

The Minimally Good Life Account of What We Owe to Others and What We Can Justifiably Demand¹

Nicole Hassoun*

Abstract

Cosa dobbiamo gli uni agli altri dal punto di vista di una giustizia fondamentale? Cosa siamo autorizzati a reclamare per noi stessi? Vi sono molte risposte a tali questioni nella letteratura specializzata. Questo articolo sostiene che le risposte principali sono o troppo esigenti o non abbastanza esigenti (e che qualche volta sono entrambe le cose: troppo esigenti o non abbastanza esigenti). In alternativa, l'articolo sostiene una visione minimalista di vita buona in base a cui ciascuno ha il diritto di essere protetto nella sua capacità di vivere una vita minimamente buona e deve rinunciare a tutto ciò che non è necessario per vivere una tale vita a favore di coloro che necessitano di assistenza per raggiungere questo fine. In altri saggi ho difeso l'idea che questa visione offre una concezione plausibile del minimo indispensabile, ma l'idea che dobbiamo agli altri questo minimo abbisogna di una giustificazione robusta. Il presente articolo offre tale giustificazione.

Parole chiave: vita minimamente buona, minimo indispensabile, cosa dobbiamo gli uni agli altri.

What do we owe to others as a matter of basic justice? What are we entitled to claim for ourselves? There are many answers to these questions in the literature. This paper argues that the main contenders are either too demanding or cannot demand enough (and sometimes that they are both too demanding and not demanding enough). Instead, it defends the minimally good life view on which everyone is entitled to protection of their ability to live a minimally good life and must give up anything not necessary to live such a life to those who require assistance in doing so. In other papers, I have set out and argued that this view provides a plausible account of the basic minimum but the idea that we do owe people any such minimum requires significant defense. This paper provides this defense.

Keywords: minimally good life, basic minimum, what we owe to each other.

¹ Saggio ricevuto in data 07/10/2022 e pubblicato in data 10/02/2023.

* Binghamton University – USA. E-mail: nhassoun@binghamton.edu

1. Introduction

What do we owe to others as a matter of basic justice? What are we entitled to claim for ourselves? There are many potential answers to such questions in the literature^[1]. Some may argue that each person should maximize utility and has a claim even to others' bodies if that improves marginal utility^[2]. Others argue that we must only respect basic entitlements and provide aid in easy rescue cases^[3]. Some claim that we should do our fair share in helping others even if this is very demanding but that we do not have to do more than this^[4]. Yet others suggest that we only need to give up what will not make our lives worse, but must give up anything that does not affect our lives' quality^[5]. This paper argues that these views are either too demanding or cannot demand enough (and sometimes that they are both too demanding and not demanding enough).^[6] Instead, it defends the minimally good life view on which everyone is entitled to protection of their ability to live a minimally good life and must give up anything not necessary to live such a life to those who require assistance in doing so^[7]. In "Sufficiency and the Minimally Good Life" and "Good Enough? The Minimally Good Life Account of the Basic Minimum" I set out and argue that this view provides a plausible account of the basic minimum but the idea that we do owe people any such minimum requires significant defense. This paper provides this defense.

I will argue that the proposed *Minimally Good Life* (MGL) account of what we owe to others and can justifiably demand as a matter of basic justice is better than the main competitors because it generates significant demands but also limits these demands significantly. It leaves significant room for beneficence and altruism, while also recognizing the importance of freedom, rights, and responsibility for human lives. The proposed standard requires we be prepared to sacrifice anything others need to live a minimally good life that we do not similarly require. However, it does not require we give to others everything from which they might benefit. Moreover, it treats people equally in specifying that everyone can demand the assistance they need to live minimally well when others need not sacrifice so much to help them.

Before defending the MGL account against the main alternatives, let me say what I mean by *basic justice*. The MGL account does not tell us what full justice, never mind morality, requires.^[8] Rather, the MGL account explains what we must provide for each other *simply out of concern for our common humanity*. There may be reasons to limit this concern in some circumstances (when providing so much requires sacrificing something of greater importance). Moreover, there are times when we owe particular people care that goes well beyond what concern for common humanity requires. Still, I believe this care should not normally come at the cost of doing what concern for common humanity (*basic justice*) requires.^[9] In general, I believe states and sometimes the international community should assist individuals in securing the basic minimum and that individuals have obligations to support these institutions. Much of what people need to live minimally well – e.g. a clean and safe environment, decent

employment conditions, and security – require decent institutions. Still, if the MGL account is correct, and institutions are failing to do what they should, individuals may have to help rectify these problems by protesting or advocating for institutional change and sometimes doing other things – like give aid directly – to help ensure that people can live at least minimally good lives. At least, individuals may have to help fill the gaps when they need not sacrifice so much to help others.^[10]

2. *Desiderata for a Successful Theory*

In Peter Singer's seminal article "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" he suggests two different accounts of the aid we owe to others that might inform an account of basic justice^[11]. On the weaker view, we must give up everything that is not morally significant to aid others. On the stronger view, we must give up everything that is not morally comparable to what others will suffer without aid.

Consider Singer's stronger, more demanding, principle first. I believe we should reject the idea that we must sacrifice all of the organs without which we might live to save others' lives at least as a matter of basic justice. It may well be one of the noblest acts of self-sacrifice to donate an organ to a loved one, never mind a stranger. But, the view that we must do so is implausibly demanding^[12]. There should be some realm – that extends at least to the edges of our bodies – where we do not have to sacrifice significantly for others even if that means they do not survive or flourish.^[13] Moreover, I believe this protection should extend well beyond our physical limits at least to the property that is important for health and life. Obviously, Singer and other maximizing utilitarians will disagree but, as John Rawls argued, such views fail to respect the separateness of persons^[14]. In any case, I will start from the desiderata that an adequate account of basic justice cannot require us to sacrifice life or limb for others.

That said, not every kind of demandingness is a problem for a principle intended to explain what we owe to others and can reasonably demand as a matter of basic justice; theories can be too minimal as well as demanding.^[15] Singer's weaker (less demanding) principle may, for instance, be too minimal. It is not at all clear what counts as *morally significant* and I will consider below different ways of interpreting this principle, but if no one must sacrifice anything that affects the quality of their life, it is too minimal. We often have to sacrifice things that are morally significant – e.g. time with our children – to help others. Besides what people must sacrifice for others as a matter of basic justice, whether people will have enough under any proposed principle also matters. *Ceteris paribus*, I will take as a second desiderata that an adequate standard must be *sufficiently robust* so that there is no serious reason to doubt that an individual who attains it can live her life well enough. That is, I will suppose people need to be able to live choice-worthy lives and have some of the things that make their lives good for them, but even if people have everything they would choose

and from which they can benefit, that is not enough. There are many reasons to endorse this desideratum even though, again, not everyone will do so. The monk who only wants solitude, and those who commit suicide for a great cause, may live choice-worthy lives, but it is not enough to provide people only with these opportunities^[16]. No one should have to sacrifice so much.

I will argue that the main alternative accounts of what we owe to others in the literature fail to satisfy one of the above desiderata or both. They require some to sacrifice life or limb for others (they are not minimal) and/or fail to provide a sufficiently robust standard for all on which there is no serious reason to doubt that those who attain it can live their lives well. Moreover, showing how alternative accounts fail to satisfy these desiderata can help justify them.

A theory that fulfills the above desiderata leaves significant room for beneficence and altruism but acknowledges the importance of basic rights as well as freedom and responsibility for human lives. Individuals are responsible for helping others secure a basic minimum, but they do not have to give to others everything from which they might benefit; both benefactors and beneficiaries have basic freedom, rights, and responsibilities.

Moreover, a theory that fulfills the desiderata above (that is both minimal and sufficient) provides a unified threshold for what people owe and can demand from others. It, thus, reconciles the two perspectives on what we owe and can reasonably demand (that of those who might give and might receive) so they are not, as Mill suggests, each from their «own point of view... unanswerable»^[17]. If an account sets different standards for what people owe and can reasonably demand, some may have to sacrifice things for others that they could not reasonably demand, while others might not have to sacrifice things they could reasonably demand. Barring relevant differences between individuals, such accounts are not appropriately impartial.^[18]

The next section sketches the MGL account so that subsequent sections can defend it against the most promising alternatives. However, what follows does not aim to defend each component of the account at length. Interested readers can find this defense in: (Hassoun, 2021; Hassoun, 2022)^[19]. Rather, this paper aims to make the case that this is what we owe to each other as a basic minimum (not just to provide an account of what we might owe). Still, in setting out the account, I provide some positive reasons to accept it. I explain, for instance, how the MGL account protects our common humanity. Minimally good lives are also partly constitutive of, constituted by, and instrumentally important for many other things of great importance. However, the main reason to provide this much for people, I think, is that each person's ability to live such a life is so (intrinsically) important for that person. And, I believe no one should have to sacrifice their ability to live such a life to help others for the same reason.^[20] So I turn to alternative accounts that deny this claim in subsequent sections.

3. The Minimally Good Life View

I believe we should generally ensure people can live a minimally good life and need not sacrifice anything that imperils our own ability to do so. To live such lives, people need (1) an *adequate range* of the (2) *fundamental conditions* that (3) *are necessary and merely important for* (4) *securing* those (5) *relationships, pleasures, knowledge, appreciation, and worthwhile activities etc.* (6) *reasonable, caring, free people would (in conversation with others) set as a minimal standard of justifiable aspiration.* The relationships, pleasures, knowledge, appreciation, and worthwhile activities etc. reasonable, caring, free people would set as a minimal standard of justifiable aspiration just are *the things that make lives minimally good.* They set the minimal standard to which people can *justifiably aspire.*^[21]

There is a sense in which even some of the most impoverished, oppressed, and disadvantaged people can live excellent, never mind minimally good, lives. It is often *reasonable to affirm* lives even when they lack many of the things people can *justifiably aspire to as a matter of basic justice.*^[22] But I am concerned with what people can *justifiably aspire to as a matter of basic justice*; this sets the standard that everyone should get as close as possible to securing.

To figure out what lives are minimally good in the “justified aspiration/basic justice” sense we should consider whether they satisfy *reasonable, caring, free people.* Reasonable people are appropriately impartial; they are committed to seeing others as free and equal^[23]. People are caring when they empathize appropriately with others and are motivated to promote others’ interests in proportion to their weight^[24]. People are free when they have some internal and external freedom; they can reason about, make, and carry out plans for themselves, and they have decent options and bargaining power^[25]. As John Rawls suggests, reasonable people would not set a standard for others under which reasonable people are not content to live themselves^[26]. The basic idea is simple: People should be content to bear the costs of living the “merely” minimally good lives the least fortunate will live when setting this standard fully understanding their circumstances, psychology, and history. The question is not whether the person one is deciding for will be content in their condition, as that person’s preferences may be adaptive and his or her bargaining position poor.^[27] Rather it is whether a reasonable, free, caring person would now (reflecting on, but not yet occupying, the person’s life) is content to live that life fully understanding the person’s circumstances, psychology, and history^[28]. Wise, informed, unbiased, consistent, caring people reflect on what they would need to be content to live others’ lives in others’ actual conditions (where many are unwise, uninformed, biased, inconsistent, and uncaring)^[29].

The proposed method for figuring out what people need to live minimally well will not resolve all disagreements, but it can help us make moral progress in the actual world as long as we buttress it with discussion and deliberation. I am not proposing an ideal observer theory of the minimally good life^[30]. No one is fully reasonable, caring, or free and we certainly lack a lot of relevant information about what other

people's lives are like. My hope is just that we empathetically put ourselves in others' shoes and think hard about whether we would be content to live their lives in trying to arrive at plausible judgments about whether their lives are good enough. So, the proposed method for figuring out what people need to live minimally well if not contractualist, is discursive. By employing this method, we demonstrate respect for others' basic moral equality and appropriate concern.^[31]

Reasonable, caring, free people will agree on some core components of the minimally good life, even when they have different backgrounds and perspectives. To live a minimally good life, a person's relationships, pleasures, and worthwhile activities etc. must outweigh their difficulties, losses, pains and frustrations so that there is no serious reason to doubt their ability to live their life satisfactorily^[32]. Moreover, this must be the case for the person's life to reach the threshold for a minimally good one at any point in time. (Though the person might live a minimally good life overall despite the fact that they fall below the threshold at some times). The question is not whether the well-off would trade their own lives for merely minimally good ones – many fortunate individuals would not. What matters is that there are no serious reasons to doubt that the person's life can be well-lived; everyone must secure basic resources and fulfill their needs, have enough opportunities and capabilities, and avoid dignity-undermining discrimination to live minimally well.

The reasonable, free, and caring would not say people need everything from which they might benefit but that people need only an *adequate range* of the things necessary and important for living minimally good lives. A minimally good human life is not perfect, but it should contain enough valuable, pleasurable, and significant things. However, a life with some significant, pleasurable, and valuable things is not necessarily minimally good. A minimally good life must be worth living, but requires more than that. A reasonable, free, caring person would set the adequacy thresholds (the bounds of the range) for securing the things that make lives minimally good so that life is at the lowest levels of flourishing.

Free, reasonable, caring people would also agree that many things are *fundamental conditions* for securing what makes lives minimally good. Amongst other things, people require capacities, resources, and institutions^[33]. Everyone needs adequate food and water, and most need sufficient shelter, education, and social and emotional goods. But, besides satisfying their material needs, people also need basic capacities, liberty, and autonomy^[34]. Everyone should have the ability to think and connect with others, develop skills, appreciate things of value, and so forth^[35]. People need social and institutional structures that help them develop capacities and let them secure the things that make lives minimally good. They must be able to interact with others, to learn, “to evaluate and appreciate things” and to determine their life's direction (Liao, 2015). In short, everyone requires the natural and social, internal and external, conditions for securing the things that make lives minimally good.

Reasonable, caring, free people will also recognize that some fundamental conditions are only *important for* securing the things that make lives minimally good

while others are strictly *necessary for* doing so. Things are *necessary for* living a minimally good life when it is impossible to live such a life without them. Things are *important for* living such lives when they make a significant contribution to individuals' ability to live such lives. Different amounts of resources, capacities, opportunities, liberties, autonomy and so forth are important for different people to live minimally well even though everyone needs some of the same things^[36].

Reasonable, free, caring people should also insist that individuals' access to the things that make their lives minimally good should be *secure* as insecurity often threatens individuals' ability to flourish. One's access to the things that make lives minimally good is *secure* when it is not too difficult for one to attain them and one is not at great risk of losing this access. Securing some of the things necessary for living a minimally good life cannot come at the cost of securing other things.

Finally, the reasonable, free, and caring person will grant that many things may make lives minimally good including *relationships, pleasures, knowledge, appreciation, and worthwhile activities*^[37]. This list is not exhaustive. People also need some kinds of *recognition and respect* to live minimally good lives (e.g.). Severe discrimination can undermine individuals' ability to such lives^[38].

To some extent, historical circumstance, geography, culture, and even individual differences determine what people need to live minimally good lives^[39]. Some will prefer starvation to culturally inappropriate food, for instance, and other resources^[40]. Others require things that they can only secure elsewhere or in the foreseeable future. Still, there are facts about what people need to live minimally good lives. While it matters that some important desires are fulfilled, some things can contribute to a person's flourishing even if that person does not desire those things.^[41] Matters of pure preference and true urgency differ.^[42]

Consider, then, why people must at least help each other live minimally good lives when that does not require sacrificing their own ability to do likewise. They must help others live such lives to respect each person's common humanity. Since we are all human, everyone has an equal claim to freedom, but also to reasonable care and concern.

One might try to ground the claim to respect for common humanity and explain its nature in different ways, but I believe that its ground lies, in part, by the fact that we stand in important relationships of care and concern to others participating in our uniquely human moral community.^[43] Our relationships help constitute, and make possible, our distinctively valuable human form of life. As humans, we all need, and benefit significantly from, care and concern over the course of our lives. Without this care and concern we simply could not survive, never mind develop or flourish.^[44] The account does not deny that we are all born equally free but recognizes the fact that each individuals' ability to survive and flourish depends on many circumstances over which individuals exercise limited control. Those who fail to respect common humanity and, say, advance the claim that one sex or race should dominate another might reflect on this fact: People only have contingent freedom and we all share a

distinctively human form of life participating in different ways at different times in important relationships of care and concern.^[45] Everyone equally has free will (or does not) and our basic freedom and constraint also help ground our claims to concern for our common humanity. No one deserves their fundamental freedom and constraint just by virtue of the contingent fact of their birth into these circumstances. Though, we may deserve differential treatment for other reasons (e.g. based on how we respond under these constraints).^[46] At different points in our lives, we all find ourselves needy and vulnerable. Moreover, even the most needy and vulnerable amongst us stand in important relationships of care and concern with others that help constitute, and make possible, our distinctively human form of life.

Consider, then, what concern for individuals' common humanity requires in more detail. As humans, everyone has an equal claim not only to freedom, but also the reasonable care and concern that partly constitute our common humanity. They have claims, or rights, to the kinds of flourishing relationships that support and help constitute this humanity. So, we must all help create the conditions under which people will lead morally (and otherwise) decent lives. We must respond to other's needs and claims to decent treatment. This arguably requires many things but when people require assistance to live minimally good lives and no one else is providing this assistance, others who can assist them without sacrificing this much must help. More precisely, to respect our common humanity, we must help one another live minimally good lives when that does not require sacrificing our own ability to do likewise.

The MGL account fulfills the desiderata with which we started – it is both minimal and sufficient. It is minimal in that it does not require some to sacrifice their basic rights to their bodies and the property necessary and important for health and life even if that means others do not survive or flourish. On the account, people must have *secure* access to an *adequate range* of the things necessary and *important* for living minimally good lives. Bodily integrity protects secure access to this range of things.^[47] (Those who doubt this might consider societies that do not protect individuals' bodily integrity or, worse, require some to sacrifice their bodily integrity for others; we have serious reason to doubt people can live well in such societies – hence those without secure protections of their bodily integrity do not reach the justifiable aspiration/basic right threshold for a minimally good life on this paper's account.^[48]) There are many possible accounts of what lives qualify as minimally good and, on some accounts, people do not require so much. But, this paper's account focuses on the kind of lives reasonable, free, caring people would be content to live and I believe they would demand bodily integrity. So, the account sets a *minimal* standard for justified aspiration everyone can plausibly claim as a basic minimum. On the other hand, the account is *sufficient* in that there is no serious reason to doubt that an individual who reaches the justified aspiration threshold at issue can live her life well. On the MGL account, we must give some significant aid but do not have to provide others with everything from which they might benefit. So, the account leaves significant room for beneficence and altruism while also recognizing the importance of freedom, rights, and responsibility

for human lives. The proposed standard requires we be prepared to sacrifice anything others need to live a minimally good life that we do not similarly require. However, it does not require we give to others everything from which they might benefit. Moreover, it treats people equally in requiring that everyone help provide for others a basic minimum when they can without sacrificing their own ability to secure this much.

4. *Alternatives*

This section considers and rejects several possible alternative accounts of what we owe to others as a matter of basic justice and what we can reasonably require others to provide.^[49] I argue that some proposals are too demanding while others do not demand enough, and some both demand too much in some respects and not enough in others. We have already seen how some accounts of basic justice (e.g. Singer's more demanding principle) qualify as too demanding according to this paper's desiderata. So, I will first consider a few theories that do not demand enough before turning to theories that are both too demanding and not demanding enough. Several of these views provide more plausible ways of interpreting Singer's weaker principle.

In "Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code," John Arthur attempts to limit our obligations to help others by considering what the ideal moral code requires^[50]. He says this code is the set of rules that, with full compliance, would produce the most good for society as a whole. Arthur thinks that the ideal moral code requires easy rescue, but he rejects the idea that one must sacrifice basic entitlements to help (at least distant) others^[51]. He says the ideal moral code includes entitlements to one's person and property.

Arthur's theory does not demand enough: We must sometimes sacrifice some entitlements (e.g. property) to help others. Often people can sacrifice a great deal of what they have without compromising their own welfare and thereby save many lives or alleviate a great deal of suffering. In these cases, it is not plausible that doing so demands too much or would fail to produce the most good for society as a whole. So, Arthur's argument fails by its own standards.^[52] Moreover, in our non-ideal world where many people fail to do what they should, we should not endorse the rules that would produce the most good for society as a whole if people did what they should. When some fail to do their part, others have to take up the slack to ensure everyone fares well enough.

Alternately, consider Liam Murphy's fair shares view as an account of what basic justice requires^[53]. Murphy argues that "agent-neutral principles should not under partial compliance require sacrifice of an agent where the total compliance effect on her, taking that sacrifice into account would be worse than it would be (all other aspects of her situation remaining the same) under full compliance from now on"^[54]. Murphy thinks we ought to reject principles that require people to sacrifice

more than they would have to if everyone were doing what they should. Rather, he thinks people should just bear their fair share of the costs of fulfilling our collective obligations to aid^[55]

Like Arthur's theory, this view does not demand enough. An agent's fair share depends upon how many people require assistance, how much assistance they need, and how many are available to help. In some cases, when an individual would have to give a miniscule amount if others were providing the requisite aid, she might literally not have to lift a finger to help others in desperate need (so this view would not even require easy rescue). At the same time, Murphy's view demands too much if an individual's fair share requires sacrificing life or limb for others.

Now, even if one finds the argument that individuals must help pick up the slack when institutions and other individuals are failing to help people live minimally good lives, one might believe that they only have to pick up some of the slack. One might maintain that no one has to sacrifice everything they do not need to live minimally well to help others. After all, people might already be doing much more than others when they do their fair share. So, consider some alternative accounts that can recognize obligations to pick up the slack but limit our obligations to help in different ways.

Although not intended as an account of basic justice per se, in *the Moral Demands of Affluence* (2004)^[56], Garrett Cullity argues that the affluent must sacrifice a significant amount to aid others (but this sacrifice does not need to be as great as I claim). Cullity argues that certain life-enhancing goods, like friendship, pursuing long term projects, and living together in a community require partiality; I cannot truly be your friend unless I am willing to give some of your interests special consideration that I do not extend to everyone^[57]. He then claims that we have to help others pursue these life-enhancing goods. These goods are *requirement grounding*^[58]. By parity, Cullity suggests agents should be free to pursue these goods for themselves, even if it means not helping others. Furthermore, people should be free to structure their lives around non-altruistic, requirement-grounding goods. This gives us permission to seek seemingly trivial goods, if they are part of a greater pursuit. For example, I do not have to volunteer for a lifesaving charity, if volunteering prevents me from taking a friend to lunch. But, if I can choose a different life that is not worse by a requirement-grounding margin that better helps others, I should^[59].

This view both demands too much and not enough if we try to use it as an account of basic justice as opposed to beneficence (though it also has some advantages over Arthur's and Murphy's accounts). Sometimes we have to give up something that Cullity thinks is requirement grounding to aid those in desperate need. For example, it seems that an aspiring scientist ought to forego completing her biology homework one evening if it means saving a life.^[60] The scientist cannot just say that she has done more than her fair share when others will suffer and die without her assistance (even if it is true and others are wronging her by failing to help pick up the slack). One might even have to give up biology to pursue a different career as long

as one could also do well enough in that career (and even if the career is worse for that person by what Cullity considers a requirement grounding margin).^[61] Granted this last point is not cut and dry, but I think the burden of proof for arguing that people need not pursue different careers when they can help more people live minimally well lies on those who insist that they can do whatever they want. After all (by hypothesis), something very significant will be lost if these people do not help others live even minimally good lives. Moreover, if someone who could aid these people goes for her next best career option and helps those in need, she will still live a minimally good life herself. The cost on the other side of the equation is just the difference in the satisfaction the person will secure in her favorite vs second favorite career. Even if the aggregate welfare loss if the person pursues her second-best career is greater than if she pursues her first choice, I do not think that someone can justify failing to aid another just by saying that she will benefit herself more if she secures her favorite job.^[62]

Moreover, we do not always have to help others secure everything that enhances their life quality by what Cullity thinks is a requirement grounding margin even when we need not sacrifice anything that would affect the quality of our own lives by the same margin. On Cullity's account, friendships and other non-altruistically focused pursuits always ground requirements to aid. But once someone has enough friendships and so forth we do not have to help them secure more and, if losing a friendship does not pose a serious threat to their ability to live well, at least basic justice does not require us to help prevent that loss. Cullity's account of what grounds requirements to aid is too demanding, as well as too minimal, to provide a plausible account of what we owe to others simply out of concern for our common humanity.^[63]

Finally, consider Richard Miller's account of the limit to our obligations as an account of basic justice. In "The Ethics of Social Democracy" Miller endorses the principle of *mutual concern*.^[64] He says "everyone's underlying concern for others ought to be sufficiently great that greater concern would impose a significant risk of worsening his or her life, if he or she fulfilled all further responsibilities; but apart from special relationships or interactions it does not have to be more demanding than this".^[65] To have "underlying concern for others," one must help people meet their needs, which requires helping them avoid "a significant risk of worsening" their lives.^[66] Besides self-reliance, Miller says people need:

access to a variety of successes in living, for example, the enjoyment, development, and expression of personal affection and friendship; inquiry whose complexity, content, and demands suits their curiosity, interests, temperament, and capacity for learning; meaningful work and reciprocation for others; contributions in cooperation; the fulfillment of responsibilities that grow with growing capacities; the enjoyment of beauty; having fun^[67].

He also specifies that to have mutual concern we must help people “to pursue enjoyably and well worthwhile goals with which... [they] ...intelligently identif[y] and ... cannot readily detach” like getting a PhD, attending an occasional play, or purchasing some designer clothes^[68]. If being unable to do these things makes one’s life significantly worse, Miller says one can and should receive aid as long as others do not have to sacrifice their quality of life^[69].

Miller’s account, like Cullity’s, requires both too much and too little. Miller claims that whether or not an agent must sacrifice something depends on what effect this thing has on her quality of life. I believe we sometimes have to sacrifice some things that affect the quality of our lives but that we do not have to sacrifice everything that does not impinge on our quality of life. Miller’s view rules out sacrifices that, intuitively (and according to the proposed desiderata), are not morally significant at all and requires other sacrifices that are very significant. I believe we have to sacrifice something as insignificant as our ability to ever buy fancy clothes or purchase a theater ticket to save someone’s life, but we need not help people see Shakespeare or buy designer clothes, even if that will not impinge on the quality of our lives.^[70]

5. Conclusion

This paper argued that we should help protect everyone’s ability to live at least a minimally good life and can reasonably demand the same as a matter of basic justice. In doing so, it goes significantly beyond^[71] that set out and defend the account as one possible basis for what we owe to others as a basic minimum. [Neither (Hassoun, 2021)^[72] nor (Hassoun, 2022)^[73] argues that we do in fact owe people this much]. Moreover, this paper argued that this account has some advantages over the most plausible alternatives, which either demand too much, not enough, or both. The account leaves room for beneficence, altruism, freedom, rights and responsibility, though we must also consider other requirements of justice (and/or morality).

On this paper’s account, we must help others live minimally good lives when doing so does not require sacrificing our own ability to live such a life. This unified standard for what we owe and can rightfully demand as a matter of basic justice treats both those who might require aid and those who might give it equally. It requires us to give some significant aid but does not demand that we provide others with everything from which they might benefit. It is minimal in that it protects everyone’s basic rights to their bodies and the property necessary and important for health and life (even if that means others do not survive or flourish). It is sufficient in that there is no serious reason to doubt that an individual who secures the aid she needs on the account can live her life well. All of the alternatives this paper considered fail one or both of these desiderata. It is not enough to say we must only sacrifice our entitlements in easy rescue cases and we sometimes have to do more than our fair share when others are not helping.^[74] At the same time, in non-ideal circumstances,

we may not even have to do what we would have to do if others were helping. We may also have to sacrifice non-altruistically focused pursuits without which we can live minimally well to help others reach this threshold, though we do not have to help others secure all the friendships and other non-altruistically focused pursuits we are justified in pursuing ourselves. Finally, we must sometimes sacrifice things that affect the quality of our lives and do not always have to sacrifice things that do not affect our life quality. Rather, to respect our common humanity, we must help one another live minimally good lives when doing so does not require sacrificing our own ability to do likewise.

Acknowledgments

The author is grateful for support from the Templeton funded Happiness & Wellbeing project at St. Louis University, and for comments from audiences at St. Louis University, the Eastern Division American Philosophical Association, University of Graz, the Creighton Club at Colgate College, University of Gothenburg, Vanderbilt University, and students and colleagues at Binghamton and Cornell University who read earlier versions of this work. I would like to thank Dan Haybron, Andrew Chignell, Tony Reeves, Luc Bovens, Johnathan Wolff, Charles Goodman, Anders Herlitz, Avi Appel, Alex Esposito, Anja Karnein, Sarah Wright, Bradley Monton, Gillian Brock, Adam Etinson, Govind Persad, Thomas Pözlner, Dale Dorsey, Dick Miller, and Judith Lichtenberg for particularly extensive comments and discussion, sometimes on multiple drafts, and Ernest Wang, Jaden Iskiev, Jacleen Nardiello, Diana Dedi, Milan Patel, and the Global Health Impact team (global-health-impact.org/new) for research assistance. I apologize for leaving this list vastly incomplete. This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the John Templeton Foundation.

- ^[1] Cf. G. Brock, *Global justice: A Cosmopolitan Account*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009; S. Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders: A Global Political Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006; D. Moellendorf, *Cosmopolitan Justice*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado 2002; P. Gilibert, *Human Dignity and Human Rights*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2019.
- ^[2] P. Unger, *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1996; P. Singer, *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*, in «Philosophy and Public Affairs» 1, no. 3 (1972), pp. 229-243.
- ^[3] J. Arthur, *Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code*, in S. M. Cahn, P. Markie (eds.), *Ethics: History, Theory and Contemporary Issues*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012.
- ^[4] L. Murphy, *Moral Demands in Non-ideal Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000.
- ^[5] R. Miller, *Globalizing Justice: The Ethics of Poverty and Power*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010.
- ^[6] For good criticisms of some alternative proposals, see: (R. Arneson, *Moral Limits on the Demands of Beneficence?*, in D.K. Chatterjee (ed.) *The Ethics of Assistance: Morality, Affluence, and the Distant Needy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, pp. 33-58 J. Philips, *A Critique of Three Recent Studies on Morality's Demands. Murphy, Mulgan, Cullity and the Issue of Cost*, in «Ethic@. An International Journal for Moral Philosophy», 7, no. 1 (2008), pp. 1-13).
- ^[7] N. Hassoun, *Sufficiency and the Minimally Good Life*, in «Utilitas», 33 no.3 (2021), pp. 321-336; N. Hassoun, *Good Enough? The Minimally Good Life Account of the Basic Minimum*, in «Australasian Journal of Philosophy», 100 no.2 (2022), pp. 330-341.
- ^[8] Though, it may inform accounts of beneficence, mutual concern, and so forth (and I will consider whether accounts of beneficence, mutual concern, and so forth can provide plausible accounts of basic justice in what follows).
- ^[9] Philosophers often try to deal with what appears to be an inadequacy in their view by appeal to incompleteness – suggesting that one can rectify these problems by appeal to other moral requirements in a different domain. This may always be necessary but my hope is to provide an account that can explain what we owe to others and can demand as a matter of basic justice simply by appeal to our common humanity (from the impartial point of view).
- ^[10] Although I do not resolve the issue of scope here, the proposed standard protects universally important interests in protecting each individuals' ability to live a minimally good life. So, articulating it provides some reason to endorse a cosmopolitan human rights perspective as opposed to a liberal welfare state view. See discussion below.
- ^[11] P. Singer, *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*, cit.
- ^[12] For some work on demandingness, see R. Arneson, *Moral Limits on the Demands of Beneficence?*, cit.; A. Gheaus, *The Feasibility Constraint on the Concept of Justice*, in «The Philosophical Quarterly» 63, no. 252 (2013), pp. 445-64.; P. Gilibert, Holly Lawford-Smith, *Political Feasibility: A Conceptual Exploration*, in «Political Studies», 60, no. 4 (2012), pp. 809-25; P. Gilibert, *Justice and Feasibility: A Dynamic Approach*, in K. Vallier, M. Weber (eds.), *Political Utopias: Contemporary Debates*, Oxford University Press, New York 2017; R. Goodin, *Political Ideals and Political Practice*, in «British Journal of Political Science», 25, no. 1, 1995, pp. 37-56.
- ^[13] Consider a case where the only way to save the baby from a pond is to agree to give up an organ -- it is not obvious that one must give up so much (and it is even less clear that one can be required to give up so much under coercive threat).
- ^[14] J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1971.
- ^[15] There are many accounts of demandingness. Some object to principles that require people to do what produces the best results, run contrary to agents' inclinations and desires, conflict with self-interest, or leave little room for agents' personal concerns (Arneson, 2004; Gheaus, 2013; Gilibert and Lawford-Smith, 2012; Gilibert, 2017, Goodin, 1995). We not only require an account of what makes principles too demanding but we need to know why that kind of demandingness, or infeasibility, undercuts the theory. Here, however, I do not attempt to defend the proposed desiderata

except by appeal to the coherentist justification one might endorse if they accept the proposed theory or the concrete judgments about the particular counter-examples I offer to alternative views. Rather, I want to develop a view that satisfies these requirements.

^[16] Cf. D. Braybrooke, *Meeting Needs*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1987; R. Arneson, *Human Flourishing Versus Desire Satisfaction*, in «Social Philosophy & Policy 16», no.1, 1999, pp. 113-42.

^[17] J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Parker, Son and Bourn, London 1863.

^[18] I assume here that the kind of impartiality required by concern for common humanity is justified - recall that I do not intend to address those who would deny this here, just those who are unsure of this commitment's implications. (Though, I also do not suppose that impartiality constitutes the whole of morality).

^[19] N. Hassoun, *Sufficiency and the Minimally Good Life*, cit.; N. Hassoun, *Good Enough? The Minimally Good Life Account of the Basic Minimum*, cit.

^[20] My view is compatible with many ways of distributing the obligations to help people live minimally good lives. Still, I suppose that what each of us should do depends on what others actually do and that, ultimately, every single person may in some circumstances be obligated to provide all the assistance they can as long as that does not undermine his or her ability to live a minimally good life. At least, if the scope of basic justice is global, then in a world where millions are suffering and dying young each year from easily preventable poverty-related causes, the affluent may have to give up a lot to help others live minimally well when doing so does not threaten their own ability to live well enough.

^[21] What I will say about (1) – (5) can, ultimately, only be vindicated in light of (6). But if it is not plausible that free, reasonable, and caring people would agree with what I say about each of the preceding conditions, I also take that to be a mark against (6)'s adequacy (that is, I think each of the conditions is plausible on its own and that the full justification for the theory is coherentist). Moreover, (6) plays the distinct role of providing a practical basis for figuring out what people need to live minimally good lives. So I will proceed to discuss each part of the account in turn. Cf. N. Hassoun, *Sufficiency and the Minimally Good Life*, cit.; N. Hassoun, *Good Enough? The Minimally Good Life Account of the Basic Minimum*, cit. For more on why we must also care for others to figure out what they need, see M. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2006.

^[22] D. Haybron, *Happiness: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013 version. (Under contract), Ch. 8; p. 113; E. Kittay, *At the Margins of Moral Personhood*, in «Ethics» 116 (1), 2005, p. 100).

^[23] J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, cit.; J. Rawls, *Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory*, in «The Journal of Philosophy», 7, no.9, 1980, pp. 515-572.

^[24] M. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, cit. The kind of empathy at issue is “projective empathy” (S. Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2002, pp. 61-62). When we empathize in this way, we share others' feelings as their perspective warrants and put ourselves in others shoes understanding their circumstances, history, and perspectives (and this is distinct from the sympathy (S. Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care*, cit., 62) endorses).

^[25] J. Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1986; ; N. Hassoun, *Raz on the Right to Autonomy*, in «European Journal of Philosophy», 22 no.1, 2014, pp. 96-109.

^[26] J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, cit.; J. Rawls, *Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory*, in «The Journal of Philosophy», cit.

^[27] For more on why we must also care for others to figure out what they need, see M. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, cit.

^[28] H. Frankfurt, *Equality as a Moral Ideal*, in «Ethics», 98, 1987, pp. 21-43.

- [29] Cf. N. Hassoun, *Globalization and Global Justice: Shrinking Distance, Expanding Obligations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012.
- [30] P. Railton, *Facts and Values*, in «Philosophical Topics», 14 (2), 1986, pp. 5-31; D. Sobel, *Subjectivism and Idealization*, in «Ethics», 119 (2), 2009, pp. 336-352; R. Arneson, *Human Flourishing Versus Desire Satisfaction*, cit.
- [31] The fact that the mechanism is intended to work in the real world (where people are not very good at giving others' interests equal consideration) also explains why people will have to take others' interests very seriously. Although I do not need to come down on this issue to make my case (and those with different perspectives on it may accept my argument), I think it is plausible that reasonable, free, caring people with full information would not make a mistake about what people need to live minimally lives. That said, it is very difficult to explain what full information requires and to make this case. Though, see P. Railton, *Facts and Values*, cit.
- [32] N. Hassoun, *Sufficiency and the Minimally Good Life*, cit.
- [33] M. Liao, *Human Rights as Fundamental Conditions for a Good Life*, in Rowan Cruft, S. Matthew Liao, Massimo Renzo (eds.), *Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015.
- [34] J. Griffin, *On Human Rights*, Oxford University Press, New York 2008; R. Kraut, *Desire and the Human Good*, in «Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association 68», no 2, 1994, pp. 39-54.
- [35] M. Nussbaum, *The Costs of Tragedy: Some Moral Limits of Cost-Benefit Analysis*, in «The Journal of Legal Studies» 29, no.2, 2000, pp. 1005-36; R. Arneson, *Human Flourishing Versus Desire Satisfaction*, cit.; D. Dorsey, *Three Arguments for Perfectionism*, in «Noûs 44», no. 1, 2010, pp. 59-79.
- [36] M. Nussbaum, *The Costs of Tragedy: Some Moral Limits of Cost-Benefit Analysis*, cit.
- [37] J. Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement, and Moral Importance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1986; V. Tiberius, *The Reflective Life*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008; F. Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life: Concerning the Nature, Varieties, and Plausibility of Hedonism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2004; R. Crisp, *Reasons and the Good*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2006; R. Arneson, *Human Flourishing Versus Desire Satisfaction*, cit.; R. Emmons, *The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns: Motivation and Spirituality in Personality*, The Guilford Press, New York 1999.
- [38] A. Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Anchor Books, New York 1999; J. Tasioulas, *Human Rights as Fundamental Conditions for a Good Life*, in Rowan Cruft, S. Matthew Liao, Massimo Renzo eds, *On the Foundations of Human Rights*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015; S. Killmister, *Dignity, Torture, and Human Rights*, in «Ethical Theory and Moral Practice», 19 (5), 2016, pp. 1087-1101.
- [39] J. Gallup, J. Sachs. *The Economic Burden of Malaria*, in «American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene» 64, no.1-2, 2001, pp. 85-96.
- [40] A. Sen, *Development as Freedom*, cit.
- [41] Although I will not pursue this line of inquiry here, one might also see accounts of welfare (e.g. informed desire or rational care accounts) as attempting to explain these facts and the differences between the accounts may matter only at the margins. (Darwall, *Virtue Ethics*, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken 2002; D. Haybron, *Happiness: A Very Short Introduction*, cit.
- [42] See T. Scanlon, *Preference and Urgency*, in «Journal of Philosophy» 72, no. 19 (1975), pp. 655-69. Though I do not take the later to be determined by consensus in a society.
- [43] I do not have space here to defend this conception of our common humanity's ground against the main competitors, so I take it as a starting point for the argument. Some seem to equate common humanity with basic needs and agency, though not everyone can secure agency (D. Braybrooke, *Meeting Needs*, cit.; G. Brock, *Global justice: A Cosmopolitan Account*, cit M. Risse, *On Global Justice*. Princeton, Princeton University Press 2012., pp. 74-82; J. Griffin, *On Human Rights*, cit.). Though as some these authors contend, it is not clear that people will have human rights to anything that does not fulfill these needs or advance their agency on such accounts (M. Risse, *On Global Justice*, cit., pp.

74-82; Griffin, *On Human Rights*, cit.). Similar points might apply to capability theories of our common humanity (M. Nussbaum, *The Costs of Tragedy: Some Moral Limits of Cost-Benefit Analysis*, in «Harvard Human Rights Journal» 20, no.21, 2007, pp. 14). Others suggest that our capacity to feel love, grief, guilt, hope, shame and remorse can help ground our common humanity though its not clear that these things can ground commitment to a robust basic minimum either (R. Gaita, *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice*, London, Routledge Press 200). Often global justice and human rights theorists appeal to common humanity without explaining its ground (P. Gilibert, *Humanist and Political Perspectives on Human Rights*, in «Political Theory» 39, no.4, 2011, pp. 439-467.; D. Moellendorf, *Cosmopolitan Justice*, cit., S. Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders: A Global Political Theory*, cit.). That said, some accounts of moral personhood or moral equality may play the requisite role. Consider this account's advantages over George Sher's account of our moral equality (G. Sher, *Equality for Inegalitarians*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2014). Sher's account fails because not everyone can cope with contingency on their own and some cannot respond at all to the misfortunes that befall them without assistance. Not everyone has beliefs, plans, or aims, for instance, and sometimes there is nothing we can do to ensure that people can live their own lives effectively. So, one of my account's advantages is that it does not exclude the severely mentally ill, incredibly disadvantaged, or others irremediably ineffective people. Another is that it does it clearly commit one to particular views on abortion, infanticide, nor animal rights. What one will think about these topics depends on exactly how one thinks about personhood and our connections to those who are not obviously part of the human community. Animals and plants are, of course, subject to contingency and also participants in ecological forms of life that may have similarly great value. I discuss the grounds of moral personhood elsewhere: N. Kreuder, N. Hassoun, *The Minimally Good Life Account of Abortion's Permissibility*, in «Binghamton University Working Paper», 2022. <https://global-health-impact.org/nhassoun/papers.html>.

^[44] Again, I discuss the grounds of moral personhood elsewhere. See, for instance: N. Kreuder, N. Hassoun, *The Minimally Good Life Account of Abortion's Permissibility*, in «Binghamton University Working Paper», 2022. <https://global-health-impact.org/nhassoun/papers.html>.

^[45] Moreover, most people are subject to coercive rules over which they exercise limited control. So, the relationships at issue include (but are not limited to) political relations. These institutions are justified, in part, by the ways in which they help us live well enough together; they promote the common good and help us solve collective action problems.

^[46] Furthermore, we often survive these contingencies and can flourish under them, in part, because we all share a distinctively human form of life participating in different ways at different times in important relationships of care and concern. Each individuals' participation in sustaining our valuable human forms of existence, moreover, helps explain the importance of protecting our common humanity. If this is right, our common humanity merits respect, in part, because of its nature: we are needy, vulnerable, interdependent creatures who stand in important relationships of care and concern to others participating in our uniquely human moral community.

^[47] Even if I am wrong about this, the account's main advantage is the flip side of this limitation: Unlike the main alternatives, the account rightly justifies differential protections for different people. At the same time, the account can explain why people often require equal treatment: equal opportunity for participation in public life is plausibly important, for instance, for protecting our common humanity (in our political relationships). It is possible to add an additional requirement of respect for bodily integrity to the account if necessary. Moreover, other requirements of, or reasons besides, basic justice to protect bodily integrity beyond those I have outlined here may exist. People may, for instance, merit protections against standard threats to their ability to live well enough. And, if some very fortunate individual can suffer a natural loss of a body part (e.g. a finger) without any risk to their ability to live minimally well even for a time, perhaps policy makers should say that they should not require priority treatment when they can direct scarce medical to others who need them

to live well enough. (Though hopefully we will have enough to help all live much more than minimally good lives.) That said, I will continue to suppose the account can protect bodily integrity here, and argue below that reasonable care often requires providing much greater protection for bodily integrity to those who need it than many alternative accounts. It can explain, for instance, why a pianist may require even very expensive reconstructive hand surgery to continue to provide for her family without undue hardship, though surgery that restores basic function might suffice for most.

[48] At least, coercive institutions cannot threaten bodily integrity in any significant way, while at the same time protecting individuals' ability to live well enough. Even coercive institutions that only threaten to remove fingers for crimes, fail to guarantee subjects the security they need to flourish at all times.

[49] Many of the accounts it considers were not intended as accounts of basic justice but of related phenomena like beneficence or charity. So, I ask readers for some license here to consider whether they can provide plausible accounts of basic justice.

[50] J. Arthur, *Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code*, cit.

[51] J. Arthur, *Famine Relief and the Ideal Moral Code*, cit., pp. 885-891.

[52] Many other non-consequentialist theories are also troublingly minimal. Some hold rights-based views on which we have perfect discretion over how to use our bodies and property (J. Thomson, *A Defense of Abortion*, in *Biomedical Ethics and the Law*. Springer, Boston 1976, pp. 39-54; J. Lichtenberg, *Negative duties, positive duties, and the "new harms"*, in «Ethics» 120, no. 3, 2010, pp. 557-578). Others suggest that people have imperfect duties of beneficence that they can fulfill as they like (I. Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Translated by Lewis White Beck, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis 1959). Yet others maintain that morality cannot require we live altruistically focused, or even moral, lives (S. Wolf, *Moral Saints*, in «The Journal of Philosophy» 79, no. 8, 1982, pp. 419-439; B. Williams, *Ethics and the limits of Philosophy*, Routledge, Abingdon 2006). The amount of discretion people have on many of these accounts is troubling and they are too minimal if they entail that people can neglect to help others even in easy rescue cases (because potential benefactors claim discretionary rights over their bodies or property, insist that they can just decide to help others later, or want to pursue personal projects or help those closer to them). On the other hand, many consequentialist and egalitarian theories demand too much (and some also do not demand enough). Many consequentialists endorse something like Singer's view (P. Singer, *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*, cit.; G. Brock, *Global justice: A Cosmopolitan Account*, cit.). Some conclude that we must even give up parts of our bodies to save others from worse fates (P. Unger, *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence*, cit.). Such views fail to fulfill this paper's desiderata for an appropriately minimal theory (though I recognize that what one thinks of this fact will depend on what one thinks of the desiderata and I can only do so much here to motivate it). Perhaps surprisingly, many other varieties of consequentialism, like prioritarianism, fare no better. Prioritarianism demands that we sacrifice everything to help those who are less well off until we come down to the marginal level of prioritarian-weighted utility and, if it is not restricted, requires we do this even for those at a very high level of utility as long as our (weighted) utility is greater (I. Persson, *Prioritarianism*, in *International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, H. LaFollette (ed.), 2013). It is less clear that satisficing consequentialism will require too much; it may be plausible if one says an outcome is good enough if everyone only lives a minimally good life (M. Slote, P. Philip, *Satisficing consequentialism*, in «Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes», 58, 1984, pp. 139-176). But satisficing consequentialism, like most other consequentialist theories, might not demand enough (it depends on exactly what sufficiency requires). Similarly, progressive consequentialism, on which we must only do something to improve the world is too minimal – we might improve the world without saving a single life even when we could save the life without sacrificing anything significant at all (W. Sinnott-Armstrong, *Consequentialism*, in E. N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Winter 2015 Edition; D. Jamieson, R. Elliot, *Progressive Consequentialism*, In W. Sinnott-Armstrong. *Consequentialism*, cit.). Alternately, consider how egalitarian

theories of what we owe to others and can reasonably demand as a matter of basic justice may require too much. If one maintains that we should equalize welfare, capabilities, or resources in some space one may require us to aid others who are extremely well off. In “Inequality, Injustice and Levelling Down”, Thomas Christiano and Will Braynen suggest that we should aim to ensure for everyone the highest attainable equality (T. Christiano, W. Braynen, *Inequality, Injustice and Levelling Down*, in «Ratio» 21, 2008, pp. 392-420); this allows them to avoid the objection that we should sometimes promote equality by making some worse off (L. Temkin, *Inequality*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993). But even this view may be extremely demanding; we have to give up anything that promotes equality. Some may even have to sacrifice a great deal to help people who are extremely well-off attain great wealth or privilege (similar points apply to Rawls’ difference principle and many other forms of egalitarianism). On the other hand, even this view may not demand enough. People can (and may even have to) simply discard things that could help many people in desperate need if aiding them would create inequality and a higher equality is not attainable

^[53] L. Murphy, *Moral Demands in Non-ideal Theory*, cit.

^[54] L. Murphy, *Moral Demands in Non-ideal Theory*, cit., p. 80.

^[55] L. Murphy, *Moral Demands in Non-ideal Theory*, cit., pp. 74-101. At present, I can present only the broad outline of Murphy’s account. See Murphy op. cit. pp. 74 – 101 for the line of argument supporting these claims. It remains open to proponents of any of these accounts to reply that sacrificing more than they demand will undermine individuals’ ability to live well enough, and for some rare individuals that may be so, but most can live well enough even when making some significant sacrifices that go well beyond what it is fair to require them to provide.

^[56] G. Cullity, *The Moral Demands of Affluence*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004.

^[57] G. Cullity, *The Moral Demands of Affluence*, cit., pp. 129-130.

^[58] G. Cullity, *The Moral Demands of Affluence*, cit., pp. 143-145.

^[59] G. Cullity, *The Moral Demands of Affluence*, cit., pp. 147-150.

^[60] Cullity wants to say people are less blameworthy and may do less wrong if they neglect to give to aid organizations than if they fail to help someone right in front of them both because if they give to an organization, their action alone will make little difference and the need is more vivid when it is right in front of them. I am not convinced of either point but we can focus on a case where the person is at some remove and one must coordinate one’s actions with others in the present case.

^[61] Of course, if going into a particular career makes one miserable or undermines one’s ability to live a minimally good life for another reason, one would not have to do so but I believe many people could be happy with many different careers. Whether we can invest a great deal in our own children’s education when others’ abilities to live minimally well are at stake presumably also depends on what educational institutions are available – whether there are serious risks that our children will not be able to live minimally well without our investment.

^[62] It is much more plausible to insist that the world should not be such that people will be unable to live minimally well if others do not make such significant sacrifices. Ours, however, is a tragic world where millions preventably suffer and die young because they cannot access adequate food, water, shelter, or health care. So, if the scope of basic justice is global, it seems some significant sacrifices are required. However, better policies might rectify this problem (N. Kreuder, N. Hassoun, *The Minimally Good Life Account of Abortion’s Permissibility*, cit.; N. Hassoun, *Raz on the Right to Autonomy*, cit.).

^[63] Cullity says he is concerned with beneficence but as he sets up the project, he engages with those who think it is a matter of basic justice that we provide more aid. So, it seems apt to consider whether his view provides a more plausible account of what basic justice requires. Not everything that affects our quality of life or requires sacrificing an entitlement will undermine our ability to live well enough.

^[64] R. Miller, *Globalizing Justice: The Ethics of Poverty and Power*, cit., pp. 9-30.

[65] R. Miller, *The Ethics of Social Democracy*, in «[Workshop for Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy](#)», Syracuse University, Syracuse 2015, p. 15.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ivi, pp. 2-3.

[68] Ibid.

[69] R. Miller, *Globalizing Justice: The Ethics of Poverty and Power*, cit., 9-30.

[70] The MGL account does not fall prey to this problem. Someone who thinks that they cannot live a minimally good life without ever seeing Shakespeare or buying designer clothes is almost certainly wrong (even if they will have to learn to value differently when they can no longer access these things and that will take some time). For discussion, see N. Kreuder, N. Hassoun, *The Minimally Good Life Account of Abortion's Permissibility*, cit.

[71] N. Hassoun, *Sufficiency and the Minimally Good Life*, cit.; N. Hassoun, *Good Enough? The Minimally Good Life Account of the Basic Minimum*, cit.

[72] N. Hassoun, *Sufficiency and the Minimally Good Life*, cit.

[73] N. Hassoun, *Good Enough? The Minimally Good Life Account of the Basic Minimum*, cit.

[74] It may be impossible to fully articulate and defend any new proposal for what we owe to others and can justifiably demand as a matter of basic justice in a single essay. Still, I hope I have done enough to establish that this proposal is promising and merits further inquiry.