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## **Demandingness and Arguments from Presupposition**

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When moral philosophers first started talking of “the problem of demandingness”, they were referring to an alleged problem concerning how much is demanded of anyone attempting to do what certain moral theories claim is morally required of us.<sup>1</sup> Act-utilitarianism was the original target of this objection, and it was subsequently noticed that other theories seem to invite the same complaint.<sup>2</sup> Theories like this seem demanding in at least two different dimensions. The first dimension is their breadth: in requiring us to optimize outcomes, they apparently reach into every part of our lives, requiring us at every moment to do what is morally best. The other dimension of demandingness concerns their depth: most of us would (it seems) have to make deep sacrifices in our own welfare if we were to live up to the standards of altruism such theories apparently demand.

<sup>1</sup> I treat claims about whether an action is morally required of us as claims about whether it would be morally wrong for us not to do it.

<sup>2</sup> Other, non-utilitarian versions of consequentialism have been the object of most of this discussion; but similar points have been made about Kantian moral theories by Bernard Williams, “Persons, Character and Morality”, and about T.M. Scanlon’s contractualism by Elizabeth Ashford, “The Demandingness of Scanlon’s Contractualism”.

More recently, it has been recognized that there is a problem that needs to be addressed by any moral outlook (whether it calls itself a “theory” or not) which finds a substantial place for requirements of beneficence. Beneficence (I stipulate, in line with widespread philosophical usage) is appropriately furthering the welfare of others, from that motive. On most views of morality, beneficence forms a central part of it, and generates moral requirements: there are some beneficent actions which it is wrong not to do. Perhaps the most obvious of these are actions in which a very needy person could be helped greatly at insignificant cost. However, once one accepts this simple point the pervasiveness of one’s apparent opportunities to help others greatly in a world in which there are so many needy people, and such ready resources enabling us to help them at a distance, again raises the prospect of an extremely demanding conclusion.

I shall give a fuller account of this problem, and describe my own preferred response to it, shortly. However, as I have done so at length elsewhere, that will not be the main aim of the current paper.

Instead, the enquiry I pursue here takes off from the following line of thought. The two ways of raising a problem of demandingness mentioned so far – as a problem for particular moral theories that see morality as requiring the impartial promotion of welfare, and as a problem for *any* moral outlook that recognizes seemingly “common sense” requirements of beneficence – are essentially applications of the same thought. How, once we recognize that there are moral requirements to promote others’ welfare, can we produce a satisfactory justification for limiting those requirements in a way

that allows us to pursue the ingredients of our own welfare?<sup>3</sup> “Welfarist” theories, act-utilitarianism prominent amongst them, make the impartial promotion of welfare the foundation for the whole of morality, and in doing so confront this problem in an especially obvious way. But all plausible moral outlooks make the promotion of others’ welfare at least a *part* of morality, and thus they face the same problem.

It might therefore be thought that there is just one problem of demandingness for morality: a problem about the promotion of welfare. The aim of this paper is to challenge that picture. I shall argue for two main conclusions. First, there is more than one problem of demandingness for morality. I shall illustrate this by discussing a pluralistic theory of morality – one that derives moral requirements from more than one fundamental source. The particular pluralistic theory I discuss is one that sees moral requirements as deriving from three different sources – the sources of what I shall call “the morality of concern”, “the morality of respect” and “the morality of cooperation”. The first of these generates requirements to promote the welfare of others; the second is the source of requirements to respect others’ equal entitlements to exercise their autonomous agency; and the third gives us those moral requirements that govern our participation together in joint activities.

I shall not try to convince you that the whole of morality derives from these three sources (although I confess to being attracted to that idea). I shall say a little in the next section to explain the attraction of thinking that there are three distinct sources of moral requirements. However, my current purposes can be fulfilled without

<sup>3</sup> I talk of “pursuing the ingredients of our own welfare”, rather than just “pursuing our own welfare”, to acknowledge the point that our pursuit of many of the things that do benefit us – fulfilling friendships, for example – are not motivated by the desire to secure a benefit for ourselves. On this point, see T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, Ch.3.

convincing you of either of those things. It will be enough that you accept that the morality of respect and the morality of cooperation are parts of morality along with the morality of concern. And most people do accept this, even if they subscribe to a monistic theory that would derive two of them from the third. My claim will be that the morality of respect and the morality of cooperation generate their own problems of demandingness, which need to be answered alongside the more familiar problem associated with the morality of concern.

That will be my first conclusion. The second will be that each of these problems has an answer. The three problems have a parallel form, and they also have a parallel solution. The solution, in each case, comes from what I shall call “an argument from presupposition”. I shall try to show that this kind of argument is an important resource for reasoned moral justification.<sup>4</sup>

### **I: Three Sources of Moral Demands**

Most of us think of morality as including three things. Moral philosophy offers us a range of different views about their relationship to each other.

<sup>4</sup> By “reasoned moral justification”, I mean moral justification that consists in the identification and explicit formulation of reasons. I do not think that this is the only kind of moral justification. I think a good moral judge can be justified in thinking that something is the thing to do, without being able to articulate the reason that counts in its favour, just as a skilled socialite can be justified in thinking that a certain action is the way to put guests at ease, without being able to articulate the reasons that make that true.

The first of these things I call “the morality of concern”. I use this label to cover the various ways in which we ought to respond to the welfare of others. By others’ “welfare”, I mean what is good or bad for them – what benefits or harms them. The most obvious parts of the morality of concern, then, are helping others to get what is good for them and avoid what is bad, and not harming them or preventing them from getting goods – that is, beneficence and non-maleficence. These are the most obvious parts of the morality of concern, but not the only ones. When you cannot help other people, there can be other things you ought to do, like expressing your solidarity with them or at least feeling sympathy with them; these are part of the morality of concern too.

I find “the morality of concern” a convenient label to cover this first topic, but it ought to come with a disclaimer. I do not mean to imply that the knowledge of others’ welfare should always prompt feelings of sympathetic concern. Rather, whatever *are* the ways in which we ought to respond to the welfare of others, they are what I am referring to as “the morality of concern”.

Next, “the morality of respect” comprises the ways in which we ought to respect others’ autonomous deliberation and agency, taking proper account of their rights and dignity. There are various ways in which we ought to do those things, and at least at first glance they do not coincide with a concern for people’s welfare. They include respecting entitlements to decline needed help, to pursue projects that are misguided or involve personal sacrifice, and to refuse to be used in the service of others’ welfare. The morality of respect thus prominently includes various negative obligations of non-interference with others’ autonomous projects. Respecting others also includes discharging those positive obligations to respect the rights conferred through voluntary acts of commitment. And, more debatably, it may be thought to include a

range of positive obligations to secure for others the conditions in which autonomous deliberation and agency can be fully exercised.<sup>5</sup>

A third group of requirements and expectations that most of us think of as part of morality is “the morality of cooperation”. This comprises the ways in which we ought to treat each other as partners in a common project. As a member of a group that is cooperating to further a goal, I ought to play my part in exerting myself alongside the other members of the group, and I ought not to take advantage of the cooperative-spiritedness of others by exploiting them. Again, first appearances suggest that these requirements go beyond the morality of concern and respect. What is required of me as a partner in a joint project with you is not that I further your welfare, nor that I respect your entitlement to conduct independent projects of your own. It is that I work together with you to a common purpose.

The moralities of concern, respect and cooperation encompass the reasons that govern three different kinds of relationship we bear to others. The morality of respect governs our relationship to others who are our equals as bearers of the capacity for autonomous deliberation and agency. The morality of concern governs our relationship to others not as agents but as patients, who stand to be affected for better or worse by us: it calls upon us to respond to them as bearers of welfare. The morality of cooperation governs our relationship to others as partners, combining our agency in collective action: it calls upon us to respond to them as co-agents in the performance of a common project.

<sup>5</sup> On this last point, see e.g. James Griffin, “Welfare Rights”, and Jeremy Waldron, “The Role of Rights in Practical Reasoning: ‘Rights’ versus ‘Needs’”.

First impressions are that the moralities of concern, respect and cooperation do not coincide. Of course, first impressions might be misleading. Perhaps, according to the best explanation of the moral norms that we are really justified in following, these three sets of norms – or at least, the parts of them that stand up to scrutiny – do coincide. Indeed, three of the most powerful schools of thought in normative moral theory – welfarist, neo-Kantian and contractualist theories respectively – are guided by the aim of showing that this is so. Theories of these three kinds attempt to show how the whole of morality can be derived from one of these three sources.

However, this is not the place to join that debate. My goal will be to show that, alongside the familiar “problem of demandingness” associated with the morality of concern, there are two others that are also generated by the morality of respect and cooperation. And all that seems to be required in order to make this significant is that each of the three groups of norms I have just referred to is indeed a part of morality. I shall proceed on the safe assumption that any plausible moral outlook – monistic or pluralistic – should accept *that*.

## **II: Demandingness and the Morality of Concern**

Beneficence does not make up the whole of what I am calling the morality of concern, but it forms its core. The first, familiar problem of demandingness for us to consider is a problem about the demands of beneficence. When we consider those situations in which beneficent action seems not simply to be a good idea, but to be morally *required* (that is, its non-performance seems morally wrong), we confront a very simple explanation of why that is so. If someone desperately needs help that I could

easily provide and I fail to provide it, the natural explanation to give of why this is wrong draws attention to the great disparity between the extents to which his interests will be compromised if I do not help him and mine will be compromised if I do. When selfishness takes this form, it is morally wrong.

A further diagnosis is offered by those forms of welfarist consequentialism which claim that the right thing to do is always what best promotes overall welfare, when each person's interests are given impartial consideration. If what morality requires of us is the impartial promotion of welfare, then that explains why my failure to save a life at trivial cost to me is wrong. But it also seems to imply that almost all forms of pursuit of my own interests are wrong given that, almost always, there are others worse off than me who would derive a greater benefit if I helped them instead.

Theories of this kind therefore generate a problem of demandingness in a very obvious way. However, you do not need to accept such a theory in order to think that there are requirements of beneficence in the kind of stark situation just described. *Any* sensible moral outlook should accept that when I can directly meet someone's desperate need at little cost – can easily save his life, for example – I can be morally required to do so. And this already seems enough to raise a problem of demandingness. For in the world we now inhabit, we are in a situation of this stark kind, continually. It is not just that, for most of the efforts I make in pursuing my own interests, there will be some way of diverting them which could better promote overall welfare. Rather, it seems that I could almost always be doing something equivalent to saving a life at tiny personal cost. Although the cost of each such action might be trivial, there are so many desperately needy people in the world that iterating this requirement would impose a total cost that is very high.



One response to this challenge is to question the empirical assumptions on which it relies – assumptions about the effects that my donations to aid agencies will have in helping people.<sup>6</sup> Another is to make the case for attaching direct moral significance to the differences between saving someone’s life yourself and supporting organized efforts to help people at a distance.<sup>7</sup> However, to many people, it seems that there is a deeper and more important reply. Any morality we can have reason to accept must be one that allows us to lead full and fulfilling lives – lives that are open to and directed towards the goods that make for a flourishing human existence: the personal relationships, forms of endeavour and self-expression that define us as individuals and make life worth living.<sup>8</sup>

The difficulty, though, is to formulate this intuitively appealing thought in a form that does not lead to further problems and implausibilities. A natural way to try to formulate this response is as the claim that we are justified in weighting our own interests more highly than those of others.<sup>9</sup> To do so is, of course, to allow us to act from attitudes of partiality towards the things that make up our own welfare, pursuing them when we could instead have promoted the welfare of others to a greater degree. But it is argued that this kind of partiality is itself impartially acceptable – it is a kind

<sup>6</sup> For discussion, see Garrett Cullity, *The Moral Demands of Affluence*, Ch.3.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. F.M. Kamm, “Does Distance Matter Morally to the Duty to Rescue?”. For a reply, see *The Moral Demands of Affluence*, Ch.2.

<sup>8</sup> This is itself often offered as a justification for attaching significance to the difference between helping others directly in an emergency that picks me out as being required to help and indirectly responding to the need I could always go out of my way to find, somewhere in the world. See e.g. Colin McGinn, “Saint Elsewhere”, and David Schmitz, “Islands in a Sea of Obligation”, p.686.

<sup>9</sup> See Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism*, Ch.3.

of partiality that each of us has good reason to endorse for others – and that this makes it morally acceptable.<sup>10</sup>

However, this way of formulating the response will not help us. At best, it could provide a way of distancing oneself from the problem of demandingness generated by welfarist consequentialism: it is after all inconsistent with thinking that the right thing to do is what best promotes overall welfare, impartially considered.<sup>11</sup> However, the problem of demandingness we need to address arises independently of this kind of consequentialist theory. For that challenge arises for anyone who *accepts* that each of us is morally permitted to grant much more weight to her own interests than she does to those of other people. All it requires is that when the cost to me of helping is trivial and the cost to someone else of not being helped is catastrophic, I am morally required to help. Provided only that any weighting I give to my own interests is consistent with this claim, iterating that requirement when there are many people I could help will yield an overall demand on me that is extreme.

As a response to the problem of demandingness raised by the morality of concern, the thought that it cannot be wrong to refuse to empty my life of personal fulfilment in order to enhance those of others retains its intuitive appeal. However, it will not solve that problem when formulated as a view about the permissibility of

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Nagel, *Equality and Partiality*, pp.15-17 and Ch.5 characterizes this approach to impartiality – asking how much partiality is impartially acceptable – as a Kantian one. (He does not advocate the weighting suggestion described earlier in the paragraph.)

<sup>11</sup> “At best”, since this suggestion also raises a series of further problems, such as the ones Shelly Kagan has emphasized concerning how such a view can accommodate moral options and constraints. See Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality*.

giving a preferential weighting to one's own interests. It needs to be formulated in a different way. My own proposal follows shortly.

### **III: Demandingness and the Morality of Respect**

First, however, we should take a closer look at the morality of respect and the morality of cooperation. These generate their own problems of demandingness too.

The morality of respect, as I have characterized it, involves the recognition of reasons not to interfere with others' exercise of their own capacities for autonomous deliberation and agency. Moral *requirements* of respect will apply to me when an action that interferes with someone else in this way fails to take adequate account of those reasons. But when is that? Just when should my pursuit of my own autonomously chosen ends be restricted in order to respect others' entitlement to pursue theirs?

Here is an initial, modest-looking and plausible suggestion. Minimal restrictions on my own ability to exercise my capacities for autonomous deliberation and agency – my freedoms, let us call them – can be required in order to protect others' freedoms against great curtailments. This looks obviously reasonable, and it is easy to see why we should think of it as an appropriate way of giving expression to the idea that we should respect each other as autonomous equals. Requirements not to act on my desire to drive my car at its top speed in busy streets, make deafening noise all night, and release toxic chemicals into the water supply, are obviously constraints that a respect for others as autonomous equals makes reasonable. I can hardly complain about being subjected to such restrictions if others' freedoms would be curtailed far more

drastically by allowing me to do these things. It therefore makes sense to complain that I am failing to take adequate account of the reasons of respect that count against doing these things, if the extent to which my own freedom is compromised in not doing them is relatively slight.

However, this modest-looking principle is again sufficient to generate a problem of demandingness. The repeated application of this principle to every situation in which it is capable of application would result in an accumulation of small constraints that would, overall, produce a curtailment of personal liberties far greater than most of us would find tolerable. Our freedom to drive polluting cars greatly restricts the freedoms of those who are hyper-sensitive to our exhaust fumes. Our freedom to throng the streets forces people who hate crowds to stay indoors. My choosing to compete for a job against someone with far fewer alternative opportunities may result in his suffering from a great restriction in his pursuit of his autonomous plans. And so on. Accepting a constraint on any one of these freedoms would not be a significant imposition, and would greatly enhance the freedoms of others. But subjecting myself to a constraint under *all* of the indefinitely many respects in which this is true would result in an overall constriction of my freedoms that seems highly undesirable.<sup>12</sup>

This problem is different from the more familiar problem that arises for the morality of concern. It is not a problem concerning the conferring of large *benefits* on

<sup>12</sup> It is tempting to say that exercising my freedom in these various ways is not *interfering* with others, unlike the earlier examples of making deafening noises and releasing toxic chemicals into the water supply. If I drive to work and you have to avoid the fumes from my car, I am not interfering with you, but just going about my ordinary business. However, that begs the question: it simply expresses the conclusion that there is an entitlement in the latter kind of case but not the former. The question is how to justify that conclusion.

others at small personal cost; rather, it concerns the respects in which the *freedoms* of others stand to be greatly affected by the imposition of small constraints on people like me. However, the parallel structure of the problem is obvious – it derives a large overall restriction on me from the iteration of a requirement that I accept a small one. It therefore makes sense to ask whether the two problems have a parallel solution.

It might seem obvious how to deal with this issue. If respect for each other requires us to extend equal entitlements to exercise autonomous agency, then (as classical liberalism tells us) the most we can justify is extending to each person a protection of the greatest possible liberty compatible with an equal liberty for all. This explains why we cannot sensibly extend to anyone a morally protected liberty to make an aggressive nuisance of himself, indulging his own desires in a way that severely impinges on the freedoms of others. But it also explains why the constraints on our liberties cannot sensibly be accumulated to the point at which those liberties are drastically curtailed overall. For that is not consistent with maximizing liberty either.

However, this reply does not work. What this “liberty principle” instructs us to do is to maximize the amount of liberty enjoyed by the person with the least. But the problem is that some people’s liberties are very drastically curtailed by our exercising those we take for granted. If we really were to maximize the amount of liberty enjoyed by the person with the least, the rest of us would have much less of it.

Is this wrong? We cannot simply assume so. We have to consider an analogue of the position taken by those who endorse an extremely demanding conclusion concerning the requirements imposed by the morality of concern. We might wish that the liberties we currently take for granted were morally defensible; but there is no guarantee that morality is comfortable. If there is a response to this, though, it will

have to come from some other argument: an appeal to the “liberty principle” will not help us.

Nor will it help simply to talk of weighing reasons of respect against reasons of self-interest. For, again, this kind of reply does not begin to explain what is wrong with the iterative argument that leads to the problem. That argument allows us to *accept* that I cannot be required to constrain my own freedom significantly for the sake of respecting the freedoms of others. The problem is that if we accept only that an insignificant constraint on my freedom can be required of me for the sake of avoiding a great curtailment of the freedom of others, iterating this requirement leads to a great cumulative demand. What needs to be explained is why we should not treat these requirements in the iterative way. Simply appealing to the relative strengths of reasons of self-interest and respect does not do that.

#### **IV: Demandingness and the Morality of Cooperation**

The reasons I have for helping you to further your welfare and to respect your autonomy do not rely on our being co-participants in some cooperative joint activity. There is a further set of reasons that govern our participation in common projects – both when and how we ought to participate in them – and these provide the topic of the morality of cooperation. On the view of the morality of cooperation that I favour, its most fundamental component is this: facts about what we collectively ought to be doing are reasons for me to contribute to our doing so.

However, that is simply a claim about the existence of reasons. How do we get from this to the existence of a moral *requirement* to cooperate? Sometimes the failure

to contribute to a collective action is morally wrong: most of us think of at least some cases of “free riding” that way. But in other circumstances, although there is a reason to join in a collective action, choosing not to act on it seems not to be morally wrong. If there is a political rally in support of an important cause this weekend, but it clashes with a concert I have been looking forward to all year, I am not morally required to cancel the concert – or so it seems. There is something that counts in favour of cancelling it, but I can choose not to act on that reason without acting morally wrongly. But what explains the difference between these cases? Why does the reason give rise to a requirement in the first case but not the second?

In relation to the morality of concern and respect, we answered the corresponding question by looking at the disparity between reasons of different kinds. When the reasons of concern that favour helping someone are very strong and the reasons of self-interest for not doing so are comparatively weak, failing to help is wrong: it takes inadequate account of the reasons for helping. And when the reasons of respect that count against interfering with someone’s freedom are very strong and the reasons for exercising one’s own freedom in not doing so are comparatively weak, interfering is wrong: it takes inadequate account of the reasons against interfering. It is natural, then, to consider the parallel suggestion for the morality of cooperation. This is that when a group ought to be pursuing a certain aim, and the reasons to make contributions of a given kind to the group’s aim are very strong, but the reasons to further my own aims instead are comparatively weak, non-cooperation is wrong. This disparity, it is natural to claim, will explain why we should think that non-cooperation takes inadequate account of the reasons that favour joining in, just as the corresponding disparities will explain the wrongness of conspicuous failures of beneficence or respect.

This suggestion compares the strengths of reasons of two different kinds: reasons to make contributions of a given kind to the aims of a group, and reasons to further my own aims instead. Reasons of the first kind can be thought of as influenced by two factors. The first is the importance of the group's aim. Thus, there is more reason to oppose an unjust war than to keep the neighbourhood park tidy. The second is how far that aim is furthered by contributions of a given type. The question here is not how far *my* joining in will further the group's aim: the answer to this may be, To no perceptible degree at all. Rather, the question is how far it is furthered by contributions of this type. If we only have a functioning public transport system because people pay their fares, then contributions of that type – paying the required fare – are essential to it. But some practices are ineffectual at meeting their aims (badly organized lobbying campaigns, for example) and some contributions are inessential to collective actions' meeting their aims (thus, we do not rely on individuals to volunteer to pick up others' litter in order to keep the streets clean).

This proposal has intuitive appeal and, at least at first sight, it appears to draw the distinction between cases of morally required and morally optional cooperation in a plausible place. Not free riding on public transport is morally required, since this action is essential to the institution's meeting its aim, and the reasons for me to ride without paying (rather than either paying or not riding) are relatively weak.<sup>13</sup> But it will be plausible to think that missing my concert to attend the political rally is not morally required, if the rally itself is unlikely to effect political change, and anyway the success of the rally does not require people to miss events of personal importance

<sup>13</sup> It is an implication of my view that free riding is less wrong when performed by those whose (morally legitimate) aims are very difficult to achieve without it – for example, those who have no feasible alternative means of transport, and for whom it is very difficult to pay.



to attend it. It is true that, on this way of thinking about the requirements of cooperation, there will also be many cases whose moral status is not clear. But that is not implausible either. Writing a letter to complain about the government's immigration detention policy is inconvenient, when I have other demands on my time. The letter-writing campaign is unlikely to change government policy. But on the other hand, we ought to be protesting about it, and that requires people to speak out, as some are doing. So: the contribution is required for the aim of the collective action to be achieved, and the aim is important; but the collective action is unlikely to achieve that aim, and the contribution, although not seriously costly, is inconvenient. Morally required, or not? The answer to that is not obvious – but this arguably supports the plausibility of this account further. For it makes unobvious something that *is* unobvious; and it also makes its moral status depend on factors that do seem to be the relevant ones to think about.

This way of thinking about the requirements of cooperation, then, seems to share the plausibility of the parallel accounts of the requirements of concern and respect. However, it also seems to give rise to a parallel problem of demandingness.

Once more, that problem concerns the demands that are generated by the repeated application of this suggested requirement. After all, there is a vast number of collective projects that ought to be conducted by groups of which I can naturally be regarded as a member, and which are being conducted thanks to the efforts of others. Some of them are ones that we conduct through the agency of the government, and I can claim to be contributing to them as a taxpayer. But there are many other things that we ought, all things considered, to be doing in addition to this (for some “we” that includes me). There are projects of welfare support, education, artistic endeavour, scientific investigation, advocacy, reconciliation, and so on, all of which we ought all

things considered to be taking forward – where “we” covers the society of which I am a member. There are also many projects that make sense simply on grounds of collective prudence – for the things that we ought collectively to do, and that thereby generate reasons to cooperate, include actions of collective prudence. Not free riding on public transport is one example of this; but so is contributing to sustainable consumption and a clean environment. For each of these worthy projects, the cost of making the kind of contribution that keeps the collective action going may be small. But if so, the proposal that has just been made apparently carries the implication that I am morally required to contribute to *all* of them. And the problem is that that would leave me with no time left for a life of my own.

Again, this might seem to invite an obvious reply. No doubt, there are many different collective ends we ought to be pursuing. But one of them, surely, is to create the conditions in which individual flourishing is possible. Having a society in which everyone is fully devoted to serving worthy collective projects is no more desirable than having a society in which everyone is fully devoted to serving others’ welfare, or to avoiding restrictions on the liberties of others. But if facilitating individual flourishing is something we ought collectively to be supporting, then I ought to be joining in our collectively doing that. So any requirement on me to join in the many other worthy collective projects that different people are pursuing is at best an “imperfect” moral requirement. I am perhaps morally required to join in some of them, at my discretion; but the importance of our preserving the conditions in which it is possible to live a flourishing life means that this requirement must be limited.

However, once more, this reply fails. It attempts to derive a limit on the requirements generated by the morality of cooperation without challenging the idea that those requirements arise from the reasons there are for individuals to contribute to

what we all ought to be doing. But if this idea is retained, merely adding that facilitating individual flourishing is an end we ought collectively to pursue does not generate a permission for me to limit the collective projects to which I contribute. On the contrary, all it could do is to impose a further (perfect) *requirement* on me: a requirement to contribute to our facilitating this.

The problem is not resolved, either, by appealing to the idea that we should balance reasons of cooperation against reasons of self-interest in order to determine when it is wrong not to cooperate. That balancing has been done when we judge that strong reasons of cooperation, accompanied by relatively weak reasons not to cooperate, generate moral requirements. The extremely demanding conclusion is generated by starting from this thought, and then iterating the requirements that it generates. The idea that moral requirements are generated when reasons of cooperation strongly outweigh reasons of self-interest is (when approached iteratively) what *creates* the problem of demandingness, not what solves it. In order to solve this problem, we need an explanation of what is wrong with this approach.

No doubt, the next response that this invites is that we have been given an excellent reason to reject the proposal that I have described concerning the moral requirements of cooperation. However, I shall argue that that is wrong too.<sup>14</sup> This third problem of demandingness does have a solution – a solution of the same form as the ones that can be given to our first two problems.

## **V: Interests, Freedoms and Collective Aims**

<sup>14</sup> I shall not try to defend it against the various further objections that might be raised against it. For a broader discussion, see Garrett Cullity, "Moral Free Riding" and "Public Goods and Fairness".

In setting out that solution, the place to begin is with a general observation about the three groups of moral requirements I have identified.

According to the picture I have presented, people's interests can give us reasons to do what furthers them, people's freedoms can give us reasons to do what respects them, and people's collective aims can give us reasons to join in collective actions directed towards those aims. Moral requirements to do these things arise when the only way to take adequate account of those reasons is to act on them.

Sometimes, however, acting on such reasons is wrong. For example, your interest in having something might be an interest in having what it is morally wrong to have. If you are cold, it may be in your interests to receive a warm coat. But if it is someone else's property, it might be wrong, all things considered, for you to have the coat.

In this case, there remains *a* reason in favour of your having the coat.<sup>15</sup> But if your having it is wrong (all things considered), then this is a reason on which you should not be acting. Taking adequate account of *all* the reasons bearing on the situation, including the facts concerning the owner's entitlements, means not acting to further your interest in having the coat. You only take adequate account of the reasons bearing on the situation if you do not act on this one. In this sense, your interest is not a morally acceptable reason for you to act on. But if that is right, it cannot be a morally acceptable reason for *me* to act on either. If it is wrong for you to further your own interest, it could only be right for me to further your interest if there is some

<sup>15</sup> In *The Moral Demands of Affluence*, p.138, I erroneously say that "interests in having what it is morally unacceptable for you to have... are the wrong kind of interests to count morally in favour of the actions that promote them." This seems to me a counterexample to that claim.

morally relevant difference between us. And if there is a morally relevant difference between us, it must consist in some *further* feature of the situation that provides me with a reason to do what benefits you. The fact that your interests will be advanced by receiving something cannot itself provide me with a morally acceptable reason for giving it to you if it does not provide you with a morally acceptable reason for having it.

A similar point applies to the freedoms we ought to respect. There are freedoms that it is wrong for you to exercise, and when that is true, the fact that an action of mine would respect your freedom cannot itself be a good reason for morally requiring me to perform that action.

For example, consider your freedom to run away and abandon your young children. Perhaps there is *a* reason to do this, but taking morally adequate account of all the reasons bearing on the situation requires you not to do it. To an action like this, a similar argument to the one concerning interests applies. In a case of this kind, taking morally adequate account of all the relevant reasons requires you not to do X. The reasons that favour your doing X are not morally acceptable reasons on which to act. Thus, *that it will facilitate your doing X* is not a morally acceptable reason for you to act on. And if not, then that same fact – *that it will facilitate your doing X* – cannot be a morally acceptable reason for me to act on either. There may be *other* reasons that count in favour of my not interfering with your freedom to X. But the fact that it will allow you to do X is not itself a morally acceptable reason for me to act. And if not, it cannot be a good reason for requiring me to respect your freedom to X.

In a similar way, when a collective aim is morally wrong, our having that aim cannot be a good reason for me to support our collectively acting in pursuit of that aim. Nothing has been said here to rule out the possibility of a collective action which

is morally wrong but which we still ought, all things considered, to perform. However, if there are any collective actions of this kind, I cannot be morally required to contribute towards them. If our collective aim is an aim the pursuit of which is morally wrong, then that means the reasons for us to pursue it are not reasons on which it is morally acceptable for us to act. And if not, then they cannot provide morally acceptable reasons for me to join in.

So we arrive at three parallel conclusions for the interests, freedoms and collective aims a person can be morally required to further, respect or support. Putting those three conclusions together, what has been argued so far is this. Neither an interest in having what it is wrong for you to have, nor a freedom that it is wrong for you to exercise, nor a collective aim that it is wrong for us to pursue, can provide a good reason for requiring me to fulfil that interest, respect that freedom or support that aim.

This claim should not be confused with other, stronger and less plausible ones. It is not being claimed that I can never be required to act in a way that helps you do something morally wrong; nor that I cannot be required to respect your entitlement to do what is wrong; nor even that I cannot be morally required to join in an immoral collective action. For the latter case: consider those who work to undermine an evil system, or to help its victims, from within. Much of what Oskar Schindler did towards the end of his life can be described in that way. In collaborating with his SS friends, he was joining in a collective activity that was immoral. But doing that was required in order to save many people's lives, and that plausibly meant that what he was doing was at least morally acceptable, and perhaps even morally required. In this kind of situation, there could be a moral requirement to join in an immoral collective action. But that would have to be because there was some *further*, morally acceptable reason

for joining in. The aims of the immoral collective action could not themselves be offered as a good reason for requiring an individual to join in.

The claim I am making, then, concerns the *reasons* that can count in favour of moral requirements. That it would further your interest in doing X, facilitate your doing X, or contribute towards our doing X cannot itself be a good reason for morally requiring me to do so if X is an action that is morally wrong.

This might seem obvious enough to raise the question how it could be of any help in dealing with our three problems of demandingness. Let me now explain how I think it provides us with the materials to do that.

## **VI: An Argument from the Presuppositions of Beneficence**

In response to each of these problems, I shall use a distinctive style of argument: I call it an “argument from presupposition”. The problem of demandingness described above, I shall argue, is met by an argument from the presuppositions of beneficence. The aim of this argument is to show that, in recognizing requirements of beneficence we commit ourselves to presuppositions that establish limits to those requirements.<sup>16</sup>

The problem of demandingness for the morality of concern begins by assuming such obvious judgements as that we can be morally required to save a person’s life when the personal cost is small. Your interest in having your life saved can ground (that is, provide sufficient reason for) a moral requirement on me to help you.

<sup>16</sup> I do not claim to have invented this kind of argument. For its use by Kant and Bernard Williams, see *The Moral Demands of Affluence*, Section 6.6. For a fuller presentation of the argument of the current section, see Ch.8.

However, the previous section showed us that this carries a presupposition about the moral status of the content of that interest. Your interest in having your life saved can only ground a requirement on me to save it as long as it is not an interest in getting something it is morally wrong for you to have. In almost all cases, that presupposition will hold true. Even if you are thoroughly evil, your interest in continuing to live is unlikely itself to be an interest in getting something it is morally wrong to have.<sup>17</sup>

It is uncontentious that a person's interest in having his life saved can ground a requirement of beneficence on me to help him in this way. But next, notice that it is equally uncontentious that there is a range of other goods that can ground requirements of beneficence on us – the requirements that those of us who do not spend our days saving people's lives actually respond to. There are interests in enjoyments, fulfilments, achievements, personal relationships and self-improvement of various kinds that can ground requirements of beneficence on me. If I could easily pass you a piece of information that will help you with a lifelong project or reunite you with a dear friend but I can't be bothered to do so, then that could be wrong in just the same way (though no doubt not to the same extent) as failing to save your life would be: the disparity between what is at stake for you and what is at stake for me makes this a failure of beneficence. Indeed, as far as I can see, the same could be true

<sup>17</sup> The only exception to this would be if your *only* interest in continuing to live were to do things that were morally wrong. I find it difficult to imagine any convincing cases to illustrate that possibility. But if that were true, there would indeed on my view be no reason of beneficence to save your life. There might be some other reason – maybe we should respect human life itself by always saving it where we can. But I do think that the fact that *it is good for you* to have your life saved would not a morally good reason for saving you if it were only good for you as a means to doing what is morally bad.



if all that is at stake is that you will miss your flight, which will be annoying but will not have any longer-term impact on your welfare.

Thus, there are interests in many other goods – beyond the good of life itself – that uncontentiously ground moral requirements on me to help others. Its being good for you to be helped to secure a range of different goods clearly provides me with reasons to help you, and my failure to respond to those reasons when the cost of responding is small can be morally wrong, in the way that all failures of beneficence are morally wrong. Notice, moreover, the plausibility of saying that these further goods – the ones that provide the substance of a life that it is good for you to live – are themselves goods *for the sake of which* it is in your interests to have your life saved. There may be reasons other than reasons of beneficence for saving a person’s life. But my reasons of *beneficence* for saving your life – the reasons given by your *interests* in having your life saved – are grounded in the further goods that *give* you an interest in having your life saved.<sup>18</sup>

This now gives us the materials we need for a response to our first problem of demandingness. According to the principle defended in Section V, your interest in having or doing something can only ground a moral requirement on me to help you to get it or do it as long as it is not morally wrong for you to have or do that thing. But the range of moral requirements of beneficence we actually recognize – up to and including requirements to save lives – are requirements grounded in people’s interests in pursuing the range of goods that make a life good for the person who lives it. This

<sup>18</sup> I leave open the possibility that mere continued existence is itself intrinsically beneficial to a person. The claim is that, whether or not that is true, having your life saved is also obviously beneficial to you for the sake of the other intrinsic goods that a well-lived life can contain.

presupposes that their pursuit of those goods is not wrong. And that could only be true if the pursuit of those same goods by *me* is not wrong.<sup>19</sup>

I shall not attempt here the lengthier task of explaining how this helps us to say what the limits of beneficence *are*.<sup>20</sup> Suffice it to say that if this argument succeeds, it implies that, for all those ways in which interests in the pursuit of personal fulfilment do ground requirements of beneficence on us to help others, pursuing fulfilment in those ways must be morally permissible.

Enough has now been said to show that the argument described in Section II, purporting to generate extremely demanding implications for the morality of concern, cannot be right. That argument purports to start from uncontroversial judgements about the requirements of beneficence, and show what those judgements commit us to. However, those judgements presuppose the moral permissibility of our pursuing interests in personal fulfilment. So we cannot retain those judgements, and extrapolate from them to the conclusion that pursuing those interests is morally impermissible. It must be a mistake, then, to iterate demands of beneficence to an extent that is incompatible with our pursuing such interests. This is not an objection to the idea that

<sup>19</sup> It is true that the extremely demanding view against which I am arguing does not say that my pursuit of my own fulfilment is *in itself* wrong: only that it happens to be wrong for me to do this when I inhabit a world populated by desperately needy people. But that does not affect the argument from presupposition presented here. Suppose I could help you to break a serious promise, which it will be uncomfortable to keep but wrong to break. Your interest in obtaining comfort for yourself cannot ground a requirement of beneficence on me to help you, because the way in which you are pursuing that interest happens to be wrong. But seeking your own comfort is not in itself wrong. What is presupposed by requirement-grounding interests is just that they are interests the pursuit of which is in fact morally permissible.

<sup>20</sup> See Cullity, *The Moral Demands of Affluence*, Chapters 9 and 10 for my attempt to do that.

failing to help you substantially at trivial personal cost is wrong. But it is an objection to the idea that, by repeatedly applying that idea, I can be required to constrain my own pursuit of those very interests that ground the requirement on me to help others. We should reject this iterative approach and accept instead an “aggregative” approach to the requirements of beneficence. When the *overall* cost of responding to others’ needs is substantial – substantial enough that others could be morally required to help me to avoid it – I can justifiably refuse to sustain that cost in helping others. I can justifiably think like this because thinking in the iterative way would commit me to a kind of life I can defensibly refuse to lead.

I have talked about what is presupposed by the “uncontentious” judgements we make about the requirements of beneficence. Let me be clear: I am not claiming to have vindicated those judgements. An argument from presupposition cannot do that. This discussion does therefore leave open the possibility that there is another argument that might be given for challenging judgements about the requirements of beneficence that we take for granted. However, it gives us a compelling response to the problem of demandingness outlined in Section II. *That* argument tried to start from uncontroversial judgements about what beneficence clearly does demand, and work from there to an extremely demanding conclusion. But what we have found is that judgements about what beneficence does demand themselves presuppose other judgements about what it does *not* demand. So we cannot get from this starting-point to an extremely demanding conclusion. Strikingly, this way of arguing that beneficence requires a lot more from us than we take for granted turns out to carry the implication that it also requires a lot *less* from us than we ordinarily suppose.

## **VII: An Argument from the Presuppositions of Respect**

Another argument from presupposition furnishes a parallel response to the second problem of demandingness – a problem for the morality of respect.

This problem again arose through the iteration of an apparently modest requirement. It seems right that small restrictions on the freedoms of people like me can properly be required in order to protect others' freedoms against very great curtailments. However, iteratively applying this requirement to every situation to which it can be applied would result in a severe overall curtailment of my ability to pursue my own fulfilment.

To respond to this, we can invoke the principle defended in Section V: only freedoms to do things that are not morally wrong can provide good reasons for morally requiring us to respect them. As I pointed out earlier, this does not say that the morality of respect cannot include respecting others' entitlements to do what is morally wrong. We need to distinguish rights from the freedoms they protect, recognizing that there may be morally good reasons to recognize rights that happen to protect freedoms to do things that are morally wrong. When I enjoy rights that are protected by the morality of respect, this is its being the case that others are morally required not to interfere with me in some way, or to fulfil undertakings made to me. A good reason for imposing such requirements might take the form: "Interfering with me in that way would impair my freedom to do *X*." But this only makes sense if *X* is not itself morally wrong. An entitlement of mine for which there is a good reason might protect my freedom to do what is morally wrong. But the *reason* for recognizing that entitlement cannot itself be that it gives me the freedom to do what is morally wrong.

Consider, then, a list of uncontentious rights that we clearly ought to respect in each other. This will include liberties of association, movement, self-expression, self-development and personally significant endeavour. From the recognition of these as morally protected rights, conclusions about the moral permissibility of exercising those rights do not immediately follow, because the exercise of rights can be morally wrong. However, what are the reasons that support the recognition of these rights? Those reasons evidently come from the importance of the freedoms they protect. The importance of our freedoms of association, movement, self-expression, self-development and personally significant endeavour themselves provide the reasons for recognizing rights that protect them: it is not as though these are merely corollaries of more general rights which are important for other reasons. Indeed, if I have reason to respect your freedom from physical or financial constraint of any kind, that presupposes the respectworthiness of the more substantial freedoms just listed. Your freedom from physical or financial constraint is something there is instrumental reason for you to seek to protect. You have reason to protect it for the sake of its impact on these other, more fundamentally important freedoms.

If this is right, then freedoms of these kinds do provide us with good reasons for imposing moral requirements of respect. And if so, they invite another argument from presupposition: this time, an argument from the presuppositions of respect. If these are freedoms that provide good reasons for morally requiring us to respect them, then that presupposes that the exercise of these freedoms must be morally permissible.

As before, this is not an objection to the idea that I can be required to accept restrictions on my freedoms for the sake of avoiding severe impositions upon the freedoms of others. Rather, it is an objection to the idea that we should iterate these requirements to generate an extremely demanding conclusion: the conclusion that we

must restrict the exercise of our own freedoms of association, movement, self-expression, self-development and personally significant endeavour. This cannot be required of us; *therefore*, it is morally acceptable to treat the moral requirements of respect in an aggregative rather than an iterative way. We can ask ourselves whether the overall restriction we are making on our own freedom for the sake of making room for others' exercise of theirs is substantial – substantial enough to ground requirements on others not to impose that restriction on us – and when the answer is Yes, we can defensibly refuse to make that restriction.

This then gives us an argument that parallels the one presented above for the morality of concern. The requirements of respect we actually recognize – requirements not to interfere with others in various ways – are grounded in reasons not to impair others' freedoms to pursue their own self-fulfilment. Those freedoms can only ground requirements of respect if they are not freedoms to do what is morally wrong. But that could only be true if my exercising those same freedoms for myself is not wrong. Therefore the morality of respect cannot properly be seen as so demanding that it requires us to abandon our own self-fulfilment out of respect for the liberties of others.

What we should say, then, about the problem of demandingness that was described for the morality of respect is this. The extremely demanding conclusion is generated by an iterative argument which attempts to start from uncontentious claims about the requirements of respect, and then – without abandoning those claims – extrapolate from the uncontentious requirements to extremely demanding ones. However, we have found once more that this combination of thoughts is unstable. The uncontentious judgements from which it starts presuppose the moral permissibility of our exercising our freedom to pursue our own fulfilment. The iterative argument

generates the conclusion that this is wrong. So it is committed to rejecting its own starting-point: it is committed to rejecting common sense claims about the reasons of respect we have for not interfering with other people's pursuit of their ends.

As before, this is not itself a vindication of those "uncontentious" claims. But it does show that an argument that attempts to derive an extremely demanding conclusion from a starting-point that accepts those claims must fail. Perhaps, surprisingly, an argument can be given to show that we should ultimately reject the thought that I can be morally required to constrain my own liberties in small ways in order to prevent much larger constrictions of others'. But whether or not that is true, we have an argument against the iterative approach to that thought for the morality of respect, just as we had an argument for rejecting an iterative approach to the morality of concern.

Again, this does not yet give us a positive account of where the boundaries of the morality of respect *do* lie. What it does tell us, however, is that those boundaries cannot be circumscribed so tightly that it makes morally impermissible the exercise of those same freedoms that ground the reasons I have to respect other people. The only way to argue for the radical claim that respect for others requires severely constricting my own freedom is to pair it with the equally radical claim that most of the freedoms we value highly are *not* ones that other people are morally required to respect. We therefore face a choice: either we reject a great range of seemingly obvious requirements of respect and accept an extremely demanding restriction on the freedoms protected by moral entitlements, or we retain those obvious requirements and reject the extreme demands. We cannot retain both, as the argument for the extremely demanding conclusion attempts to do.

### **VIII: An Argument from the Presuppositions of Cooperation**

Our third problem of demandingness was a problem about the requirements of cooperation. It was generated by combining three elements. First, it assumes the correctness of a range of uncontentious-looking claims about what we collectively ought to be doing. We ought to further our interests by cooperating in a variety of ways, and we ought also to cooperate in various other ways to benefit and respect other people, through projects of welfare support, advocacy, institutional reform, education, and so on. There are so many such projects that if I was determined to contribute to as many as possible I could spend my whole life doing so. The second element was a proposal about when contributing to a collective action is morally required. This proposal, modelled on the plausible-looking analogues for concern and respect, was that when a group ought to be pursuing a certain aim, I am morally required to make a contribution of a given kind to group's pursuit of that aim when the reasons to make contributions of that kind are very strong, and the reasons to further my own aims instead are comparatively weak. And the third element was the iteration of this requirement. There are very many important collective actions that ought to be performed, and for each of them, the cost to me of making the kind of contribution that is required of individuals if the group is to do what it ought is very small. Meeting this iterated requirement would leave me with hardly any time to spend on my own personal fulfilment.

It may look as though the demanding implication is a reason to reject this proposal. However, I think that would be a mistake. What should be rejected is not the proposal itself, but the iterative approach to it. Again, an argument from presupposition explains why.



The collective actions that we ought to perform have different aims. In some of them, the aim is simply to further the interests of the group. Let us start with these.

There are two different kinds of case to consider here. In the first, there is a good that each of us has an interest in receiving, and our interests are better served if we cooperate to pursue them together than if we pursue them independently.<sup>21</sup> The most obvious public goods – security, public amenities, public health, and so on – are all goods for which this is true. In this kind of case, the pursuit of the aim is in the group’s interests because it is in the individual interests of each of its members. There is perhaps also a second kind of case. Perhaps it makes sense to talk of “the interests of a group” to refer to something that does not reduce to the interests of its individual members. For example, one might think that there is a reason to preserve a dying culture because of its distinctive value, irrespective of whether its members could achieve as much personal fulfilment living outside it.<sup>22</sup> Let us concentrate initially on the first kind of case. The conclusions we reach concerning it will turn out to have a bearing on the second kind of case also.

Surely, there *are* many things that we ought collectively to do because of the way in which our doing so benefits each of us. The argument to a demanding conclusion about the requirements of cooperation starts from that thought, and that thought looks hard to deny. The argument then makes a further claim: the things that we collectively ought to do, in promoting the interests of the members of the group, can be good reasons for imposing moral requirements on individuals to contribute towards our

<sup>21</sup> Of course, it often remains the case that *I* will be best off if I avoid the costs of cooperation, no matter how many others are doing so; and this can make securing cooperation difficult.

<sup>22</sup> It is hard to see how there could be any plausibility in thinking that that reason could be decisive independently of the effects of preserving the culture on the interests and choices of its members.

doing them. That also seems hard to deny. “Free riding” by failing to contribute towards collectively prudential action can be morally wrong. However, let us now ask, again, what this claim about the requirements of cooperation presupposes. There can only be a moral requirement on individuals to support a collective aim when it is not a collective aim that it is morally wrong for us to pursue. Section V showed us that, along with the corresponding principles for the morality of concern and respect. But when our collective aim is the aim of promoting the interests of the members of the group, our pursuing that aim will only be morally acceptable when those interests are interests it is morally acceptable to pursue. The moral permissibility of the group’s action presupposes the moral permissibility of pursuing the individual interests that provide the reasons for the group’s action. I can only be morally required to act in the service of interests that are themselves morally acceptable ones to act on.

Someone meeting the extremely demanding standard of requirement for cooperation would need, as I said above, to be devoting practically no attention to her own personal fulfilment, for the sake of joining in the very many collective actions that ought to be performed. However, the interests which provide good reasons for collective action include the components of personal fulfilment – the aspects of personal welfare that it makes sense for us to band together to advance. It is a presupposition of their providing good reasons for moral requirements that it is morally acceptable to pursue those interests. Therefore it must be morally acceptable to lead a life that is not emptied of personal fulfilment in the service of our collective aims.

I mentioned above a second possible way in which the pursuit of an aim might be in the interests of a group: perhaps the group’s interests do not reduce to the interests of its members. It is hard to think of any real examples in which a single individual is

a member of many such groups. But that is at least conceivable, and raises the prospect of an iterative argument generating extreme demands. Such an argument would also be met by the reply just given. Group interests of this second kind do not themselves imply the permissibility of group members' pursuing their own lives. But there are other requirements of cooperation, as we have just seen, that *do* presuppose the permissibility of individuals' pursuing their own personal interests. And if that is morally permissible, then it is morally acceptable to reject the iteration of moral requirements to contribute to collective action in a way that would preclude it.

This is not an argument for thinking that it is always morally acceptable to pursue one's own interests when these would be compromised by joining in a collective action. That idea – a moral defence of free riding – is no more supported by what I have just said than callous egoism is supported by my argument against extreme demands of beneficence. In rejecting extreme demands of beneficence, I was not arguing that there are no moral requirements of altruism – only that such requirements cannot be iterated in a way that would impose severe constraints on one's own fulfilment: the very constraints that others could be morally required to help me avoid. Likewise, I have not been arguing here that there are no moral requirements of cooperation – only that such requirements cannot be iterated in a way that would impose a life of severely constrained personal fulfilment. We *are* required not to exploit others' cooperation by free-riding. But that itself presupposes the moral acceptability of pursuing our personal fulfilment. So what is defeated is not the existence of moral requirements to cooperate, but the iterative approach to them.

Once more, what has been supported instead is an aggregative approach to these requirements. When the overall cost of my contribution to the collective actions we ought to be performing is itself great enough to amount to the kind of cost the

avoidance of which we could have good reason to band together to secure, that cost must be one that I can permissibly refuse to bear.

The collective actions we ought to perform are not only actions of collective prudence. We also ought to act together for reasons of concern and respect for non-group members. However, the previous two sections show what is wrong with the idea that an extremely demanding conclusion might be reached by iterating requirements of those kinds. There are good reasons of concern and respect for imposing such requirements; but this presupposes the moral acceptability of pursuing the interests and exercising the freedoms that give us those reasons; and this means that we must reject the iterative approach that leads to an extremely demanding conclusion.

As before, the conclusion we reach is a limited one. The argument just presented does not itself directly support the proposal I have advanced concerning moral requirements on individuals to contribute to the collective actions we ought to perform. What has been shown is that that proposal cannot be rejected on the strength of its allegedly extreme demands. If there is an objection to my preferred treatment of the morality of cooperation, it will have to come from elsewhere. It cannot be rejected on the strength of its excessive demands. Perhaps there *are* extreme demands that can be generated from the morality of cooperation. But if so, another argument would be needed to show that. And it would need to be an argument that not only upholds the extreme demands, but also at the same time denies the seemingly “common sense” claims about the collective aims of prudence, concern and respect that there is a moral requirement to support. For as we have seen, those claims contain presuppositions that lead to the rejection of the extremely demanding view.

## **IX: Required Self-Sacrifice**

I have argued that, in addition to the familiar problem of demandingness that arises in relation to beneficence, similar problems of demandingness can be generated for what I have been calling the morality of respect and the morality of cooperation. However, all three problems can be met by responses with a similar structure – arguments from presupposition, as I have called them. In presenting these arguments, I have emphasized one limitation in the conclusions that can be drawn from them. These arguments do not provide a fully decisive demonstration that an extremely demanding moral outlook is wrong. For they do not speak against the possibility that our conceptions of the morality of concern, respect and cooperation need to be radically overturned and replaced with normative views that are not only much more demanding than we think in some respects, but also much *less* demanding in many others. That is hard to believe. But I cannot claim to have demonstrated here why such a radical overturning should be rejected. Suffice it to say that it makes sense to wait for someone to produce an argument for this radical alternative, and reply to it then.

I shall close by mentioning another way in which the conclusions established here are limited. The argument I have presented does not stand in the way of the idea that in some circumstances it can be morally wrong for a person not to perform an extremely self-sacrificing action. This actually seems to me a strength of the view I am putting forward, given the implausibility of thinking that we all enjoy a blanket moral permission to pursue our own personal fulfilment, come what may. I now give three examples to illustrate this.

First, consider requirements of beneficence towards those who stand in special relationships to me that make them especially reliant on me for their welfare. The most obvious such relationship is that of a child to a parent. My children's needs for parental attention and support might be great enough to mean that my own personal fulfilment might be seriously compromised by continuing to look after them.<sup>23</sup> So does that mean that I can appeal to an argument from the presuppositions of beneficence to support the conclusion that, given the extreme demands involved in looking after my children, I can justifiably abandon them?

It does not mean that. For what is the interest grounding the requirement of beneficence in this case? It is my child's interest in *receiving parental care and attention*. The claim that *this* good grounds a requirement of beneficence on me as a parent presupposes only that the pursuit of this same good is permissible – by my children or by me. But accepting *this* goes no way towards justifying my abandonment of my children. It only tells me that it must have been permissible for me to have received the care and attention of my own parents.

Consider next the keeping of an onerous promise. Promise-keeping is part of the morality of respect: having made a promise to you, I should respect the entitlement that this gives you to its fulfilment. Suppose that, as things have turned out, keeping my promise would involve a serious constriction of my liberties. Can I now appeal to an argument from the presuppositions of respect to justify breaking the promise –

<sup>23</sup> I hope I am not read as claiming that looking after seriously needy children always involves a sacrifice in the personal fulfilment of their parents. On the contrary, it might be the greatest source of such fulfilment. The claim is only that in some circumstances fulfilling parental responsibilities can require genuine self-sacrifice.

arguing that the respectworthiness of others' liberties presupposes the moral permissibility of acting to preserve my own?

Again, this will not work. Arguing from the presuppositions of respect, we can indeed maintain that a given liberty of yours can be one that I am morally required to respect only if it is one that it is morally permissible for you to exercise, and that if so, it must be morally permissible for me to exercise that same liberty. However, when we apply this to the case of promise-keeping, it does not give us a justification of the breaking of onerous promises. Far from it: all it tells us is that I can be required to keep my promises to you only if you are morally permitted to exercise your liberty to insist on their fulfilment, and that this will be true only if I am morally permitted to exercise the corresponding liberty to insist on the fulfilment of promises made to me. But *that* moral permission obviously falls well short of justifying my breaking my own promises.

Finally, we can consider an example drawn from the morality of cooperation. Suppose others are risking their lives in some crucial enterprise to protect everyone's safety – fighting in a justified war of self-defence, perhaps. Can I sensibly argue from the presuppositions of cooperation to justify my refusal to join in? What should we make of the argument: Any requirement on me to contribute towards our pursuit of a collective aim presupposes the moral permissibility of that aim; so our interests can only ground such requirements if it is morally permissible for us to pursue them; therefore my refusal to compromise my own interests in the service of our collective interests must be morally permissible?

Again, this attempted application of the argument from presupposition fails. What is the aim of the collective action in this case? It is protecting ourselves against an unjust aggressor. It is true that this can only be something I can be morally required to

support if it is an aim that it is morally permissible for us to pursue; and that this can only be true if it is an aim it is morally permissible for individuals to pursue for themselves. But that obviously falls short of a justification for my refusal to join in our collective efforts to protect ourselves. It shows that, if we could construe a collective action as an act of unjust aggression against me, then I would be entitled to defend myself against it. It does not show that I can justifiably refuse to join in an action of collective self-defence.

These three examples illustrate why it is wrong to construe my argument as an argument for thinking that the moral requirements generated by the three sources I have identified cannot be extremely demanding. I have not shown that no personally demanding moral requirements are generated by the morality of concern, respect or cooperation. What I have shown is that extreme demands of personal self-sacrifice cannot be generated by iterating more modest ones. There is no good argument for generating extreme demands across the whole of our lives by extrapolating them from the moral requirements we already do accept, since those requirements should be approached aggregatively rather than iteratively. It is morally acceptable for us to fulfil interests, exercise freedoms and pursue aims that are not themselves devoted towards concern, respect and cooperation. Such interests, freedoms and aims, after all, are themselves what ground the requirements of concern, respect and cooperation to which we *are* importantly subject in our dealings with each other.

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