

CHAPTER 10

KINDNESS TO
STRANGERS

Killing the Mandarin

In Balzac's *Père Goriot*, there's a scene in which Eugène Rastignac, a young man tormented by social ambitions he lacks the means to support, is speaking to a medical-student friend about a question he attributes (wrongly, as it happens) to Rousseau:

"Do you recall the passage where he asks the reader what he'd do if he could make himself rich by killing an old mandarin in China merely by willing it, without budging from Paris?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Bah! I'm on my thirty-third mandarin."

"Don't make a joke of it. Really, if it were proved to you that

the thing was possible and that a nod of your head would be enough, would you do it?"¹

Rastignac's question is splendidly philosophical. Who but a philosopher would place magical murder in one pan of the scales and a million gold louis in the other? And, in fact, though Rousseau doesn't seem to have posed this question, Balzac might have been inspired by a passage from another eminent philosopher, the Scotsman Adam Smith. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), he writes memorably about the limits of the moral imagination. Smith's argument begins with an imagined earthquake swallowing up "the great empire of China." Surely a "man of humanity in Europe" would be moved to sorrow by news of the event and reflect on its melancholy meaning, perhaps even on its effects on world trade. Still, Smith says, once he had had these feelings and completed these reflections, he would return, untroubled, to his ordinary life. "The most frivolous disaster which could befall himself would occasion a more real disturbance," Smith wrote, and he went on,

If he was to lose his little finger to-morrow, he would not sleep to-night; but, provided he never saw them, he will snore with the most profound security over the ruin of a hundred millions of his brethren. . . . To prevent, therefore, this paltry misfortune to himself, would a man of humanity be willing to sacrifice the lives of a hundred millions of his brethren, provided he had never seen them? Human nature startles with horror at the thought, and the world, in its greatest depravity and corruption, never produced such a villain as could be capable of entertaining it. But what makes this difference?

How is it, he wonders, that our "passive feelings" can be so selfish while our "active principles" are often so generous? "It is not the soft

power of humanity, it is not that feeble spark of benevolence which Nature has lighted up in the human heart, that is thus capable of counteracting the strongest impulses of self-love," he concludes. "It is a stronger power, a more forcible motive, which exerts itself upon such occasions. It is reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbitrator of our conduct."²

Smith asks whether we would contemplate doing a great wrong for a small benefit; Rastignac has us wondering whether we would do a lesser wrong for a very great benefit. In shifting the example, Balzac has moved from an exploration of moral psychology, which was Smith's aim, to a question of basic morality. We'll do well to keep both in mind. If we were to apportion our efforts to the strength of our feelings, we would sacrifice a hundred millions to save our little finger (Smith's inference); and if we would do that (this is Rastignac's corollary), we would surely sacrifice a single faraway life to gain a great fortune. We know mandarins die everyday: what grasp does that knowledge have on our feelings? That the test case is China presupposes that, for those nearby, reason might not be necessary. A Scotsman would presumably respond to destruction of his fellow Scots not with reason but with passion. He doesn't need reason. It is his ox that is being goled.

If you start with this thought, you will naturally ask whether cosmopolitan talk of what we owe to strangers is likely to remain a sonorous abstraction. "Cosmopolitanism as an ethical commitment strains to extend our concrete realities to include some distant and generalized 'others' who, we are told, are our global neighbours," Robert Sibley has written. "The idea might give you the warm-and-fuzzies, but it's nothing for which you'd be willing to go to war."³ What's presupposed here is that cosmopolitan moral judgment requires us to feel about everyone in the world what we feel about our literal neighbors (a strength of feeling that is per-

haps exaggerated by the suggestion that for them, at least, we would risk our lives). We can't be intimate with billions; ergo, we can't make the cosmopolitan judgment. But, as Adam Smith saw, to say that we have obligations to strangers isn't to demand that they have the same grip on our sympathies as our nearest and dearest. We'd better start with the recognition that they don't.

Taking Smith's answer seriously, though, requires that our cosmopolitanism should not make impossible psychological demands. Robert Sibley's skepticism is a natural response, I think, to some of the demands that moral cosmopolitans have recently made. So how much do we really owe to strangers?

The Shallow Pond

Here's one answer. "To behave in a way that's not seriously wrong, a well-off person, like you and me, must contribute to vitally effective groups, like OXFAM and UNICEF, most of the money and property she now has, and most of what comes her way for the foreseeable future": that's what the philosopher Peter Unger has argued, in a book provocatively entitled *Living High and Letting Die*.⁴

I've cut to the chase. But philosophers have defended such a view in considerable detail. One of Unger's points of departure is a famous analogy previously offered by the philosopher Peter Singer. "If I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out," Singer wrote. "This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing."⁵ And Unger has developed various kindred cases to focus our intuitions. Suppose you've spent a great deal of your limited time and means in restoring a vintage Mercedes sedan to mint condition, with partic-

ular attention to the leather upholstery, and you pass by a hiker with a badly injured foot. Though the injury isn't life threatening, he'll lose his foot if you don't take him to the hospital. There's nobody else around. Wouldn't you do it, even though the bleeding from his wound would ruin the leather seat? Then suppose you received an envelope from UNICEF asking for a donation for thirty children in a foreign land; if you don't send a hundred dollars, they will die. Tossing the envelope in the trash is, in a similar way, immoral.

But, of course, if that's true for the first hundred dollars you could give, it's true for the next hundred dollars you could give. That's why Unger can conclude that "it's seriously wrong not to send to the likes of UNICEF and OXFAM, about as promptly as possible, nearly all your worldly wealth."⁶ You'd have to liquidate your assets and empty your coffers until you could be sure that your losing a hundred dollars was worse than thirty kids' dying. Robert Sibley is at the back of the room, rightly shaking his head in disbelief. What has gone wrong?

Let me make, first, a small but important point. All this talk of mandarins and foreign children can make it seem that Unger's paradox is a special problem for cosmopolitans. It is not. Forget the starving children of Africa and Asia, if you can. Wherever you live in the West, there are children's lives to be saved in your own country. There are fewer of them, and saving each of them will cost more: but should your response to the drowning child depend on the cost of your suit? There are also—need I mention?—adults you wouldn't leave to die in a puddle either. You could give some of them longer lives, lives they want, by paying their medical bills. If you live in a metropolitan area, there are some close by; they are your neighbors. Should you give away most of your money to do so? Philosophers like Unger and Singer would say yes . . . or at least they would if they didn't think the needs of the starving children elsewhere were more urgent. The problem with the argument

isn't that it says we have incredible obligations to foreigners; the problem is that it claims we have incredible obligations. Whatever has gone wrong, you can't blame it on us cosmopolitans.

How does Unger get us from where we are to where he wants us to be? By starting with that drowning child. No decent person will want to conclude that not muddying my trousers justifies letting a child drown, not even if my suit was hand-tailored in mohair in Savile Row. But to go anywhere with this judgment about a particular case, you have to draw a moral; and clearly how far you can get will depend on exactly which moral you draw. Unger's most extreme statements require both drawing a very general principle and making some strong empirical assumptions. I think that both the principle and the assumptions are wrong.

Here's a principle that connects the drowning child to the conclusions I quoted above.

If you can prevent something bad from happening at the cost of something less bad, you ought to do it.

There seems, at first, no doubt that this principle—which, since it appears to motivate some of Peter Singer's arguments, I'll call the Singer principle—has the consequence that you should save the drowning child.⁷ The child's drowning is bad; getting your suit dirty is much less bad. All this I grant. But does our moral response to the drowning child really entail giving away all our worldly wealth?

The Singer principle requires you to prevent bad things from happening if the cost is something less awful. Upon reflection, however, it's not so clear that the principle even gets the drowning case right. Saving the child may be preventing something bad; but *not* saving the child might, for all we know, prevent something worse. After all, shouldn't I be busy about saving those hundreds of thousands of starving children? And wouldn't selling my suit raise a few hun-

dred dollars? And wouldn't ruining it mean I couldn't raise those dollars? The principle says that, if this kid right here has to drown for me to save my suit for sale so I can save, say, ninety other children, so be it; though it also leaves me free to let the ninety die, if I can find something worse to prevent. As for that hiker with the bleeding foot, he's plainly out of luck: why hurt the sedan's resale value, given all the good in the world we could do with the money? The seeming moderation of the principle hides a powerful claim: it's really a way of saying you should do the most you can to minimize the amount of badness in the world. I have no idea how I would do that. But there's no reason to think it involves bankrupting myself to send a large check to UNICEF. There's bound to be at least one thing I can do with the money that would do more good. The problem would be working out what that was.

The larger point, of course, is that our conviction that we should save the drowning child doesn't by itself tell us *why* we should do so. I have already argued that our moral intuitions are often more secure than the principles we appeal to in explaining them. There are countless principles that would get you to save the drowning child without justifying your own immiseration. Here's one:

If you are the person in the best position to prevent something really awful, and it won't cost you much to do so, do it.

Now this principle—which I am inclined, for the moment, to think may be right—simply doesn't have the radical consequences of the Singer principle. I'm not especially well placed to save the children that UNICEF has told me about. And even if I were, giving away most of my means would radically reduce my quality of life. Perhaps this principle suggests that Bill Gates should give millions to save poor children from dying around the world. But, come to think of it, he does that already.

This principle—I'll call it the emergency principle—is a low-level one that I think is pretty plausible. I wouldn't be surprised, though, if some philosopher came up with a case where the emergency principle gave what I thought was the wrong answer. That's because figuring out moral principles, as an idle glance at the history of moral philosophy will show you, is *hard*. I have talked often in this book about values, in part because I think it is easier to identify values than to identify exceptionless principles. One reason that life is full of hard decisions is precisely that it's not easy to identify single principles, like the Singer principle, that aim to tell you what to do. (Even the Singer principle tells you what to do only if you can reduce all values to their contributions to the badness in the world, which is something I seriously doubt.) Another reason is that it's often unclear what the effects will be of what we do.

On the other hand, many decisions *aren't* so hard, because some of our firmest moral knowledge is about particular cases. I have no doubt at all that I should save the drowning child and ruin my suit. (Oddly, American states differ as to whether this requirement is a legal one.) There are many arguments that I might make in defense of this view, especially to someone who was seriously convinced that he was free to let the child drown. But I am less certain of most of those arguments than I am that I should save the child.

Basic Needs

The emergency principle may or may not be sound, but it tells me nothing about what I should do when UNICEF sends me a request for money. I think that a cosmopolitan who believes that every human being matters cannot be satisfied with that. So let's start with the sort of core moral ideas increasingly articulated in our

conception of basic human rights.⁸ People have needs—health, food, shelter, education—that must be met if they are to lead decent lives. There are certain options that they ought to have: to seek sexual satisfaction with consenting partners; to have children if they wish to; to move from place to place; to express and share ideas; to help manage their societies; to exercise their imaginations. (These are options. People should also be free not to exercise them.) And there are certain obstacles to a good life that ought not to be imposed upon them: needless pain, unwarranted consent, the mutilation of their bodies. To recognize that everybody is entitled, where possible, to have their basic needs met, to exercise certain human capabilities, and to be protected from certain harms, is not yet to say how all these things are to be assured. But if you accept that these basic needs ought to be met, what obligations have you incurred? I want to offer some constraints on an acceptable answer.

First, the primary mechanism for ensuring these entitlements remains the nation-state. There are a few political cosmopolitans who say they want a world government. But the cosmopolitanism I am defending prizes a variety of political arrangements, provided, of course, each state grants every individual what he or she deserves. A global state would have at least three obvious problems. It could easily accumulate uncontrollable power, which it might use to do great harm; it would often be unresponsive to local needs; and it would almost certainly reduce the variety of institutional experimentation from which all of us can learn. Accepting the nation-state means accepting that we have a special responsibility for the life and the justice of our own; but we still have to play our part in ensuring that all states respect the rights and meet the needs of their citizens. If they cannot, then all of us—through our nations, if they will do it, and in spite of them, if they won't—share the collective obligation to change them; and if the reason they fail their

citizens is that they lack resources, providing resources can be part of that collective obligation. That is an equally fundamental cosmopolitan commitment.

But, second, our obligation is not to carry the whole burden alone. Each of us should do our fair share; but we cannot be required to do more. This is a constraint, however inchoate, that the Shallow Pond theorists do not respect. The Singer principle just doesn't begin to capture the subtlety of our actual moral thought. A different philosopher's story, this one offered by Richard W. Miller, makes the point. An adult is plummeting from a tenth-story window, and you, on the sidewalk below, know that you can save that person's life by cushioning his fall. If you did so, however, you would very likely suffer broken bones, which would heal, perhaps painfully and imperfectly, over a period of months. (Suppose you know all this because you're an orthopedic surgeon.) To Miller it's clear that you can do your "fair share in making the world a better place while turning down this chance for world-improvement."⁴⁹ Since the death you failed to prevent is worse than a few months of suffering, the Singer principle, of course, says otherwise. Our ordinary moral thinking makes distinctions the principle doesn't capture.

Now, I agree that it's not easy to specify what our fair share might be, and especially how it might be affected by the derelictions of others. Suppose we had a plan for guaranteeing everyone his or her basic entitlements. Let's call the share that I owe—suppose it would be paid as a development tax—my basic obligation. Even if we could get everyone to agree on the virtues of the plan; and even if we could determine how each of us, depending on our resources, should contribute his or her fair share, we can be pretty confident that some people would not give their fair share. That means there would still be some unmet entitlements. What is the obligation of those who have already met their basic obligation? Is it enough simply to say, "I know there are unmet entitlements, but I have done my part"? After all, the unmet entitlements are still unmet, and they're still entitlements.

Third, whatever our basic obligations, they must be consistent with our being, as I said at the beginning, partial to those closest to us: to our families, our friends, our nations; to the many groups that call upon us through our identities, chosen and unchosen; and, of course, to ourselves. Whatever my basic obligations are to the poor far away, they cannot be enough, I believe, to trump my concerns for my family, my friends, my country; nor can an argument that every life matters require me to be indifferent to the fact that one of those lives is mine. This constraint is another that the Shallow Pond theorists are indifferent toward. They think that it is so important to avoid the bad things in other lives that we should be willing to accept for ourselves, our families and friends, lives that are barely worth living. This third constraint interacts, I think, with the worry that I expressed about the second. For if so many people in the world are not doing their share—and they clearly are not—it seems to me I cannot be required to derail my life to take up the slack.

Let me add one final, general constraint. Any plausible answer to the question of what we owe to others will have to take account of many values; no sensible story of our obligations to strangers can ignore the diversity of the things that matter in human life. Cosmopolitans, more than anyone else, know this. Imagine a drab totalitarian regime with excellent prenatal healthcare. After a "velvet revolution," a vibrant democracy emerges and freedom reigns. But perhaps because the health care system is a little wobblier (or perhaps because some pregnant mothers exercise their newly won right to smoke and drink), the rates of infant mortality are a little higher. Most people would still plump for the velvet revolution. We think the death of a child is a very bad thing; but clearly we don't think it's the only thing that matters. This is part of why the child in the pond isn't adequate to the real complexity of our thinking.

What would the world look like if people always spent their money to alleviate diarrhea in the Third World and never on a ticket to the opera (or a donation to a local theater company, gallery, symphony orchestra, library, or what have you)? Well, it would probably be a flat and dreary place. You do not need to say—as Unger would invite you to—that the lives of the children you could have saved were just worth less than your evening at the ballet. That answer presupposes that there is really only one thing that matters: that all values are measurable in a single thin currency of goodness and badness. It was terribly wrong that slaves were worked to death building the pyramids—or, for that matter, in building the United States—but it is not therefore terrible that those monuments, or this nation, exist. Not all values have a single measure. If the founders of this nation had dealt only with the most urgent moral problem facing them—and let us suppose that it was, indeed, slavery—they would almost certainly not have set in motion the slow march of political, cultural, and moral progress, with its salaries and its retreats, that Americans justly take pride in. Would you really want to live in a world in which the only thing anyone had ever cared about was saving lives?

Decisions, Decisions

I realize that, to some, what I have just said is shocking. I have defended going to the opera when children are dying, children who could be saved with the price of admission. It is, perhaps, almost as counterintuitive to say this as it is to say, with Unger, that we should sacrifice nearly everything else we value to save the poor. So remember, when you go to the opera, others are spending money, too; money that could save the same children. You have no special

relationship to their deaths, as you would if you ignored the emergency principle. Nor is this like willing the mandarin to death. You are not killing anyone by going to the opera. Part of the strategy of Unger's argument is to persuade us that not intervening to save someone because we have something else worth doing is morally equivalent to killing him in the name of those other values. We should resist the equation.

But the Shallow Pond arguments raise more empirical concerns, to which, as I promised, I now return. Consider the factual claim that UNICEF can save the lives of thirty children for \$100. What does this mean? It doesn't, of course, mean that you can keep them alive forever. Part of the reason UNICEF or OXFAM—both well-run organizations full of well-intentioned people doing much good—can keep sending those letters is that they have to save the same children over and over again. You send the check. Even if, *per impossible*, your money could be traced to a particular village in Bangladesh, rehydrating thirty particular children who would otherwise have died of their diarrhea, you are not thereby making a serious contribution to the real improvement of their life chances. Death isn't the only thing that matters. What matters is decent lives. And if what you save them for is just another month or another year or another decade of horrible suffering, have you really made the best use of your money? Indeed, have you really made the world less bad?

This isn't to criticize the particular organizations that Unger has chosen to celebrate. I am confident that they, and organizations like them, are doing much genuine long-term good. But responding to the crisis of a child dying because her frail body cannot absorb fluids faster than they pour out of her is not really saving her, if tomorrow she will eat the same poor food, drink the same infected water, and live in a country with the same incompetent government; if the government's economic policies continue to block

real development for her family and her community; if her country is still trapped in poverty in part because our government has imposed tariffs on some of their exports to protect American manufacturers with a well-organized lobbying group in Washington, while the European Union saves jobs for its people by placing quotas on the importation of others.

A genuinely cosmopolitan response begins with caring to try to understand *why* that child is dying. Cosmopolitanism is about intelligence and curiosity as well as engagement. It requires knowing that policies that I might have supported because they protect jobs in my state or region are part of the answer. It involves seeing not just a suffering body but a wasted human life.

Once you start thinking about the facts—which play a large role in Singer's arguments, but rather little in Unger's—the dilemmas about intervention proliferate. There are, to begin with, problems of timing. If Bill Gates had followed Peter Unger's advice when he was in his twenties, he wouldn't have been in a position to give billions to good causes today. He didn't know that he'd be a billionaire, of course. (He thought he would be, no doubt, that's the way with entrepreneurs; but he didn't *know*.) One of the things wealth is good for is generating more wealth. I can probably do more good later by saving and investing now. Peter Singer would tell me that, if that's my argument, I should be saving and investing more. But that would mean less expenditure now; fewer people—some of them in the poorest countries of the world—would be earning dollars by making the goods and providing the services I pay for. Indeed, if all Americans or Europeans stopped buying consumer goods, the result would almost certainly be a collapse of the global economy. Government income from taxation would fall, and government development assistance would fall with it. Given the role of consumption in driving the American economy, creating the wealth that the U.S. government taxes in order to pay, among

other things, for development assistance, you'd have to be a pretty good economist to figure out whether Singer was right.

Once you take seriously the real challenges posed by global poverty, you have to come to grips with hard problems about how money is best spent. Given the results, most development economists would agree that much of the trillion dollars in foreign aid between 1950 and 1995 wasn't well spent. After all, many of the poorest countries in the world have seen incomes *fall* over that period.¹⁰ That's not a reason for giving up, though. It's a reason for trying to understand what went wrong and what went right—especially in the places, like Botswana, where aid really helped—and reapplying ourselves to the task.

There are questions to do with technological advances that may yet come. Take AIDS in Africa. Should we invest heavily in the distribution of antiretrovirals to extend the lives of those currently living with HIV/AIDS? Or should the priority be vaccine research, in the hopes of preventing or mitigating future infections? We'll want to invest in health care infrastructure, clean water, education, water, clinics, and roads to get to them—but which should get priority? And if we do build the roads, which will help get the nurses and the doctors to the clinics, will they have the resources, not just the money but the people with the knowledge, to maintain them? Part of what it means for an economy to be, as we used to say, underdeveloped is that there are limits on how fast it can absorb capital.

In recent years, social scientists have increasingly recognized that a crucial constraint on development is weak governance and poor institutions. The Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen famously showed that, while famine can be triggered by nature—a drought, a plague of locusts—it doesn't occur in democracies. According to a recent study by the economists Craig Burnside and David Dollar, foreign assistance helped development and reduced poverty—but only in countries with decent policies.¹¹ Institutions

of land tenure, which are often intertwined with cultural assumptions that may be hard to change, are sometimes at the root of rural poverty. In Asante, land is held by local chiefs "in trust" for the people. To fertilize, sow, and cultivate my land, I may need to borrow. But if I farm on the land at the chief's discretion, how can I secure a debt? Clear title may require reform of land law, establishing reliable land registers and making the courts more efficient and less corrupt. I know, gentle reader, that you will pay to send food to starving children. Will you pay to promote reform in the design and execution of the land policies that help keep their families poor?

I am not arguing—I do not believe—that we should throw up our hands in despair. Nor do I think that because past aid has not raised the standard of living in much of Africa, we should abandon attempts to help. We are not in danger of being excessively generous; indeed, most of us are in no danger of meeting what I called our basic obligation. But what's wanted, as Adam Smith would have anticipated, is the exercise of reason, not just explosions of feeling. Charitable giving in the wake of the tsunami of Christmas 2004 was remarkable and heartening; but two million people die each year of malaria; 240,000 a month die of AIDS; 136,000 of diarrhea.¹² And practical-minded economists, like Jeffrey Sachs, starting with real data, have made arguments that really concerted and well-orchestrated efforts to alleviate poverty in the Third World have a good shot at success. They rebut the usual defeatist assumptions. Too many people, for example, are reflex Malthusians, worried that saving hungry children can only result in more hungry adults. But that depends on how you do it. If you save children by creating opportunities for their parents and so raising overall affluence, then, history affirms, fertility rates ultimately decline. On the other hand, if you "save" the children by dumping free grain into the local economy and putting the local farmers out of business—who can compete with free?—you may, indeed, be doing more harm than good.

U.S. government foreign aid was a little over \$16 billion in 2003; American private assistance to low-income countries was at least \$6.3 billion in the same year.¹³ The American development assistance budget is the largest in the world. As a percentage of GDP, though, it is at the bottom of the affluent donor nations. Many poor countries pay more in debt servicing to the United States than they receive in assistance; and, in turn, much of that assistance merely takes the form of debt relief. Only a fraction of American foreign assistance is specifically targeted at helping the extremely poor. These numbers, however, obscure other things, both for better and for worse, that America does. For example, on the debit side, U.S. tariffs cost the tsunami-affected countries more in 2004—about \$1.8 billion—than U.S. charity will enrich them, though American trade policies are generally much better for the developing world than those of Europe or Japan.¹⁴ (James Wolfensohn, the former president of the World Bank, once pointed out that "the average European cow lives on \$2.50-a-day subsidy when three billion people live on under \$2 a day.") On the credit side, America admits many more immigrants than Japan and Europe, and those immigrants send tens of billions home in remittances, creating, at least potentially, a savings base for capital and growth. On the debit side again, however, the United States is meeting its health needs—especially those of poor Americans—with a brain drain of doctors and nurses (trained, usually, at public expense), from places like India, Pakistan, Ghana, Nigeria, and Jamaica, where they are desperately needed.

When you spend your dollars—or euros or pounds—isn't it worth also spending a moment or two to ask whether they are being spent intelligently? However much you give, doesn't it matter that none of it is wasted? Part of the trouble with Peter Unger's focus on those starving children is that it blocks thought about the complexity of the problems facing the global poor. Ask the people at

OXFAM and UNICEF whether they think that all that matters is keeping children alive a while longer.

The juxtaposition of Western affluence with Third World poverty can sometimes lead activists to see the two as causally linked in some straightforward way, as if they are poor because we are rich. So it's worth remembering that poverty is far less prevalent today than it was a century ago. Since 1950, life expectancy and literacy rates in the developing world have increased quite dramatically. In 1990, some 375 million people in China were living in what the World Bank calls "extreme poverty," an income of less than a dollar a day. By 2001, that figure declined by more than 160 million, even as the total population continued to rise. The number of South Asians living in extreme poverty declined by tens of millions. But Africa has been left behind, and it is Africa that presents the greatest challenge to our development experts—and to our sense of our global obligations.

In thinking about trade policies, immigration policies, and aid policies, in deciding which industries to subsidize at home, which governments to support and arm abroad, politicians in the world's richest countries naturally respond most to the needs of those who elected them. But they should be responding to their citizens' aspirations as well. And America's attitude toward foreign assistance is a complicated thing. In surveys, American are apt to say that too much is given; and then propose that the amount be lowered, say, to just 5 percent of the federal budget. (That's ten times more than the United States actually allocated in 2005.) Some decades ago, the great development economist Alfred O. Hirschman, in a paper he wrote with Richard M. Bird, made an arresting proposal. Suppose you allowed taxpayers to specify that a certain amount of what they paid (up to 5 percent, the economists suggested) be designated for foreign aid contributions, remitted to a World Development Fund. The proposal had various embellishments, but one result,

they recognized, would be this: "we would have, for the first time, a concrete indication of how many people in the United States care enough about foreign aid to be willing explicitly to divert some of their tax dollars to it. Our initial assumption is that more aid is a good thing. This proposal would, if nothing else, enable us to know how many people agree with us."¹⁵

As I say, I do not know exactly what the basic obligations are of each American or each human being. A few years ago, the UN convened a summit meeting in Monterrey, Mexico, in which leaders from all over discussed specific ways of alleviating the kind of grinding poverty that afflicts a sixth of the world's population. Needless to say, the announced goals, itemized in the "Monterrey consensus," haven't been met—agreeing on where you want to go doesn't get you there—but it was a truly cosmopolitan conversation on a matter of central cosmopolitan concern. It's important that conversations like these continue; it's even more important that they don't remain just at the level of conversation. For if there are people without their basic entitlements—and there are billions of them—we know that, collectively, we are not meeting our obligations. The Shallow Pond theorists are wrong about what we owe. They are surely right to insist that we owe more.

Faced with impossible demands, we are likely to throw up our hands in horror. But the obligations we have are not monstrous or unreasonable. They do not require us to abandon our own lives. They entail, as Adam Smith saw, clearheadedness, not heroism. Jeffrey Sachs has argued that in twenty years, at a cost of about \$150 billion a year, we can eradicate extreme poverty—the poverty that kills people and empties lives of meaning. I don't know whether the number is correct or whether his detailed proposals are, either. But if he is even half right, the richest nations can together salvage the wasted lives of the poorest human beings, by spending collectively less than a third of what the United States spends each year

on defense all by itself; put another way, we could raise the money at about 45 cents a day for each citizen of the European Union, the United States, Canada, and Japan which is a little more than a third of what the average Norwegian is paying already. The average Norwegian is not three times richer than the average citizen of the industrialized world.¹⁶ If we accept the cosmopolitan challenge, we will tell our representatives that we want them to remember those strangers. Not because we are moved by their suffering—we may or may not be—but because we are responsive to what Adam Smith called “reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast.” The people of the richest nations can do better. This is a demand of simple morality. But it is one that will resonate more widely if we make our civilization more cosmopolitan.

And, not to leave you in any suspense about it, Rastignac’s friend, too, was guided by that inhabitant of the breast. “Damn it,” he said, after some brow-furrowing thought. “I’ve come to the conclusion that the Chinaman must live.”

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As always, in this as in all things, my greatest debt is to my partner Henry Finder, *sine quo non*.

My thanks to my mother are already expressed on the dedication page; but I can’t resist telling one short story about why this seems to me so much her book. My mother moved to Ghana in 1955. When my father died in 1990, people kept asking her when she was going home. “But I *am* home,” she always said. Then she had an idea. She went to the City Council offices and bought the plot next to the one where my father was buried and

2. "Hadji Murat," in Leo Tolstoy, *Master and Man and Other Stories*, trans. Paul Foote (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 240.
3. William C. Sumner, *Folkways* (Boston: Atheneum Press, 1907), p. 331.
4. Melville J. Herskovits, *Cultural Relativism* (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 56.

Chapter 4. Moral Disagreements

1. Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Arguments at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).
2. See Paul Rozin, "Food Is Fundamental, Fun, Frightening, and Far-reaching," *Social Research* 66 (1999): 9–30. I am grateful to John Haidt for a discussion of these issues.
3. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.
4. Menstruation: Leviticus 15:19–28. Male ejaculation: Leviticus 15:16–18.
5. Leviticus 17:11–13. In a footnote (p. 618), Alter suggests what the content of this explanation really amounts to. The proscription itself is in the preceding verse.
6. H. L. A. Hart introduced the idea of "open texture" to discussions of jurisprudence in *The Concept of Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), chap. 6. He borrowed the idea of open texture from F. Waismann, who thought open texture was an irreducible feature of language. The example of the bylaw about vehicles in the park is Hart's; see his "Positivism and the Separation of Law and Morals," *Harvard Law Review* 71 (1958): 593–629.
7. W. B. Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56 (1956): 169.
8. Charles L. Black Jr., *Capital Punishment: The Inevitability of Caprice and Mistake*, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 1981).

Chapter 5. The Primacy of Practice

1. Cass R. Sunstein, "Incompletely Theorized Agreements," *Harvard Law Review* 108 (1995): 1733–72.
2. Joseph Appiah, *Joe Appiah: The Autobiography of an African Patriot* (New York: Praeger, 1990), p. 22.
3. I have put this complaint in the mouth of a Muslim. But the truth is you could hear it from non-Muslims in many places as well. It is less likely to be heard in non-Muslim Africa, because there, by and large (as Amartya Sen has pointed out), women have a less unequal place in public life. See Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

Chapter 6. Imaginary Strangers

1. Brent Berlin and Paul Kay, *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).
2. Donald Brown, *Human Universals* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1991).

Chapter 7. Cosmopolitan Contamination

1. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, in *Essays on Politics and Society*, ed. John M. Robson, vol. 18 of *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 270.
2. Quoted in Larry Strelitz, "Where the Global Meets the Local: Media Studies and the Myth of Cultural Homogenization," *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, no. 6 (Spring/Summer 2001), <http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Spring01/strelitz.html>.
3. Ien Ang, *Watching "Dallas": Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1985); Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz, *The Export of Meaning: Cross-cultural Readings of Dallas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); John Sinclair, Elizabeth Jacka, and Stuart Cunningham, eds., *New Patterns in Global Television: Peripheral Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Strelitz, "Where the Global Meets the Local."
4. See J. D. Straubhaar, "Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity," *Critical Studies in Mass Communications* 8 (1991): 39–59.
5. The quotes from the Zulu student Sipho are from Larry Strelitz, *Where the Global Meets the Local: South African Youth and Their Experience of the Global Media* (PhD Thesis, Rhodes University, 2003), pp. 137–41.
6. Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), p. 394.

Chapter 8. Whose Culture Is It, Anyway?

1. Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). The history of Asante in the nineteenth century has a great deal to do with its wars and treaties with Britain. Sir Garnet Wolseley's sack of Kumasi was intended to establish British dominance in the region; though the fact is that he entered Kumasi unopposed on February 4, 1874, and had to retreat two days later because he needed to take his sick and wounded back to the safety of the Gold Coast colony. The expedition of 1895–96, in which Baden-Powell took part, was intended in part to enforce the settlement of 1874 and to establish British sovereignty over Asante by the forced submission of the king. The British eventually exiled a number of political leaders, like the Asantehene, to the Seychelles, remote islands in the middle of the Indian

- Ocean, in order to make it hard for them to communicate with their peoples. Prempeh I returned to the Gold Coast colony as a private citizen in 1924, and was allowed to resume his title as Kumashene—the chief of Kumasi—a couple of years later. Only in 1935 was his successor, Osei Agyeman Prempeh II (my great-uncle by marriage), allowed to resume the title of Asantehene, king of Asante.
2. I owe a great deal to the cogent (and cosmopolitan!) outline of the development of the relevant international law in John Henry Merryman's classic paper "Two Ways of Thinking about Cultural Property," *American Journal of International Law* 80, no. 4 (October 1986): 831–53.
 3. James Cuno, "U.S. Art Museums and Cultural Property," *Connecticut Journal of International Law* 16 (Spring 2001): 189–96.
 4. Michael F. Brown, "Can Culture Be Copyrighted?" *Current Anthropology* 39, no. 2 (April 1998): 203.
 5. Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).
 6. Merryman, "Two Ways of Thinking," p. 852.
 7. The quotations from the *Daily Telegraph*, *London Times*, and *New York Herald*, as well as the information about Osei Bonsu, are all from Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 200–201.

Chapter 9. The Counter-Cosmopolitans

1. Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 25. Though published in the United States, the book uses (mostly) British spelling. I have silently Americanized it for the convenience of the reader.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
3. Jeffrey Gettleman with David M. Halbfinger, "Suspect in '96 Olympic Bombing and 3 Other Attacks Is Caught," *New York Times*, June 1, 2003, p. 1.
4. For Sayyid Ahmad Khan see the essay by Javed Majeed in *Islam and Modernity: Muslim Intellectuals Respond* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000); for Taha see the essay by Mohamed Mahmoud; there are references to Muhammad 'Abduh throughout the book. And see Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Khaled Abou El-Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).
5. See the interview by Rania Al Malley in *Egypt Today*, 26, no. 2 (February 2005).
6. *The Koran*, trans. N. J. Dawood (London: Penguin, 2002) 29:46; 2:256.
7. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 174.
8. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. C. D. Clark (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 202.

Chapter 10. Kindness to Strangers

1. Honoré de Balzac, *Père Goriot* (Paris: Éditions Garniers Frères, 1961), pp. 154–55. (A footnote in this edition suggests that Balzac got the mandarin from Chateaubriand, who certainly knew his Smith.)
2. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 157. The chapter is entitled "Of the Influence and Authority of Conscience."
3. Robert Sibley, "Globalization and the Meaning of Canadian Life," *Canadian Review of Books*, 28, nos. 8–9 (Winter 2000).
4. Peter Unger, *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 56.
5. Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1, no. 3 (Spring 1972): 231.
6. Unger, *Living High*, p. 143.
7. Singer's own formulation is this: "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. By 'without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance,' I mean without causing anything else comparably bad to happen, or doing something that is wrong in itself, or failing to promote some moral good, comparable in significance to the bad thing that we can prevent." Singer, "Famine," p. 231.
8. I am attracted to the way of defining what we are entitled to that is to be found in Martha C. Nussbaum, "Human Capabilities" in Martha C. Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover, eds. *Women, Culture, and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 72. For further work in this tradition see Martha C. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, eds., *The Quality of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
9. Richard W. Miller, "Cosmopolitan Respect and Patriotic Concern," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 27 (1998): 209.
10. George Easterly, *The Elusive Quest for Growth: Economists' Adventures and Misadventures in the Tropics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).
11. Craig Burnside and David Dollar, "Aid, Policies, and Growth" (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 569252, June 1997). <http://ssrn.com/abstract=569252>.
12. David B. Francis, "U.S. Foreign Aid: Do Americans Give Enough?" *Christian Science Monitor*, January 6, 2005.
13. Steven Radelet, "Think Again: Foreign Aid," Posted on the *Foreign Policy* magazine Web site February 2005, <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/files/story2773.php>.
14. Radelet, *ibid.*, points out that promised U.S. assistance of \$350 million is dwarfed by the \$1.8 billion in tariffs it raises on imports from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and India alone.