



# The Money Question and the Good Life

## An Enquiry Guided by Williams and Nussbaum\*

By/Par

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### ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a theory of the good life for use in answering the question how much money the rich should spend on fighting poverty. The paper moves from the abstract to the concrete. To begin with, it investigates various ways to get an answer to the question what is good, and finds itself drawn to objective theories of the good. It then develops, taking Bernard Williams and Martha Nussbaum as its guides, a broad outline of a theory of the good. It holds that something evil happens to people if they do not have a real choice from a reasonable number of projects that realize most of their key capacities to a certain degree, and in connection to this it points to the great importance of money. The paper goes on specifically to consider what criticisms of Nussbaum's version of the capability approach are implied in this outline of a theory of the good. Next, it gets more specific and asks how much money the rich can give -and how they can be restricted in spending their money- without suffering any evil. It does three suggestions: the tithe suggestion, the ecological (or footprint) suggestion, and the fair trade suggestion. To conclude, the paper returns to the question how much money the rich should spend on fighting poverty.

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## RÉSUMÉ

Ce papier propose une théorie de la vie bonne en vue de répondre à la question combien d'argent les riches doivent-ils consacrer à la lutte contre la pauvreté. Le papier débute de manière abstraite pour finir sur des aspects concrets. Il commence par une investigation de la question qu'est ce qu'une vie bonne, s'articule autour des théories objectives du bien. Il développe alors, à partir de Bernard Williams et Martha Nussbaum, un large contour de la théorie du bien. Il soutient que quelque chose de mauvais arrive aux personnes si elles n'ont pas un choix réel entre un nombre raisonnable de projets qui réalisent jusqu'à un certain degré la plupart de leurs capacités essentielles. En connexion avec ceci, il souligne la grande importance de la monnaie. Le papier examine les critiques de la version des capacités proposée par Nussbaum qu'une telle théorie implique. Ensuite, il s'oriente de manière plus spécifique sur la question combien les riches doivent-ils donner-et comment ils peuvent être restreints concernant leurs dépenses- sans souffrir d'aucun mal. Il fait trois suggestions : la suggestion du dixième, la suggestion écologique (ou de l'empreinte écologique), et celle du commerce équitable. Pour conclure, le papier revient sur la question combien les riches doivent-ils consacrer à la lutte contre la pauvreté.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Every rich person is confronted with the question *how much of his money he should devote to fighting poverty*. This paper wants to contribute to answering this question, which we shall call the “money question”. Those who focus their research on this question are often decried for neglecting structural issues, for being shallow, or for trying to put philosophy to practical uses for which it is not fit. Even so, the question is a real and a deep one. At an “existential” level, we can even say that it is -- along with such questions as how much time we should devote to fighting poverty, and how world poverty problems should influence our vote and our consumer behavior -- one of the first ethical questions about poverty that each of us rich people must answer. By “rich people” I mean people (such as probably ourselves) who have middle class lives; the rich are those who earn middle class incomes and have middle class wealth, or more. Or, to use an image: the rich are those who live in middle class apartments or in mansions. By “poor people” I mean people whose lives are precarious and very far removed middle class lives, people who have much less than middle class incomes and middle class wealth. Poor are, for example, those people who live in urban slums.<sup>1</sup>

The most important thing that we need in order to answer the “money question” --and also to explain why rich people are concerned with fighting poverty in the first place-- is a (sufficiently developed) theory of right action. That is, we need a theory of what we should, morally speaking, do. However, this paper will not try to defend such a theory; I do that elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> The present paper focuses on developing a broad theory of the good. The relevance of such a theory for answering the money question is twofold. First, a theory of the good can make very abstract answers to the money question more concrete. One can get such abstract answers from theories of the right -- for example, from a theory of the right that is in important respects consequentialist. Such a theory of the right (a famous example of which is Peter Singer's<sup>3</sup>) says that you should morally do what produces the best results. This statement needs to be made more concrete if we are to have a meaningful answer to the money question, and a theory of the good can help us to do so. The second way in which a theory of the good can be relevant for answering the money question is that such a theory can help to make the point that giving away certain amounts of money does not, for the giver, amount to anything bad, and similarly that heeding certain restrictions in spending money does not, for the spender, amount to anything bad. This point may, in combination with a number of theories of the right, not only consequentialist ones, lead to powerful conclusions about how much money we *should* give away.

The paper moves from the abstract to the concrete. Section 2 makes some very abstract points about the way in which a theory of the good should be defended. In Section 3, I

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<sup>1</sup> These are only rough descriptions, but for our purposes they will do. For as we will see, the things most urgently needed for answering the money question are a theory of right action, and a theory of the good.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., e.g., my “On Letting Evils Persist without Good Reason.” *Paper* presented to the Dundee Conference on Demandingness, Dundee, Scotland, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> See Singer (1972), (1993).

propose the broad outlines of a theory of the good. In doing so, I take Bernard Williams and Martha Nussbaum as my guides. I will also specifically consider what criticisms of Nussbaum's version of the capabilities approach are implied in the theory of the good that I propose. Section 4 develops some suggestions to the effect that certain degrees of monetary largesse do not involve anything bad for the giver at all, and that observing certain restrictions in spending money is not bad for the spender at all. Section 5, finally, returns to the question how much of their money the rich should devote to fighting poverty.

## **2 HOW TO DEFEND A THEORY OF THE GOOD**

When thinking about how much money we rich people should devote to fighting poverty, we might think, as consequentialists do, that we should (rather than, for example, unconditionally give our money away) put our money where it does most *good*. But how do we decide what is good?

Before exploring this question a couple of terminological stipulations are in order. Firstly, by a “theory of the good” we mean a theory that answers the question what is necessary and sufficient for having a “good life” (the answer may be different for different people). And, we say that people have a “bad life” when not all the necessary and sufficient conditions for their having a good life are fulfilled. Next, something that is among the necessary conditions for (some people's) good lives is “a good”, or “something that is good”.<sup>4</sup> And finally, “an evil” is an element of a person's situation that needs to be changed in order for him to have fulfilled the necessary and sufficient conditions for having a good life. Thus, in our nomenclature, an evil is the absence of a good.<sup>5</sup>

Let us now ask how we can decide what is good. Borrowing freely from the literature we may distinguish four answers to this question.<sup>6</sup> The first answer is: good is what the people

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<sup>4</sup> Goods come in roughly two sorts: goods that are preconditions for a good life and goods that are constituents of it. The distinction is not always sharp in practice and for our purposes it need not be stressed.

<sup>5</sup> Of course in our nomenclature many different things count as good, and as evil; and not all are equally great and comprehensive goods, or evils. (The most comprehensive good is to have all that is necessary and sufficient for having a good life; and then there are many less comprehensive goods). For combination with some theories of the right, it will be important for a theory of the good to spell out exactly which goods are how great. However, the present paper can only offer the broad outlines of a theory of the good.

<sup>6</sup> Acknowledging that the literature does not always use the *exact* same approaches, and that where it does, it often uses them for a purpose different from constructing a theory of the good, we can say that the first approach is favored by many (welfare) economists and has important affinities with many versions of utilitarianism; that Sen, among others, has much sympathy for the second approach (e.g. Sen, 1999); that the third approach is favored by, for example Nussbaum (e.g., 2000); and that the fourth approach is found with Kant as well as with, for example, Gewirth (e.g., 2003) and, to some extent, with Williams (e.g., 1981) and Cullity (2004).

think is good. So, assuming I am a consequentialist,<sup>7</sup> if Mr. A tells me that he suffers greatly from the absence of potable water and Mrs. B tells me that she suffers *very* greatly from the absence of bread, I should spend my money on providing Mrs. B with bread (if I cannot help Mr. A and Mrs. B out).

The second answer says that I should abide by the outcome of a participatory process. So suppose that, as a consequentialist, I am going to spend my money on helping a group that is clearly worse off than I myself am, and that I am unsure whether to spend my money on providing them with sewerage or on providing them with elementary education (and that I cannot do both). The beneficiaries have made it very clear (in a voting procedure, say) that they prefer to have elementary education. Then that is what I should spend my money on.

The third approach sees things differently. It says that I should form a conception of what is good that is ultimately founded on my relevant considered intuitions, and that if (being a consequentialist) I deeply feel that sewerage is much more important than elementary education, I should put my money on the sewerage rather than on the elementary education.

Lastly, the fourth way of deciding what is good I dub “transcendental”. This way of deciding tries to pull itself out of the swamp by its own hairs. It starts by making some relatively or absolutely uncontroversial observations about human beings (such as, that they are agents, rational, or have no reason to go on if their life has no substance) and then asks what must be the case for people to, say, be able to act, to reason, or to pursue what gives point to their lives. If it is to lead to a theory of the good it should then proceed more or less as follows: it is a good for human beings to be (able to behave as) an agent, and therefore it is also a good for them to have what is necessary for them to have in order to be an agent.

How should we evaluate these ways of deciding what is good? My aim is only briefly to indicate some reasons for going with one approach rather than another. The first way of deciding what is good that I have mentioned runs into serious difficulties, such as problems of expensive tastes and of adaptive preferences. These problems are well known and need not be elaborated on here. The problems are so serious that they seem to disqualify this approach.

It is more difficult with regard to the second approach. For one, where should I put my money when there is a conflict between my relevant considered intuitions about where to put it (the third approach) on the one hand, and the outcome of a participatory process (the second approach) on the other? Offhand, it seems hard to choose the outcome of the participatory process over my relevant considered intuitions here: for these intuitions give me reasons to think that the outcome of the process has got it wrong. But let us consider some objections. Firstly, someone may object that the participatory process offers reasons or arguments too, and these say that I, the rich person, have got it wrong. The problem is, however, that *I* am the one who is deciding what I am going to do, and that in *my* view the arguments that prevail in the participatory process are weaker. So how can I give precedence

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<sup>7</sup> I make this assumption here -and in what follows immediately- only because it enables me to give definite examples of what I should do.

to the weaker arguments? Second, might not my own intuitions tell me that the outcome of the participatory process is the best indicator of what is good and that I should therefore (at least if I am a consequentialist) respect it, whatever it is? The problem with this suggestion is that it does not always seem correct. True, sometimes it does seem correct, and then it should be taken seriously. For instance, if I have no idea whether it is better for people to have elementary education or sewerage, it might be best, in my judgment, to abide by their own decision. However, always to follow the mentioned suggestion would very likely take us back to such problems as those of expensive tastes and adaptive preferences. The third objection says that even if I have arguments to think that what is best for people differs from what they themselves think is best for them, it is still better for them to have the worse thing they choose to have than to have imposed on them the things that I think are better for them. This we may call a “Lockean suggestion” because of its similarity to what Locke has said about tolerance.<sup>8</sup> I think that, for many -but not for all- goods, this suggestion gets it right when the choice is indeed between being positively coerced (without having any decent alternative) to have A versus having B in a non-coerced way. In such cases, it may be better to have B even if without the difference in coercion it would be better to have A. However, even if the “Lockean suggestion” is right, it makes only a limited case for the second approach. For the idea that it is usually very bad to be coerced is compatible with the idea (which is a sensible one) that it is not usually a bad thing to have a limited number of meaningful options to choose from which may not include all the options that you would like to have.

I don't see similarly great problems with the third approach. It tells us to decide what is good by relying on our relevant, critically scrutinized intuitions (or, as Rawls would put it, on our considered judgments). Suppose that we have convinced ourselves that a certain set of intuitions about the good is both intuitively plausible and consistent with other plausible intuitions, and that it also has plausible implications and presuppositions. Suppose, further, that this set of intuitions can, if need be, be supported by arguments that go 'one step deeper'. In this case we may declare these intuitions about the good to be acceptable.<sup>9</sup>

However, one may well have problems with an appeal to relevant considered intuitions, because intuitions do not offer much in the way of argument. Instead of arguing, it seems that someone who appeals to intuitions simply asserts that he is right, and that those who disagree with him see things wrongly.

Bernard Williams makes a remark that can be seen as an elaboration on this point.<sup>10</sup> He says that whenever people's real interests are taken to be different from what they themselves take their interests to be, we should be on our guard. In order for subjectively unaccepted interests

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. also Dworkin (2000, Ch. 6) on constitutive and additive goods.

<sup>9</sup> Favoring this third approach is compatible with allowing for certain roles for the outcome of participation, e.g. epistemic and practical roles (cf. Nussbaum, 2000): the roles of telling us that we may be on the right track to finding truth, and that we may be on the way to finding a practically viable solution.

<sup>10</sup> See Williams, 1985, Ch. 3, esp. pp. 42-43

to be called “real” it does not even suffice, he says, for them later to become accepted by the people in question themselves; we must at the very least have an independent account of how it is that people were once mistaken about their real interests, and that now they no longer are; and we must have an account of why some people are mistaken about their real interests, while others aren't. In Williams's words, what we need is a theory of error.

Such a theory of error is an extremely good idea. Yet at the same time thinking about a theory of error may show the ineluctability of the third approach. For how do we know whether a theory of error is an acceptable one? Again, the best answer may be that it matches our considered relevant intuitions. Even if an appeal to intuition may in some respects be unsatisfactory, it is hard to do better without it.

That gets us, fourthly, to transcendental ways of justification. These may, I believe, be part of a more extensive set of justifications such as just outlined (under the third point). It is very attractive to appeal to a relatively uncontroversial thing (often a good) and to derive from this thing that some things must be good, because their being good is a precondition for that uncontroversial thing's being the case. For example, it is very plausible that if we see human agency as a good, we must see whatever is a precondition for human agency as a good too; or that, if we see it as a good to have a life worth living, then we must see it as a good to have the things without which we would have no reason to go on living. However, the problem with these arguments often is that they claim that only goods won in a transcendental way are goods, or at the very least that the goods whose goodness is established in a transcendental way are the greatest goods. This claim is frequently left implicit, and it may often be very hard to substantiate it.

Therefore the third approach, rather than the stricter transcendental approach, is the one I want to go with. Since the kind of justification of the good that I favor has strong affinity with “objective list” theories, I will call the theory of the good that I will defend an “objective” theory. One prominent worry about such a theory, however, is whether it could gain wide social acceptance. In the context of the present paper, the main answer to this worry can be this: a theory of the good used for deciding how much money I should, as a rich person, spend on fighting poverty, has fundamentally different concerns than a theory that aims at formulating minimum standards of justice or of quality of life in the context of policy making.<sup>11</sup> For the latter kind of theory the need for wide acceptability and hence for something like a politically liberal spirit seems much clearer than for the former.

### **3 A BROAD OUTLINE OF A THEORY OF THE GOOD**

We now turn to the defense of a more concrete outline of a theory of the good. I take three main steps to arrive at the theory of the good that I favor. Each new step corrects the earlier steps, and avoids certain problems of these earlier steps. Accordingly, the theory that we end

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<sup>11</sup> It is with concerns close to these that many theorists, most famously Rawls (1993), have stressed the need for a widely acceptable theory. See also, e.g., Nussbaum (2000).

up with avoids a number of problems that alternative theories do not avoid. At the end, we have what I believe to be a relatively strong theory of the good.

Our main guides on the journey will be Bernard Williams and Martha Nussbaum. We start with Williams (in the *first step*). For with him we find a suggestion that is very influential across much of the contemporary liberal literature, and in some sense among the “moderns” in general.<sup>12</sup> However, there are some problems with this suggestion, and I shall (in the *second step*) try to show that Nussbaum can help us remedy them. Nussbaum's theory, in turn, owes much to Aristotle and in some sense to the “ancients” in general. However, it turns out (in the *third step*) that we will also have to go beyond the synthesis of Williams and Nussbaum (which we arrived at in the second step).<sup>13</sup>

*First step.* Williams states that “a man may have ... a *ground* project or a set of projects which are closely related to his existence and which to a significant degree give meaning to his life.”<sup>14</sup> The significance of such project(s) is according to him very deep indeed: “Most people have categorical desires, which do not depend on the assumption of the person's existence, since they serve to prevent that assumption's being questioned, or to answer the question if it is raised. Thus one's pattern of interests, desires and projects not only provide the reason for an interest in what happens within the horizon of one's future, but also constitute the conditions of there being such a future at all.”<sup>15</sup> Williams singles “deep attachments to other persons” out for special mention and says that they “compel [a man's]

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<sup>12</sup> Authors who make suggestions similar to Williams's are, for example, Rawls (e.g., 1971), Nagel (e.g., 1986, 1991), and also Scheffler (e.g., 2001, 2003), and Cullity (2004).

But Williams also criticizes Rawls and Nagel. He maintains that, speaking of projects and the like, these authors conceive of life as a rectangle to be filled in (Williams, 1981, p. 12). Williams, by contrast, wants to emphasize that my having ground projects determines whether I shall go on living at all. I think we can share this Williamsian emphasis if it is only meant to point out that the presence or absence of ground projects is something that is good or bad for me in a particularly deep sense of the word. However, in Williams it may well mean more than that. But I shall leave this complication to one side.

<sup>13</sup> It bears stressing that Williams might well have had some problems with our project of looking for a theory of the good. He makes it plain that we don't have a clear answer to the question how an individual should live (at most to the question whether society should go on). (See Williams 1985, Ch. 3, esp. p. 48.) And, as I have already said, he also has certain reservations about using what I have called an “objective” theory of the good. Even so, I think a suggestion of his is a very good starting point for formulating an objective theory of the good. It might have been taken from others, but Williams's version serves our purposes well. As for Nussbaum, I think that I stay a bit closer to what she herself wants to do. (For the contrast between Nussbaum and Williams see Nussbaum 2003). And also, it might be quite clear why I choose her, being perhaps the most influential neo-Aristotelian, to present some neo-Aristotelian corrections to “Williams's suggestion.”

<sup>14</sup> Williams, 1981, p. 12 (emphasis in original).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

allegiance to life itself".<sup>16</sup> This special attention for relationships seems entirely justified: often, they are perhaps *the* most important part of someone's ground project(s).<sup>17</sup>

In line with these remarks, one can at the very least make the following suggestion: *it is good for people to be engaged in (ground) projects and (personal) relationships to which they are (deeply) committed.*

Elaborating on this, we must ask a question that goes beyond Williams: should we say that it is a good thing for people *actually* to be engaged in ground projects to which they are committed or (also?) that it is a good thing for people to have (meaningful) *opportunities* to be engaged in these projects? This may be a hard question to decide in the abstract. But if we are looking at what we should do to make the world a better place (more specifically, how much money we rich people should spend on fighting poverty), it seems that the good we are aiming at is people actually engaging in projects they are committed to – like having a family, writing literature, being active for an NGO, or playing the piano. But certainly we shouldn't be forcing people to participate in good things, because usually being forced to engage in better things is worse than engaging freely in worse things. Therefore we should focus on providing people with opportunities rather than getting them to actually engage in certain projects.<sup>18</sup>

This does not, however, do away with all complications, because certainly there *are* a number of things which it is better to have while being forced than to do without freely; and, we could ask whether the focus on providing opportunities is entirely justified, since one might wonder whether we should not, if the really good thing is for people *actually* to be engaging in ground projects that are their point for living, concentrate on providing those opportunities that we know will be taken advantage of. I think both objections are real and that a number of others could be added. Yet if one has a preference for something like an objective list theory (see above), there is a great risk of making things worse by imposing on people what is not fit for them. This is a good reason for generally preferring a focus on opportunities rather than realization.

The attractiveness of "Williams's suggestion" is threefold. Firstly, it is a *unifying* suggestion: it is far too weak to call engaging in ground projects and personal relationships to which one is deeply committed *a* good, for this good seems to embrace *all* or at least *very many* of the most important things that are worthwhile for human beings.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, although it is unifying it is *not oppressive*: it leaves room to incorporate both adherence to a religious tradition, maintaining strong ties with one's family, and more individualistic ideals such as

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> Williams does not give a definition of what a project is. One definition might be: a project is a coherent set of relatively concrete undertakings.

<sup>18</sup> Further clarification of the concept of "opportunity" --of which I will use the singular and the plural indiscriminately-- will be given shortly (in the present section, at the "second step").

<sup>19</sup> Some authors more explicitly mention enjoyment and achievement as things that are worthwhile (e.g., Griffin 1985, Scanlon 1998, Cullity 2004). I would say that these are, in important ways, essential parts of what it is to engage in ground projects and relationships. Once one sees this, it is doubtful whether they should be added separately.

pursuing one's childhood dream of traveling around the world. Thirdly, the suggestion's capacity to unify (nearly) all of the most important good things without being oppressive may arouse the suspicion that the suggestion is empty and incapable of saying anything substantial about the good life. This suspicion is unfounded, however. We may say that thinking about the good as people's engaging in projects and relationships that they are committed to -or rather, as their opportunities to do this- is a *colorful* one: it evokes pictures of people dining together, engaging in the life of the local community, going fishing, collecting old-timers, undertaking a journey through South-East Asia, and so on. I take the suggestion's colorfulness to mean that it does real work in having us imagine what the (necessary and sufficient conditions for) a good life may look like.

But then it may look as if we have returned to a subjective approach of the good: good is what people endorse as good. I do not think, however, that this suspicion is ultimately justified. It is true that we have allowed the possibility for each and every project and relationship that people endorse to count as good (although we'll shortly come back to that). But thinking of the good in terms of projects and relationships at all is itself objective, and it provides a general and unoppressive framework for thinking about the good life that is -as just said- not empty but prone to elicit concrete stories and pictures.

*Second step.* In short, the idea is that the main good for people is to have the opportunity to engage in projects and relationships that are central to their lives. I have explained why this suggestion is attractive, but it also has its problems. The main problem seems to me to be this: if we look at the matter in this way, aren't there way too many goods -and consequently evils- in the world? If it is a good that you can engage in projects that are central to your life, then it seems to be a good if you can collect expensive cars or become a movie star or a star athlete, provided that such pursuits are central to your life. It would then be an evil if you cannot do these things. Consequently, we are back to problems of expensive tastes -- even though our theory of the good has, as we have emphasized, important non-subjective components.<sup>20</sup> We could say that what we have here is "overcrowding" of evils. And this is a problem mainly because such overcrowding necessarily goes with what we may call "outcrowding" of serious evils: they tend to get watered down among the multitude of evils which we recognize. (When combined with a consequentialist theory of the right, a theory of the good that allows in very many goods may lead to the conclusion that we should let some people starve to help others collect old-timers.) If a theory of the good is to be plausible, it must concentrate on the absence of "abysses". To do this, we need to make more definite our objective broad theory of the good, which says that the main good is for people to have the opportunity to engage in projects and relationships that are of central importance to them.

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<sup>20</sup> We are also back to problems of adaptive preferences in the sense that we could imagine people being committed only to projects and relationships that seem to leave them in many ways very badly off. This may be the case, for example, with many followers of religious sects, and with many poor people -- and it also the case in the Kosinski example that is used below. Our final proposal remedies this problem as well as the "outcrowding" problem.

To amend Williams's suggestion Nussbaum's (neo-Aristotelian) approach, which focuses on people's capacities, can be of great help. I focus on Nussbaum's late work here.<sup>21</sup> There she states that it must be a universal political goal for people to have real freedoms to develop and exercise at least a threshold level of a number of central capacities. She names ten such freedoms, among which: "Life: [having the real freedom to] live to the end of a human life of normal length [...]; emotions: [having the real freedom to] have attachments to things and people outside ourselves [...]; practical reason: [having the real freedom to] form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life [...]; affiliation: A [having the real freedom to] live with and towards others [...]; B [having the real freedom to have] the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation."<sup>22</sup> These real freedoms are freedoms for human beings to do or to be certain things; they are real freedoms to develop and/or exercise certain capacities that they have. Having real freedom to develop or exercise certain capacities means that one can develop or exercise these capacities if one wants to. In order for a person to have real freedom in this sense, certain internal states of readiness on the part of the person are prerequisites, according to Nussbaum (for example, for a person to be really free, the mental preconditions for making choices must be fulfilled with him).<sup>23</sup> Also, for a person really to be free to develop or exercise certain capacities, there must be certain arrangements in place in his environment.<sup>24</sup> In other words, real freedoms have certain internal and certain external preconditions.<sup>25</sup> Finally, to add to this a remark about terminology: if someone has a "real freedom" to develop or exercise certain capacities, I shall also say that he has a "real opportunity", or a "real choice", to develop or exercise them.

Nussbaum's suggestions for political universals can be of use for developing a general theory of the good. When we try to combine Nussbaum's approach with Williams's suggestion we get something like the following: it is an evil if you don't have real opportunities (real freedom) to pursue projects -among which, prominently, relationships- in which most of your central capacities are developed to a minimum degree.<sup>26</sup> For example, if someone should only have the real opportunity to live as Chance in Kosinski's "Being There" did, that is, to live a life of TV-watching and gardening only, then this would be an evil -- assuming at least that this life doesn't give one the real opportunity to develop such central capacities as one's intellectual, social and emotional capacities to a certain threshold level. Note that when

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<sup>21</sup> Esp. Nussbaum (2000); see also, e.g., Nussbaum (1998) and Nussbaum (2005).

<sup>22</sup> Nussbaum (2000), pp. 78-79. Nussbaum calls these central real freedoms to develop and exercise certain capacities: "capabilities". Thus a capability is not a "capacity" but a "real freedom".

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Nussbaum, 2000, p. 84

<sup>24</sup> See Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 84-85

<sup>25</sup> Thus if one is to have real freedom to develop certain capacities, the development can't start from zero. Therefore it might be more accurate to speak of "further developing" certain capacities than of "developing" them. However, I shall for simplicity continue to speak of "developing" capacities. Furthermore, often when I speak of "developing" certain capacities this should be read as "developing and exercising" them.

<sup>26</sup> Nussbaum thinks that there should be real freedom to develop each and every of the central capacities to a threshold level. Alkire (2002) thinks that the real freedom to develop most might be enough. I tend to go with Alkire here -- where the interpretation of "most" should be neither too strict nor too lenient.

our aim is to develop a theory of the good, we can to some extent take into account -indeed we should take into account- that it can differ from person to person what these key capacities are; when we want political universals, these interpersonal differences may be harder to take into account.<sup>27</sup>

If we should adopt the suggestion that there is *only* an evil for people as long as they don't have the real opportunity to pursue projects that develop most of their central capacities to a certain threshold level, we seem to have arrived at a much more specific objective theory of the good, and one that certainly avoids overcrowding of evils.<sup>28</sup>

*Third step.* But now, unless we make two additions, there is a risk of what we may (by a neologism) call “undercrowding” of evils. I shall give two reasons for this risk and two additions that can help us get around it.

Firstly. Presumably, when we say that it is an evil if someone doesn't have the real opportunity to pursue projects that develop most of his key capacities to a certain threshold level, we do not mean that *all* different ways to develop these capacities should be open to him. To think that they should be is highly implausible a position (and at any rate it would make for over- rather than undercrowding by evils). But what is it, then, that we mean? Nussbaum speaks of multiple realizability of central capabilities (real freedoms): “[E]ach of the different capabilities may be concretely realized in a variety of different ways, in accordance with individual tastes, local circumstances, and traditions.”<sup>29</sup> I fear that this may be read -though Nussbaum will no doubt distance herself from this reading- as saying that as long as there is available, in every culture, a certain more concrete way to realize a certain more abstract capacity, we can be satisfied. But certainly this result would be oppressive: if we do not, in *each* culture, have available a *reasonable number* of more concrete ways to realize a certain more general central capacity to a certain degree -ways, moreover, that fit us- talk of real freedom will sound hollow.<sup>30</sup>

One might say that this is an “operationalization” issue, an issue that has to do with the provision more *concrete* ways to realize more *general* capacities. That could be correct, but if the thought were that the issue is unimportant, I would not agree. To stress its importance I'd like to refer to it as the “redoubling of freedom”: in order for there not to be an evil, you must have a real choice from a *reasonable number* of different projects that fit you and through which you can develop most of your key capacities to a certain threshold level. (This of course is entirely compatible with -indeed it implies- the idea that you should not be positively coerced to carry out one of those different projects.<sup>31</sup>) To my mind, Nussbaum

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<sup>27</sup> However, as we shall see below, a theory of the good too can only take them into account to a limited extent.

<sup>28</sup> That is, if we don't have too wild ideas about what can count as a central capacity.

<sup>29</sup> Nussbaum, 2000, p. 105 (cf. also p. 77).

<sup>30</sup> It is not similarly true that a social setting is oppressive unless it gives you the maximum choice you could possibly have -- in particular, unless it gives you a choice from as many projects that fit you as possible. Cf. e.g. Williams (1987), G. Dworkin (1989), Sen (1992).

<sup>31</sup> By positive coercion I mean coercion not by a logical lack of options (as in “you must either be an atheist, an agnostic or a theist”) nor by an empirical lack of options (as in “you can choose either to be

doesn't bring out the need to redouble freedom in the way just mentioned sufficiently clearly. It is true that Nussbaum's emphasis on practical reason may go in the same direction. But it does so only indirectly and non-explicitly.

"Redoubling freedom" thus helps us to get at a theory of the good that does not fall victim to "undercrowding" of evils (i.e., to admitting too few things as evils). But there is still another reason why our theory of the good risks "undercrowding" of evils. I now turn to this second reason. We have said that, in a theory of the good, the focus should be on giving people a real choice from a reasonable number of projects that fit them and through which they can develop most of their central capacities to a certain threshold level. However, in this formulation the clause "that fit them" might cause problems. For even in a broad theory of the good that is for non-political use, we will necessarily evaluate the world in relatively general terms. Let's take a summer camp as an example. We will say that there are no evils for anyone as regards his real opportunities to realize his essential creative capacities as long as there is a real choice from a reasonable number of projects that focus on creative pursuits, such as playing the guitar, reading books, and playing soccer. Certainly in this way we get fair enough an evaluation of how good this social setting is, but at the same time the evaluation is somewhat crude. It is very much imaginable that for a certain someone the only way sufficiently to develop his emotional and creative skills is to play the piano - not the guitar, the fagot, or the organ, but the *piano* (as, recently, for the mystery piano man<sup>32</sup>); and to play on it not jazz, nor Romantic or contemporary music, but Bach and *Bach* alone. I think this example points to an inevitable crudeness of any theory of the good, and especially of any theory of the good focusing on giving real opportunities to pursue a reasonable number of capacity-realizing projects: it can never do full justice to the differences between individuals.<sup>33</sup>

There is no solution for this problem, I think (except trying to be ever more fine-grained), but as far as I am concerned the problem points to the special importance of providing people with means that are as generic as possible, such as money.<sup>34</sup> In our summer camp example, if the piano man had been given some money he might have taken the bus to town, found a piano somewhere, and go play his favorite music. Although this argument for bringing in money is neither very precise as to the amount of money that people should have nor purports to present money as a panacea, it does make a clear case for the importance of money.

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a carpenter or a blacksmith"); rather, we have a case of positive coercion in situations where I should either do X or else am made to face grave consequences.

<sup>32</sup> *The Guardian* of May 16, 2005 featured an article entitled "Do you know this man? Mystery of the silent, talented piano player who lives for his music. His rendition of Swan Lake only clue to identity of stranger found soaked by the sea." This fascinating story was later revealed as a scam.

<sup>33</sup> We may, paradoxically, say that every theory is always to some extent second-best. The clause "that fits them" points not to people's own desires but to the fact that people are different and consequently that the opportunities they should have in order to be able to realize their key capacities up to a certain level won't be the same for all of them.

<sup>34</sup> Obviously, money is only (relatively) generic as long as there is an institutional context in which it functions relatively well.

Furthermore, this argument is different from another argument that, let me emphasize it, is presupposed throughout this entire paper. This argument is that if it is good to have a certain thing, it is also good to have all (necessary and sufficient) preconditions for having that good. Among these preconditions, money is frequently prominent.<sup>35</sup>

*To summarize:* There is an evil for someone only if he does not have 1) a real choice from a reasonable number of projects through which he can realize most of his central capacities to some threshold level, as well as 2) a reasonable amount of money. It is true that, for some people, neither having real choice from a number of apparently acceptable projects nor some amount of money will actually give them real opportunities for realizing most of their key capacities to some degree. To stay with our earlier example: the piano man may have money and take a bus to town but there may turn out to be no public pianos in town. But for most people we can say that if they have the two things just mentioned, they will have such opportunities and there will be no evil for them.

The arguments for this broad theory of the good are: that it is -as Williams's sketch was- an unoppressive, unifying theory,<sup>36</sup> capable of evoking concrete images; and that it avoids problems of over- as well as of undercrowding of evils. In connection to this last point, we may observe the following advantage of our account: With Williams's suggestion we were not in a position to criticize any projects and relationships; now we are. Those constellations of projects and relationships are liable to criticism that do not give people real freedom to pursue a number of concrete ways to develop most of their central capacities to a threshold level. This further advantage implies that we have admittedly moved yet a bit further away from Williams: we have moved further away from the idea that there is always something deeply unreasonable to people having to give up their ground projects,<sup>37</sup> in a sense, our theory has become a bit more unforgiving, and it now says that sometimes situations which do not allow for certain ground projects and the like do not involve evils after all.

It is useful to reiterate the main critical remarks about Nussbaum's approach that are implied in the above. Firstly, we should insist that *freedom ought to be redoubled*: not only should people have real freedoms to realize capacities, they should also have a real choice from a sufficient number of projects that realize them. The need for such redoubling is not brought out well enough by Nussbaumian phrases such as "multiple realizability". Second, providing real choice from a sufficient number of projects that are at first sight appropriately capacity-realizing is for a number of people unlikely to really provide them with real opportunities to

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<sup>35</sup> Finally, since the argument might provoke confusion, I should stress that I am not of course arguing for bringing money in for its own sake. If I refrain from explaining what the money is for, this is because the money's purpose varies among individuals and thus does not admit of any explanation in general terms.

<sup>36</sup> It is especially unifying, of course, as long as we don't specify what capacities are central. Frequently, it *is* of course necessary to specify this. One plausible way doing so would be Finn's method, which Alkire (2002) advocates.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Williams (1981, p. 14, p. 17). I attribute to Williams a slightly bolder position than he actually defends. But there should be no problem as long as we keep in mind that Williams is not saying that a categorical commitment must always take precedence over moral demands, but rather that he is stressing the aporetic character of situations where commitments and moral demands conflict.

develop most of their key capacities to a threshold level. More generic means like money can often do more to give these people real capacity-developing opportunities. Therefore such means should receive due emphasis. In other words, *money remains important*.

In addition, I have drawn attention to two further advantages of speaking in terms of projects and relationships. First, this way of speaking is *unifying*. To use it may be an antidote against proliferation of and balkanization of the mind by all kinds of lists and enumerations. It may help theories of the good to (re)capture the imagination. Second, the language of projects and relationships is nevertheless *concrete*: it focuses the attention on such things as playing the piano, worshipping one's God, etc.. This concreteness too may help to make reflection about the good captivating.

Finally. The theory of the good that we have outlined can be developed further in a number of ways, such as by asking: what, more concretely, are the key capacities that matter, and to what extent should they be developed? And, if people have a real choice from certain projects, just how much real freedom to develop certain capacities does this give them? Etc.. Such questions are very important if we are to use the theory of the good developed here in tandem with a theory of the right. However, these questions surpass the limits of the present paper, which can only give a direction in which a theory of the good should go.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, however, giving a direction would be useless if we could not indicate some practical implications of our theory of the good. This is what we shall now do.<sup>39</sup>

#### **4 THE GOOD LIFE, GIVING AWAY MONEY, AND LIMITATIONS ON SPENDING MONEY**

In this section we are going to put the general theory of the good that we have developed to use, by asking when a lack of money can be seen as an evil. More precisely we shall be asking this question while concentrating on those who may give money: how much can they

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<sup>38</sup> It may be wondered whether an outline of a theory that leaves certain vital things open (such as which are the key capacities that matter) does not run a greater risk of abuse than a very specific theory. My reply would be: a well worked-out theory may well be easier to apply practically, and that is an advantage. (Yet our theory too already admits of practical translations; see the next section.) Still, it is not clear whether a better worked-out theory is by that token less liable to abuse. For one, also a better worked-out theory would still be dependent on good-faith application, and could be abused by those who wished to bend it according to their purposes. For example, if (as I tend to think but cannot argue for in the present paper) the important human capacities are cognitive, social, emotional and physical capacities, a theory that stated and defended them as such could still be liable to abuse. Furthermore, a better worked-out theory could even be *more* liable to abuse than a vaguer one, because it lends itself more to mechanistic interpretation that neglects the "spirit" of its specifications. For example, arguing (as I shall do in the next section) for the statement that rich people should usually give away 10% of their money is risky, because such a statement easily gets a life of its own: people tend to forget the considerations on which it is based.

<sup>39</sup> As will become clear, the implications that I propose do not presuppose answers to all such questions as exactly which key capacities matter - they could follow for a fairly broad range of answers to such questions.

give without suffering any evil? And, what restrictions on spending money can they observe without suffering any evil? We will only make some suggestions, which are not the *only* ones that may follow from our general theory of the good.<sup>40</sup>

First. It seems to follow from the proposed theory of the good that it is not an evil thing to give away money if after the giving you still have a real choice from a reasonable number of projects that realize most of your key capacities to a certain minimum extent, as well as a reasonable amount of money; and if, moreover, having all this is not seriously threatened in the future. My suggestion is that, since usually these conditions are clearly and amply fulfilled for a reasonably rich person before he gives anything away, they will *at any rate* keep being fulfilled if he has *roughly the same amount* of money left after he has given some money away.<sup>41</sup> One can disagree as to how long this is the case, but for someone who has quite some money it seems to be somewhere between, say, one percent (which is in any case not a substantial change) and fifty percent (which is at any rate a substantial change). What is true for one percent is also true for two, three, or five percent, it seems: these are not, for people who are reasonably well-off, substantial changes. And what is true for fifty percent is also true for forty, thirty, and probably also for twenty-five percent. It seems, then, a good practical guideline that for rich (wo)men giving away about *ten percent* of their money does not involve any evil.<sup>42</sup> This guideline we may call *the tithe suggestion* (at least, if we forget about the undertones of taxes that the word “tithe” easily evokes).<sup>43</sup>

Let us briefly look at some problems of this suggestion. First, suppose that someone says that he already pays a lot of taxes, and that therefore he cannot, without suffering evils, give tithes in addition. The reply can be that the tithe suggestion is offered as an answer to the question how much, at least, I can make myself “worse off” in financial terms without suffering any evil. Now, the present objection seems to say that I have already made myself a lot “worse off” in such terms by deciding to pay taxes. But such a decision is not, in fact, a choice to make oneself worse off, because one does not, at least in a country where paying taxes is reasonably well enforced, really have the choice not to pay taxes.

Secondly, it may seem that the above suggestion is open to an iterative interpretation.<sup>44</sup> That is, if it does not involve anything bad to give away 10% of your money, why shouldn't one say that giving 10% of the remaining 90% doesn't involve any evil either? To reply: even if giving ten percent of the remaining 90% doesn't make you worse off when you compare having what you've left with having 90%, it might make you worse off when compare having what you've left with having the original amount of money (there is a sorites paradox involved here).<sup>45</sup> (In any case, we cannot say that you still have roughly the same amount of

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<sup>40</sup> Also, I cannot of course claim that mine is the only theory of the good with which these suggestions are compatible.

<sup>41</sup> This absolutely leaves open the possibility that they keep being fulfilled if one gives away much more than this.

<sup>42</sup> These conclusions remain standing if one takes a closer look at how most rich people spend their money and how much they can and do save. But I will not try to show this here.

<sup>43</sup> Singer (1993, p. 246) makes the same suggestion, but arrives at it in a very different way.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Cullity (2004, esp. Ch. 5, 6). In his discussion, Cullity is throughout concerned with right action.

<sup>45</sup> As said, I leave open the question whether it *does* in fact make you worse off.

money as you originally had.) And when we ask whether you've made yourself worse off by giving money, the latter comparison is the appropriate one to make.

Third, what about someone saying "I've got used to (a constellation of) projects that require all my money; therefore to give away *any* of it involves evil for me." Here, the answer should be that as a reasonably rich person, I have the appearances against me, because I have so much more than what we would generally and in good faith regard as necessary to give someone a real choice from a reasonable number of projects that realize most of his key capacities to a certain minimum extent, as well as to let him have a reasonable amount of money.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, even if we grant that in order to have a good life, I must be able to go on living as I now do, I cannot really make myself believe that I need all my money to do so. A lifestyle of a reasonably rich person grows and is tuned to certain *rough* amounts of money, not to *exact* amounts. The rich person who complains that he would suffer evils for absolutely everything he gives away, should also complain that he had too little money to begin with.

Finally, suppose that someone claims that he needs all his money to be able to maintain his self-respect. It may seem possible to reply that self-respect should be a byproduct of having everything else that is needed to have a good life. And if so, having self-respect wouldn't take any extra money at all. Sometimes, however, it does seem to be the case that even reasonably rich people can with good reason claim that they do need all their money or even more to maintain their self-respect (e.g., in societies where self-respect crucially depends, for the rich at least, on the ability to give gifts). The point is that the rich in contemporary Western societies cannot usually credibly claim to be in such a situation.

Let us now consider some restrictions that could be observed when spending money and that do not involve any evil for the spender. I shall discuss two that seem to me promising.

The first, which is connected to money in a rather indirect way, can be called the "ecological (or footprint) point". It is beyond doubt that if someone could only act in ways that would minimally damage the environment (or make for maximum "sustainability" and the like), he would be very seriously limited in what he could do -- to such an extent that these limitations would involve serious evils for him. But perhaps this is not true if he could only choose from actions that damaged the environment to a modest and limited degree; then, many actions could still be open to him, and often no evil might be involved.

Can we say something more about when it involves an evil not to be able to burden the environment to a certain extent? Suppose that we could give the same answer to this question for every human being: not to be able burden the environment to at least size X involves an

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<sup>46</sup> This is so for a number of good-faith specifications of which key capacities and which level of them matters. One specification might be: having a real choice from a number of educational and professional trajectories, and having a real choice in how to form and maintain relationships and leisure projects. In addition, there would of course have to be a real opportunity to have adequate housing and adequate health care, as well as other things that are needed if one is to be able to really choose from a number of fitting projects and relationships.

evil. Then, we could say that we lived in a sense in a tragic world if size X were bigger than the size of one's ecological footprint, where the ecological footprint is defined as the maximum size of environmental burden that would be sustainable (make for ecological survival) if every human being imposed such a burden. We *hope* that we do not live in a tragic world in this sense, and thus that size X is at most the size of our ecological footprint - or rather, at most the size that our ecological footprint would be even if the world's population were considerably larger than it is now. In other words, we *hope* that it does not involve an evil to be able maximally to burden the environment as much as the size of our ecological footprint.

Why would our hope be *real*, and could we thus say that we would not suffer any evil if we lived within our ecological footprint, with the restrictions on spending money that this involves? It seems real because the development of our key capacities (such as our cognitive, emotional and social capacities) often does not require very many material goods. For example, to exercise your cognitive capacities you do need materials, such as pencils and paper, as well as materials involved in preconditions for your exercising your skills (such preconditions include your being healthy and well-fed etc.); but all this does not usually involve *very many* material goods. Therefore most people can have a real choice from a variety of projects that develop most of their key capacities to a certain threshold level while their environmental burden is at most the size of their ecological footprint.

We should acknowledge, however, that our hope is not real for everyone: some people's personal key capacities may, at times, be such that they could only be developed to a threshold level through projects that guzzled material resources (although I find it hard to think of an example here); or some people may only be able to survive an illness by getting very effective but very environmentally burdening treatment; or they may hold a high public office that requires them to fly around the world. It is hard to deny, then, that some people do exist for whom it does involve evils to operate within the confines of their ecological footprint; but their number doesn't seem to be overwhelmingly large.<sup>47</sup> Yet because there are such people, our hope must be that for the rest of us it does not involve an evil to be able only to burden the planet somewhat *less* than the size of our ecological footprint.<sup>48</sup>

I very briefly mention a second restriction that we rich people could, when spending money, heed without suffering any evil: the fair trade suggestion. It seems to me, but cannot argue for this here, that it does imply an evil always to look for (nearly) the cheapest ways to develop most of your key capacities to some extent. But it may involve no evil only to be able to choose those ways of developing your key capacities that are for (a range of) reasons

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<sup>47</sup> It seems to me that we must be extremely wary of people who quickly claim to be among these people themselves.

<sup>48</sup> For many rich people, living within their footprint will surely involve changing their lifestyles. So the footprint-suggestion proposes that we can change our lives very much and still have good lives. The tithing suggestion, by contrast, does not involve any drastic life-changes. But then, the tithing suggestion is only a very minimal suggestion. On the other hand, one may think that the footprint suggestion may be overly optimistic. Even so, however, we must firmly hope that there is an arrangement that is both sustainable and makes a good life for everyone possible.

*other than* their price the impartially best ones available to you.<sup>49</sup> For example, it may involve no evil only to have a choice to buy fair (trade) products instead of conventional products (that are by many standards less fair), as long at least as there is enough choice within the category of fair products, and as long as the price differences between these products and "conventional" products are not too extreme.

Finally, I would like to add a remark about Nussbaum's version of the capability approach, with which many thoughts developed in the present paper have a lot of similarities. I have said that many people's central capacities can be developed and exercised to a great extent in relatively "immaterial" ways. If that is correct, then something that is sometimes said about the capability approach –and especially about Nussbaum's version of it- is probably not true: it is likely to be incorrect that the capability approach is totally out of touch with a finite world where many goods are scarce. The capability approach may be able to deal better with scarcity than is sometimes assumed. If it is lofty, it often may be realizable as well. It need not be too good to be true.

## **5 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Let us summarize the main concrete suggestions that we have just arrived at. For ease of recognition, we'll give them some fancy names.

- 1) *The Tithing Suggestion*. For rich people, it does not usually involve evil to give away ten percent of their money;
- 2) *The Ecological (or Footprint) Suggestion*. For rich people, it mostly does not involve an evil to spend their money so as to avoid exceeding their ecological footprint;
- 3) *The Fair Trade Suggestion*. For rich people, it may not involve an evil to have only the opportunity to buy fair trade products.

It bears repeating that these are minimum suggestions; probably they do not offer an exhaustive account of the degrees and ways of giving money which involve no evils. And, it is important that the suggestions can to a great extent coexist; often, abiding by all of them at the same time does not involve any evil.<sup>50</sup>

All this does not yet provide us with an answer to the question how much of their money rich people should give away to fight poverty. To arrive at such an answer, we need a theory of the right, that is, a theory about what we should morally do. Such a theory could, for example, tell us always to maximize the good. Our theory of the good may make sense in combination with a lot of (rather formal) theories of the right. I will briefly say something

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<sup>49</sup> It would be more correct but more cumbersome, and less clear, to speak not of the "impartially best" but of the "impersonally least suboptimal" ways available to you. Here "impersonal" means: as seen from "nowhere". Cf. Nagel 1986

<sup>50</sup> Admittedly, this suggestion deserves careful elaboration, which I cannot however give it here.

about this theory of the good in combination with a theory of the right with the following main components:<sup>51</sup>

- 1) There is a pro-tanto moral reason to fight impersonal evils as best you can. (By impersonal evils I mean evils as they are -qua quality and quantity- as seen from 'nowhere'.)<sup>52</sup>
- 2) There is a pro-tanto moral reason to fight personal evils as best you can. (By personal evils I mean evils as they are -qua quality and quantity- as seen through a moral agent's own eyes and as felt through his own skin.)
- 3) About the relative weight of these two moral reasons we can say: If you can fight a great personal evil at the cost of a small impersonal evil, you may do so; and if you can fight a great impersonal evil at the cost of a small personal evil, you must do so.

I will not spend any time trying to defend this theory of right action here; I do that elsewhere. Our present concern is what answers to the money question it would give us when combined with the theory of the good that has been proposed above. This theory of the good holds that someone has a good life if he has a real choice from a reasonable number of projects that realize most of his key capacities to some extent. This means that if he does not have such a choice, he suffers a great evil;<sup>53</sup> and if he has it, he suffers no (or in any case no significant) evil. Now if we combine this with the third statement of the above theory of the right, it follows that a person must at least fight those great impersonal evils that he can fight without giving up having real choice from a reasonable number of projects that realize most of his key capacities to some extent.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Of extant proposals, this theory may be closest to Scheffler's (1982) or to a variation of this position.

<sup>52</sup> The term pro-tanto moral reason, which is taken from Kagan (1989), denotes a real moral reason which can, however, be outweighed by stronger ones. The nomenclature impersonal-personal is inspired by Scheffler (1982) and Nagel (1986). (For what I call "impersonal" and "personal" here, Nagel would probably say "objective" and "subjective".)

<sup>53</sup> Our theory seems to suggest that there is one turning point between having real choice and not having it, and that by having to go beyond this point (e.g., by giving money) one suffers great evil. But, it may be objected, any such point will be arbitrary. However, we have the choice between saying that beyond a certain -inevitably somewhat arbitrary- point I suffer great evil if I go on giving dollars away, and saying that I suffer no great evil until the loss of an extra dollar (or dime, or cent...) is by itself a great evil for me (cf. Cullity 2004). The latter alternative is implausibly strict: it is intuitively clear that I suffer a great evil by giving away money long before one extra dollar (or dime, or cent...) by itself makes a difference to me. (There is a sorites paradox involved here.)

<sup>54</sup> One may ask: what if all the rich were willing to do at least what they could do at the no significant cost (in terms of evils) to themselves, and if consequently there were too many hands to fight serious evils (such as poverty)? (Let us not now doubt whether there could ever be too many hands; let us, for the sake of the argument, just assume that this could be the case.) Which rich people should be exempted from doing their duty? It seems to me that the following would be the most plausible answer: even if all rich people in this case can help without suffering significant evil themselves, it may still be possible to distinguish between those who can help at cost (in terms of evils) to themselves that are "not significant" and those who can help at costs that are "absolutely not significant". It would then be most plausible to assign the duties to help to those who could perform them at "absolutely no significant" cost to themselves.

Now since we rich people can usually give tithes and still have a real choice from a reasonable number of capacity-realizing projects, and since we can do a lot of impersonal good by giving them,<sup>55</sup> we *must*, morally, give tithes for the sake of fighting poverty or some similarly good cause. The same is true for living within our ecological footprint and for buying only fair trade products: these are courses of action that we must take, since we can take them and still have real choice from a fair number of capacity-realizing projects, and since they are bound to do great impersonal good.<sup>56</sup>

It may be useful to compare the position developed in this paper with a famous different one, Peter Singer's. Singer simply says that you should fight impersonal evil as best you can. This means that you can be required to take on great evils, provided only that the price you pay by doing so is, impersonally seen, more than offset by the goods that others receive as a result. It is true that Singer also defends a principle that might generate the same conclusion as we have just reached. He says that "if we can prevent something bad without sacrificing anything of comparable [moral] significance, we ought to do it."<sup>57</sup> This principle is so general as to be able both to make room for personal evils and to allow for many different specifications of what is bad or evil, including the one that we have proposed. It is clear, however, that Singer intends this principle only as a minimal and ecumenical suggestion, meant to speak to those who don't share his utilitarian framework. Ultimately, however, Singer remains a utilitarian -to be precise, a preference utilitarian-, and consequently both his theory of the right and his theory of the good differ considerably from those that have been proposed in the present paper.

Finally. I have proposed a theory of the good which, in combination with certain theories of the right, might not let the rich get away with it easily. It may be wondered, however, whether this doesn't come at a price: to the extent that we the rich can do with less money while nothing bad happens to us, to that extent, it seems, can the poor too do with less money without anything bad happening to them.

But is this really so? We have taken as our guide the idea that something bad happens to people when they do not have a real choice from a reasonable number of projects that enable them to develop most of their key capacities to some degree, and also if they do not have a

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<sup>55</sup> To be sure, there is a lot of debate about whether our help can help. Elsewhere, I have defended that it can (cf. also Cullity 2004, Ch. 3). Of course, saying that help of rich individuals can do good is in no way to deny the importance of structural reform. Indeed, one way in which the rich individuals can help is by lobbying for institutional reform.

<sup>56</sup> This may be least clear for living within your ecological footprint. My idea is that it could really help the poor to do this, because living in this way could be a real and forceful inspiration for yourself and others to get serious about moving towards a more ideal world; if the size of your lifestyle is bigger than what it could justifiably be in an ideal situation, you might well –even if you speak differently- be quite happy to leave things as they are.

<sup>57</sup> Singer, 1993, p. 230 (Singer leaves out the word "moral" but inserts it in what follows immediately: *ibid.*, p. 231).

certain amount of money. This conception of the good does imply that you do not need a whole lot of money. But it also implies that you do need some.<sup>58</sup>

More generally, many poor people clearly lack real freedom to engage in a reasonable number of capacity-realizing projects. On the conception of the good that I have sketched we do not, then, have a reason to condone the "multidimensional conspiracies" that many situations of dire poverty are: situations where people are stuck in poor housing conditions, violence, poor health, illiteracy, and unemployment; where they lack real opportunities to acquire self-esteem and to avoid that their families are uprooted, their emotions blunted, and that they fall victim to despair – to name only some of the things we find together in many shantytowns and other places of widespread poverty across the world. Nor, it should be recalled, does what has been said here imply that we should usually just go ahead and impose our own vision on others: frequently the people themselves are the best guides to what is best for them, and seldom is coercion justified. This is not to say that there are no risks in the position that has been defended here. Yet there is reason to think that if this paper delivers a message to the rich, it does not do so at the expense of the poor.

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<sup>58</sup> This is again true for a broad range of concretizations of the theory of the good outlined above. On many such concretizations, it may, if you're not very rich, involve significant evils to give tithes. And, if you have very little money (or more generally have very few opportunities for flourishing) sticking to the "ecological suggestion" may also involve significant evil. For although it is commonly easier to live within your ecological footprint when you are poor, it may in a context of multifold deprivation involve significant evil not to avail yourself of ecologically destructive opportunities when they present themselves. (However, I think, or at least very much hope, that in the end the poor cannot usually be excused here and can generally live within their footprint without anything bad happening to them.)

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