Chapter 6

Giving Isn't Demanding

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In "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," Peter Singer (1972) suggests two moral principles that concern our obligations of beneficence:

> *Principle of Sacrifice*: if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it. (231)
>
> *Weak Principle of Sacrifice*: if it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything else morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it. (235)

Though many people have been persuaded that these are genuine moral principles, others have been unconvinced. They argue that these principles are *too demanding*: if we followed them, we would have to give away most of what we own and spend most of our time helping others. This, it is alleged, is asking more of us than morality truly requires.

In this chapter we propose an even weaker principle:

> *Very Weak Principle of Sacrifice*: Most middle-class members of affluent countries ought, morally, to use at least 10 percent of their income to effectively improve the lives of others.

Even though it's even weaker than Singer's *Weak Principle of Sacrifice*, this principle is still revisionary. The nonprofit Giving What We Can (of which two of the authors are cofounders) encourages people to take a 10 percent pledge; this pledge is regarded by most people who hear about it as beyond the call of duty rather than morally required. On average, per capita private donations as a percentage of GDP amount to about 2 percent in the United States (Giving Institute 2017) and 0.5 percent in the United Kingdom (Charities Aid Foundation 2015); even among those donations, only a small percentage is spent on the most effective programs. Even if only half of all people in the United States abided by this principle, an additional USD 612 billion per year would be donated. As a comparison, total global foreign aid spending is only USD 135 billion per year (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2015).

In this chapter, we argue that the *Very Weak Principle of Sacrifice* is not very demanding at all, and therefore that the "demandingness" objection has not even pro tanto force against it. Whatever one thinks about the demandingness of Singer's two proposed principles, one should therefore endorse the *Very Weak Principle of Sacrifice* and agree that we still have significant obligations to use our income to effectively improve the lives of others.

Our argument in favor of the claim that the *Very Weak Principle of Sacrifice* is not terribly demanding is based on the following two premises:

1. Giving financial resources is not particularly onerous, far less onerous than we intuitively believe.
2. Giving financial resources does a huge amount of good, far more good than we intuitively believe.

We argue for each of these premises in turn, based primarily on empirical evidence from psychology and economics. Before we begin, however, a few clarifications are in order.

First, this chapter is not concerned with the demandingness of *utilitarianism*. Rather it is concerned with the demandingness of a much more specific normative requirement: giving 10 percent of one's income. Too often the issue of the demandingness of our obligations to use some of our financial resources to improve the lives of others has been conflated with the much more narrow view that we ought always to maximize the good. We don't claim that one does *not* have an obligation to give even more; indeed we believe our arguments could plausibly be extended to higher donation levels. But we believe, at a minimum, that the obligation to give 10 percent of our income should be agreed upon by any plausible moral theory.

Second, we restrict our claim to "middle-class members of affluent countries." We define "middle-class" to mean "in the richest 50 percent" by income. We further restrict the scope of our claim to "most" middle-class members of affluent countries in order to account for those who may have unusually high costs of living, such as those with a disability that requires significant ongoing healthcare.

Third, we do not claim that there is anything special about the requirement to donate 10 percent of one's income. Nor do we mean to suggest that the evidence we cite couldn't justify a requirement to donate more than 10 percent. Rather we chose the 10 percent figure because (1) it is very hard to argue that a principle requiring that much would be too demanding and (2) such a principle already has drastically revisionary implications, given how little people do in fact donate.

Fourth, by "effectively improve the lives of others" we have in mind interventions that improve people's lives much more than the typical intervention. As we note below, it costs only USD 2,800 to save a life in a poor country (GiveWell 2015), whereas typical life-saving interventions in a rich country can be a hundred or a thousand times more costly.

The fifth and most important clarification concerns the nature of the demandingness objection. Whether a moral theory or duty is too demanding depends on two things: the costs to the agent of the actions required by that duty and the size of the moral stakes at issue. If the moral stakes are high, morality can be very demanding, without being too demanding. This is represented within commonsense morality. Consider, for example, a slave owner living centuries ago. He would be morally required to free his slaves even if that meant he would lose his family's livelihood. Or consider an innocent person who, through an unfortunate series of events, has been convicted of murder and is on Death Row in Texas. According to commonsense morality, she would be required to lose her life rather than escape, if the only way to escape involved killing an innocent prison guard.

When we assess the demandingness of a particular duty, therefore, we must look at both the costs to the agent *and* the size of the moral stakes. Our argument in this chapter therefore concerns the *ratio* of how much one can benefit others to how much one can benefit oneself.

One might argue that the slave owner and Death Row cases concern potential violations of *justice* rather than violations of *beneficence*, which is all that failing to give 10 percent would involve. However, even those who endorse the demandingness objection agree that there are some duties of beneficence to strangers, and that these can require sacrifices: "There is nothing intuitively objectionable about a morality's requiring a degree of sacrifice for the sake of benefiting strangers" (Hooker 2009, 151). This makes sense. Sometimes duties of beneficence can compete with or outweigh duties of justice, for example in emergency scenarios, where failing to violate some side constraint would result in the loss of thousands of lives. But if justice can generate large moral stakes that result in demanding duties, and duties of beneficence can sometimes compete with or outweigh duties of justice, then beneficence can sometimes generate large moral stakes. This chapter argues that, in comparison with the loss to the donor, the stakes are indeed very large.

Here is one final point of clarification: when the costs of complying with a moral theory's demands are deemed to be too high, it is not always clear what costs are at issue (Kagan 1989). For the purposes of this chapter, we will assume that the demandingness objection is concerned with the sacrifice of individual well-being or individual self-interest, as opposed to moral autonomy (Slote 1985; Shiffrin 1991) or the pursuit of individual projects and commitments (considered apart from their contribution to individual self-interest) (Williams 1973). Unfortunately a full defense of this assumption is beyond the scope of this chapter. But we assume that representing costs in terms of losses in individual well-being represents a highly intuitive understanding of what it means for a moral theory to be overly demanding in asking the agent to bear unreasonable costs. If we can rebut the demandingness worry attached to the *Very Weak Principle of Sacrifice* on this assumption, we will at the very least have gone a long way to rebutting the demandingness worry tout court. With this on board, we can turn to our main argument.

THE COSTS TO YOU ARE SMALLER THAN YOU THINK

In this section we try to estimate the loss in happiness that a requirement to give 10 percent would impose on the agent. We make three claims. First, our intuitions about the costs of giving aren't generally reliable and are biased in systematic ways. Second, the available evidence suggests that the costs of giving are comparatively minor. Third, the evidence also suggests that giving, besides having some costs, also has nonnegligible benefits.

We should note that, in all cases, the data we give concern the relationship between income and happiness *on average*. It may be that, for some people, income is very strongly correlated with happiness; for such people our arguments will be weaker. Similarly for many people the correlation between income and happiness will be weaker than the average; when directed to such people, our arguments will be stronger.

Unreliable Intuitions

Different people have different relationships with money and draw their happiness from different sources. In order to determine exactly how your happiness, or subjective well-being, depends on a certain level of income, some personal judgment is called for. At the same time we need to be aware of our own fallibility. Psychologists have studied our accuracy in predicting the effect of various outcomes on happiness;

these predictions are called *affective forecasts*. They have found that we are not as good at affective forecasting as we might expect.

We *are* generally good at predicting whether an outcome will be pleasant or unpleasant: we know full well that going on holiday is a good time and that going to the dentist is not. The problem lies elsewhere: in our estimates of quantity rather than quality. Our affective forecasts are subject to an *impact bias*: we overestimate the duration and intensity of the pleasant or unpleasant feelings associated with good or bad outcomes (Wilson and Gilbert 2005). For example, people routinely misjudge the negative impact of various medical conditions on people's quality of life (Boyd et al. 1990; Sackett and Torrance 1978). Similarly, lovers overestimate the negative impact of the dissolution of their relationship, academics overestimate the negative impact of being denied tenure, and voters overestimate the negative impact of having their candidate lose the election (Gilbert et al. 1998).

The impact bias also colors people's perceptions of the relationship between income and happiness. Kahneman et al. (2006, 1909) asked a sample of working women in the United States to estimate the proportion of time typically spent in a bad mood by someone with low income (less than USD 20,000); they found the predicted prevalence of bad mood to be "grossly exaggerated." Aknin et al. (2009, 524) found that a representative sample of Americans "vastly underestimated the happiness of people earning lower levels of household income (USD 55,000 and below)." Giving away 10 percent of your income will probably not reduce your happiness by nearly as much as you think.

The Costs of Giving

It is therefore unlikely that giving 10 percent will be as bad as we intuitively predict, given the unreliability of such predictions. But how bad, if at all, is it likely to be?

Cross-sectional studies consistently show that at any given time, within any given country, income is positively correlated with happiness (see Diener and Biswas-Diener 2002: 122–127 for overview and discussion). Thus the World Values Survey has found the percentage of respondents in the United Kingdom reporting above neutral life-satisfaction to be 19 percent higher for high-income groups compared to low-income groups; in France the difference was 29 percent, in the Netherlands it was 6 percent, and the global average was 17 percent (World Value Survey Group 1994).

What, if anything, can we conclude from this regarding the probable effects of giving away 10 percent of income? One might think of this as equivalent to simply exchanging our level of happiness for that attributed by a cross-sectional survey to someone like us within our country whose income is 10 percent lower than our own; more exactly, we might expect to experience a drop in well-being equivalent to the average difference in happiness between someone earning what we earn and someone earning 10 percent less.

There are two problems with this. First, note that cross-sectional surveys demonstrate only correlation, not causation. The existence of a positive correlation between happiness and income might be partly due to the influence of happiness on income: people of a more cheerful disposition might end up wealthier than others. There is evidence to support the existence of an effect of this kind (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2002: 134–135). Similarly the correlation between income and happiness might be partly due to any number of third variables that cause both higher income and higher happiness (Easterlin 2001: 468; see Diener and Biswas-Diener 2002: 128 for general discussion).

Second, we may worry that cross-sectional surveys don't use the best available measure of subjective well-being. In these surveys well-being is typically measured by asking subjects to provide global reports of life satisfaction. For example, they may be asked, "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?" However, there exists an alternative technique for measuring happiness, *experiential sampling,* wherein subjects are asked to report their instantaneous feelings of happiness or unhappiness at several points over an extended period of time. It has been argued that experiential sampling provides a superior method of measuring happiness because it overcomes the biases associated with the cognitive capacities required to recollect and aggregate past experience (Kahneman 1999; Stone et al. 1999). The choice of method matters, as the correlation between income and happiness is weakened when global self-report measures are replaced with experiential sampling (Kahneman et al. 2006; Diener et al. 2010). If experiential sampling provides a better measure of subjective well-being, then money buys less happiness than studies of life satisfaction indicate.

But let's ignore these concerns and consider the degree to which our happiness would drop if we were to infer causation from correlation and equate happiness with life satisfaction. The conclusions we draw would then plausibly provide a *lower bound* for the level to which our happiness would drop as a result of donating 10 percent of our income. Now because the correlation between income and happiness is small and nonlinear, it turns out that even very large falls in income result in very modest drops in life satisfaction. Using data from the Gallup World Poll, Stevenson and Wolfers (2013) found that the relationship between happiness and income is logarithmic: each additional doubling of income is associated with a constant increase in happiness. By looking at their paper we can see that for a citizen of the United States, a 10 percent reduction in income is associated with a loss of about one-tenth of a point in a ten-point scale measuring life satisfaction. We may conclude that donating 10 percent should produce, *at worst,* a very small reduction in personal happiness.

The Benefits of Giving

Our discussion in the previous section has assumed that donating 10 percent of our income is like earning 10 percent less. But this assumption is questionable. In relying on this assumption, we would presume that giving away money to charities that help people in distant countries is as good from the perspective of our well-being as having never earned that money in the first place or having simply thrown it away. This seems quite implausible.

To understand how our happiness varies depending on whether or not we give 10 percent of our income to charity, we need to look at how happiness varies with different kinds of spending. Notably the available evidence suggests that spending money on others can often improve our subjective well-being to a greater extent than spending money on ourselves (Dunn et al. 2011).

Imagine the following scenario. You are a participant in a psychological experiment; you are given an envelope containing a small sum of money, which you are asked to spend within twenty-four hours. The experimenter can assign you to one of two conditions: she can require that you spend the money on yourself (paying a bill or buying yourself a treat), or she can require that you spend the money on others (buying a present for someone or donating the money to charity). Which condition do you suppose would bring the greatest happiness: spending the windfall on yourself or on someone else?

If you are like the typical participant in an experiment of this kind, conducted by Dunn et al. (2008), you will expect that spending money on yourself brings greater happiness. However, the experimenters found that subjects in the prosocial spending condition reported greater happiness after spending their windfall than did those in the personal spending condition. This was not an isolated result. Dunn et al. also conducted a longitudinal study of sixteen employees at a Boston-based company who received a profit-sharing bonus, finding that those who devoted more of their bonus to prosocial spending experienced greater happiness as a result of spending their windfall; a cross-sectional study of a representative sample of Americans also found greater prosocial spending correlated with significantly greater happiness, while personal spending turned out to be unrelated to happiness. Similarly Aknin et al. (2010) examined survey data from 136 countries gathered by the Gallup Organization, to see whether ratings of subjective well-being were positively correlated with donating to charity. Controlling for household income, it was found that in 122 of the 136 countries there is a positive correlation between subjective well-being and answering "Yes" to the question "Have you donated money to charity in the last month?" The authors found that, on average, "donating to charity has a similar relationship to SWB [subjective well-being] as a doubling of household income" (638).

Of course we have to be careful when trying to extrapolate from these results. The Gallup data did not assess the amount given to charity and are correlational. The sums involved in the experiment are insignificant in comparison to donating 10 percent of one's income. The experiment also involved windfall gains: nobody was asked to spend money that they had already planned to spend for their own purposes. And the experimenters did not distinguish between prosocial spenders who spent money on friends and family and those who donated their money to charity. In spite of such limitations, these results lend some credence to the idea that giving money to charity can be a source of life satisfaction that outweighs whatever minor frustrations we might experience from having less money to spend for our own purposes. Anecdotally this is borne out in the experience of the three authors of this chapter.

Although it is difficult to draw any hard and fast conclusions from the foregoing discussion, we seem to have uncovered evidence that complying with the *Very Weak Principle of Sacrifice* will involve no great sacrifice on our behalf and certainly less than we initially expected. If the money we donate is as good from the perspective of our self-interest as money that's straightforwardly forgone, we should at worst expect only a minor decrease in our subjective well-being, on the order of a loss of one-tenth of a point on a ten-point scale. But we've also seen evidence suggesting that charitable giving may bring benefits to us, that these benefits might be greater than we anticipate and greater than those that could be achieved by spending money on ourselves. It is unclear whether donating 10 percent of our income would actually decrease our subjective well-being to any extent. Even if it does, the loss of happiness is far too small to vindicate the claim that requiring people to give this much is particularly demanding.

THE BENEFITS TO OTHERS ARE LARGER THAN YOU THINK

We can assess how much of a comparative benefit we provide to the poor by considering a number of different metrics: (1) the relationship between income and happiness, (2) the cost per life year, and (3) the cost per life saved.

First, let's look at income and happiness. Many of the world's people live in conditions of extreme poverty. They face material conditions that are almost unknown in rich countries, such as the United States and Australia, or in Western Europe. While there is poverty in these rich countries, it is of a very different sort. We are familiar with *relative poverty,* where some people have comparatively less than *others,* which leads to social exclusion, crime, and many other problems. This is a serious concern for these countries, but it is important to distinguish it from what concerns us in this context, which is *absolute poverty.* Absolute poverty is not defined in terms of how much worse off one person is compared to another, but by how little one person has compared to a standard for being able to afford the basic necessities of life.

To put things into perspective, consider that of the seven billion people in the world today:

702.1 million live on less than USD 1.90 per day (World Bank 2015)
663 million lack clean drinking water (World Health Organization and UNICEF 2015)
793 million people are undernourished (Food and Agriculture Organization 2015)
100 million children don't complete primary schooling (UNESCO 2015)
781 million adults cannot read or write (UNESCO 2014)
3 million children will die each year from preventable diseases (UNICEF 2015)

What is important for the present discussion is just that there are a great many people living in extreme poverty, while there are significant opportunities for the more affluent to help alleviate some of their suffering, or to lift some of them out of poverty entirely.

Now consider the world income distribution. Imagine lining up everyone in the world in order of their annual income. There are a couple of technical adjustments that would be required to allow proper comparisons. A dollar goes further in poorer countries, but we can adjust the incomes to take this into account, putting them in *purchasing power parity* terms. There is also a challenge concerning how to account for children, who often have no income. We shall therefore follow one of the typical conventions of dividing up a household's income evenly among its members. Taking these adjustments into account, if you lined everyone up in order of income, you would see the distribution of income depicted in Figure 6.1.

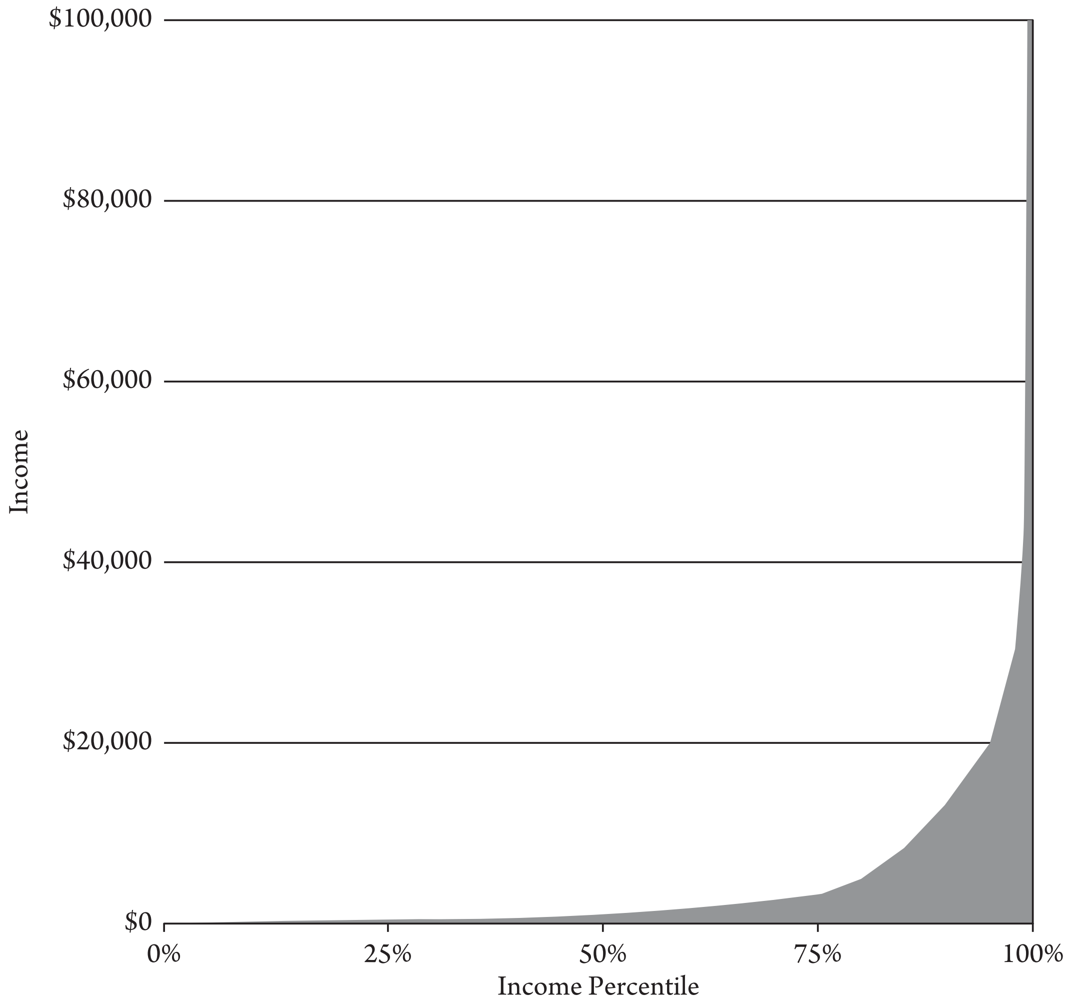

Figure 6.1. Global distribution of income. *Source: MacAskill (2015, 18).*

A perfectly even distribution would appear as a horizontal line on the chart. The actual distribution though, is nothing like this; it is all piled up at the right end of the chart, in the hands of the richest people.

Most people in rich countries do not think of themselves as truly rich. They compare themselves to the people in their social circles and find that they are a little richer or a little poorer. However, on a world scale they are often very rich. For example, a single person in the United States who earned just USD 30,000 per year would be in the richest 2 percent of the world's population and would earn twenty-five times as much as the typical person in the world. Even the current U.S. federal minimum wage of USD 7.25 (USD 14,500 per year) would be enough to leave a single person in the richest 10 percent of the world's population.

Figure 6.1 is one of the most important summaries of the world today. It shows just how unequal the world is; it explains to us our own position in this distribution; and it shows just how little we need each extra dollar compared to the world's poorest people.

Indeed the fact that we've found ourselves at the top of the global income distribution provides us with a tremendous opportunity to make a difference. Because we are comparatively so rich, the amount by which we can benefit others is vastly greater than the amount by which we can benefit ourselves. We can therefore do a huge amount of good at relatively little cost.

Just how much good should we expect to be able to do? Let's assume that by donating to an effective charity we make ourselves a dollar poorer and thereby make a poor person in Africa living in extreme poverty a dollar richer. (This assumption is at least realistic for donations to charities that make direct cash transfers; if you donate USD 1 to GiveDirectly, someone in Kenya or Uganda will receive about USD 0.90.) How much greater a benefit would that dollar provide for the poor African than it would provide for ourselves?

To answer this we can return to economics research on income and well-being. In order to work out the relationship between level of income and level of subjective well-being, economists have conducted large-scale surveys of income levels and the subjective well-being of people in each of them. Their results are given in Figure 6.2, which shows the relationship between income and subjective well-being both within a country and across countries.

The vertical axis of Figure 6.2 represents self-reported life satisfaction. Those interviewed had to say how satisfied they were with their lives on a scale from 0 to 10. Rating yourself at 10 means you consider yourself maximally happy: you think that, realistically,

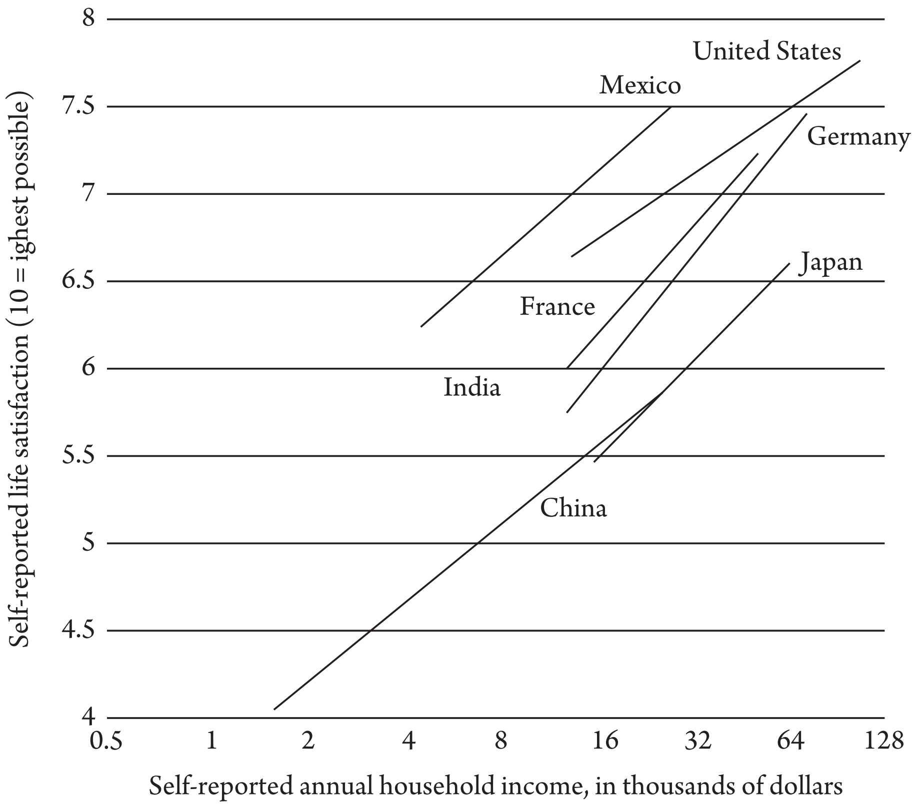

Figure 6.2. Life satisfaction and income. *Source: Stevenson and Wolfers (2013).*

life couldn't get any better. Rating yourself at 0 means you consider yourself maximally unhappy: you think that, realistically, life couldn't get any worse. Most people fall in the middle of this range. The horizontal axis represents annual income.

What's interesting about this graph is that a doubling of income will always increase reported subjective well-being by the same amount. For someone earning USD 1,000 per year, a USD 1,000 pay rise generates the same increase in happiness as does a USD 2,000 pay rise for someone earning USD 2,000 per year, or a USD 80,000 pay rise for someone already earning USD 80,000 per year. And so on.

The economic studies suggest that the benefit you get from having your salary doubled is the same as the benefit an extremely poor person from Somalia gets from having his or her salary doubled. If you earn the median U.S. wage of USD 28,850 per year (Social Security Administration 2014), the benefit you'd get from an additional USD 28,850 in income is the same as the benefit a poor farmer from Somalia would get from an additional USD 133—the nominal average GDP per capita (UNdata 2015).

This gives us a good reason for thinking that the same amount of money can benefit the very poorest people in the world *much* more that it can benefit typical citizens of the United States. If you earn as much as the typical American worker, then you are more than two hundred times as rich as the very poorest people in the world. If you earn USD 28,850 and reduce your income by 10 percent, you can increase the income of 216 people by 10 percent. You will therefore provide two hundred times the benefit to others as you would provide to yourself by spending that money self-interestedly.

A second way of estimating the relative benefit one can provide to oneself versus to others is to look at the cost in different countries of providing one quality-adjusted life-year (QALY), which represents the benefit of giving one person one year of very healthy life. Health economists have estimated the cost of providing one QALY by funding different sorts of health programs or treatments, in order to advise governments on how they can most effectively use their limited resources.

In the United Kingdom the marginal cost to provide one QALY is USD 42,000 (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence 2014, sect. 7.7.). No U.S. agency gives an explicit figure, but Braithwaite et al. (2008) have estimated the societal willingness to pay for health care in the United States at between USD 183,000 and USD 264,000 per life-year. In turn Tengs et al. (1995) analyzed five hundred life-saving interventions in the United States and found that the median intervention costs USD 42,000 per life-year saved.

By donating to the most effective charities, in contrast, one can provide one QALY for as little as USD 100 in poorer countries (GiveWell 2015). Thus for the price we in rich countries are prepared to pay for a single year of healthy life, we could instead provide hundreds of years of healthy life to people in the poorest countries. As with the relationship between income and happiness, the benefit our money could provide for us compared to how much it could provide those in poverty differs by more than two orders of magnitude.

A third way of comparing the benefit one can provide for oneself versus others is to look at the cost to save a life in different countries. Government departments in the United States will pay for infrastructure to improve safety if doing so costs less than about USD 7 million per life saved; the precise figures are USD 9.1 million for the Environmental Protection Agency, USD 7.9 million for the Food and Drug Administration, and USD 6 million for the Department of Transportation.

In contrast, in poor countries, it costs only USD 2,800 to prevent the loss of a life (GiveWell 2015). Here the discrepancy in benefit is even greater: the cost of preventing the loss of a life overseas is less than a thousand times the cost the United States is willing to incur to save the life of an American.

Given these facts, it is hard to escape the conclusion that donating 10 percent of one's income is not overly demanding. On the one hand, donating 10 percent will result in at most a very small decrease in one's well-being, and may even improve one's life. On the other hand, such a donation will provide enormous benefits to others, at least one hundred times as much benefit as one could provide to oneself, and plausibly much more. Donating 10 percent is much more than most people do. But morality requires at least this much.

DIFFERENT THEORIES OF WELL-BEING

So far we have relied on economists' measures of well-being. But one might question the relevance of these measures to philosophical issues; presumably such measures rely on assumptions about the nature of well-being, which might be philosophically controversial. In this section we consider two objections.

First, we have looked at two primary measures of well-being: whole life evaluations (as measured by surveys of life satisfaction) and experiential sampling. These two different metrics naturally measure two different conceptions of well-being. The whole life evaluation metric, insofar as it asks people their all-things-considered views on how their life is going, is a natural measure of well-being if one endorses a preference-satisfaction account of well-being. The experiential sampling metric, which takes the integral over time of how good one is feeling at a particular moment, seems to be a natural measure of well-being if one endorses a hedonistic account of well-being. We can make our argument perfectly well with either metric, so our argument should satisfy both preference-satisfactionists and hedonists.

Things are a little more complicated with respect to objective list theorists. Indeed it's difficult to make an argument to them directly because there are many possible items on the list of objective goods and many possible ways in which one could propose that cardinal comparisons in objective conceptions of well-being should be made between different people. But we believe that our argument should be compelling even to objective theorists.

All plausible objective theorists would consider positive conscious states as one of the objective goods.[1] And, as we have seen, experiential sampling seems to be a natural measure of positive conscious states. So even if we can't definitively say that the benefits to the extreme poor of donating 10 percent are hundreds of times as great as the costs to oneself of donating 10 percent, we can say that *with respect to one of the objective goods*, this is true.

Similarly most or all objective theories would count health as one of the objective goods. And, again, we saw that the discrepancy in health benefit that can be gained with a given amount of money varies by a factor of over 1,000, depending on whether one is trying to benefit oneself or trying to benefit the extreme poor. Given, therefore, that we have grounds for supposing there to be such a difference in impact on well-being for the two objective goods for which there are good measures available, it's reasonable to suppose that we would reach a similar conclusion if we had measures available of the other objective goods.

Perhaps one could reject our conclusion if one believed that there were certain "higher" goods—such as enjoyment of great art or engaging in philosophy—that lexically dominate the benefits we can provide for others by donating to charity and that are accessible only to those of a given income level. In that case, donating a proportion of one's income would reduce one's ability to enjoy higher goods, merely in exchange for others to enjoy lower goods. This objection, however, does not trouble us, because we do not think that a view of well-being that has such radically anti-egalitarian implications is one that anyone should endorse.

A second objection concerns *adaptive preferences*, i.e., preferences that are formed merely because of limitations on the set of available options for the agent (Bruckner 2009). One might reasonably think that the satisfaction of adaptive preferences do not make a person better off. For example, a slave may come to desire that she be enslaved because forming such a desire is the best way of dealing with a terrible situation. We could raise a similar issue with respect to hedonic states. Even if the slave finds her situation pleasant (as a result of forming a desire to be enslaved), we intuitively might wish to deny that such "adaptive experiences" make her life better.

One might worry that the phenomenon of adaptive preferences infects the empirical research we have surveyed. Once one is sufficiently rich, being able to buy fewer rather than more material goods makes very little difference to one's reported well-being. But this is, in part, because we adapt to our circumstances via rationalization and self-affirmation (Wilson and Gilbert 2005).

However, we believe that there are good reasons not to be troubled by this objection. First, failure to predict adaptation only partly explains why we overestimate the impact of income on our well-being. As well as adaptation, psychologists suggest that another part of the explanation is the *focusing illusion* (Wilson and Gilbert 2005). If someone who is not disabled is asked to consider what life would be like with a disability, his mind is immediately drawn to those aspects of life that would be negatively impacted by this condition. The particular salience of these considerations gives them a disproportionate place in the picture he forms of life with a disability: he forgets to take due account of the many other things that contribute to personal well-being but which are not affected by disability. We see the outcome that we are thinking about as mattering more to our happiness simply because we are focusing on it at the time.

Second, the objector must argue not only that people's preferences are adaptive, but that they are *objectionably* adaptive. For example, if your long-term partner breaks up with you, you may come to see that former partner in a different light: his flaws might become more salient; his positive characteristics might come to seem less important. This is a natural part of coping with loss, and, it seems to us, is genuinely relevant to assessing someone's well-being. All other things being equal, someone who did not have such psychological coping mechanisms would be made worse off by a romantic breakup than someone who does have such mechanisms.

Third, as previously noted, when we look at more objective measures of well-being, such as risks of death, we get even stronger conclusions in terms of the ratio between how much we can benefit ourselves and how much we can benefit others. But such objective measures of well-being are not contaminated by adaptive preferences.

Fourth, and most important, if we are concerned with the phenomenon of adaptive preferences, we must be concerned with it in relation *both* to the preferences of those in rich countries and those in poor countries because our argument concerns the *ratio* between benefits that one can provide to oneself and benefits that one can provide to others. If we worry that the comparatively poor in rich countries overestimate their own well-being because of adaptive preferences, we must worry to a far greater degree that the very poor overestimate their own well-being because of adaptive preferences. Indeed in the literature on adaptive preferences, it is the adaptive preferences of the indigent or oppressed that have typically been taken to be the most objectionable as part of a theory of well-being (Nussbaum 2001). This makes sense because it is the very poorest who have by far the largest constraints on the options available to them. Given this, rejecting the satisfaction of adaptive preferences as contributing to a person's well-being will only make our argument stronger.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we considered the following principle:

> *Very Weak Principle of Sacrifice*: Most middle-class members of affluent countries ought, morally, to use at least 10 percent of their income to effectively improve the lives of others.

We argued that, unlike Singer's two proposed principles of sacrifice, there is not even a pro tanto case that the *Very Weak Principle of Sacrifice* is too demanding, because this principle is not demanding at all. Following this principle would have small or no costs to one's well-being but would result in very large benefits for some of the poorest people in the world.

NOTE

1. As Parfit (1984, 4) writes, "On all theories, happiness and pleasure are at least part of what makes our lives go better for us, and misery and pain are at least part of what makes our lives go worse. These claims would be made by any plausible Objective List Theory. . . . On all theories, the Hedonistic Theory is at least part of the truth."

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