draw upon economies of scale and to solve the coordination problem that arises from the simultaneous pursuit of multiple ends by different agencies. It can also ensure that people do their fair share when it comes to

discharging duties of assistance, making sure that none are left picking up the slack caused by the inaction of others in this context. Beyond this, the current proposal would help affluent people to realise moral outcomes that they already identify with, on some level, but which they are not motivated to pursue directly through their personal conduct. At the level of phenomenology, assistance provided via taxation also tends to *feel* less costly than giving money away on a voluntary basis. Finally, the political approach would lead to policies and institutions that function as a 'commitment device' for affluent people, helping them to discharge moral responsibilities successfully over time by binding them to a certain course of action. Being cognisant both of the substantive benefits that this approach brings with it, and also of the obstacles to action that they encounter on an individual basis, there is reason to hope that this approach could command the support of many of those who currently come up short. It would allow them to live in a better world. It would also help them lead the kind of morally decent lives that many of them aspire to live.

In addition to this, the fourth chapter argued that the wide-scope division of labour proposal meets several other important desiderata that bear upon the desirability and feasibility of an institutional scheme. This kind of institutional arrangement would be legitimate. It is both justified and justifiable to people who endorse a wide range of reasonable comprehensive moral doctrines. Therefore, it remains compatible with the notion of liberalism as a political enterprise. The design in question is stable. It could generate support for the principles it embodies by drawing upon a process of civic education that serves this purpose. Finally, the fifth chapter demonstrated that the proposed arrangement is accessible (and can be accessed in morally acceptable ways). For many countries, there is a morally permissible route from where they are now to a situation in which the wide-scope division of labour obtains. This is important, because the wide-scope division of labour can itself be understood in a transitional light: as a component of non-ideal theory that is designed to move us closer to still better institutional arrangements at the global level. Furthermore, the arrangement in question is also achievable. Despite the obstacles that have been identified, NGOs and anti-poverty campaigners stand a reasonable chance of success in endeavouring to bring it about. In order to deliver on this aspiration, they must adopt the mantle of norm entrepreneur, challenging the idea that assistance is only a matter of charity, or that compatriots always take priority, by advancing a justice-based argument for better, more universalistic institutions.

While we may ultimately hope to build stronger international institutions that are capable of realising sufficientarian or egalitarian values on a global basis, the establishment of a wide-scope

division of labour at the national level represents a very significant improvement on the status quo and also, perhaps, our best hope that this state of affairs can be brought about. This approach builds upon an accurate diagnosis of the Explanatory Problem and takes seriously the concerns that the Moral Problem raises. In conjunction with efforts to address bias and error at the individual level, it should command our support and represents part of the best possible way in which to proceed. If efforts to improve the lives of people living in extreme poverty are successful, we will all be better, and better off, for it. The establishment of a wide-scope division of labour is an important first step towards building a better world.

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