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Harmful Beneficence

Beneficence can be significant to moral action but criteria for good beneficence is rarely discussed. Much work has focused on how extensive the demands are on agents to be beneficent and on agents' motivations for beneficence.[1] There has been little direct attention to the relationship between benefactor and beneficiary. The argument here is that serious deficiencies exist in the view that benefactors should focus primarily on satisfying another's self-chosen ends. A narrow focus on the attempt to help someone satisfy her ends misses the harmful effects that benefactors can have on a dependent beneficiary's ability to choose freely from her own values and to utilize her internal and external resources in future action.

This paper will argue that beneficence that involves a relationship of dependence between benefactor and beneficiary cannot aim only at promoting that beneficiary's good, narrowly conceived as meeting her self-chosen ends; it must also preserve the current conditions that the beneficiary depends on for her free agency. A concern for free agency in beneficence goes beyond whether one satisfies someone's freely chosen ends and respects her internal capacity to set ends. It must also involve the beneficiary's overall conception of her good and the resources she depends upon in realizing that conception. When a benefactor fails to understand or respect the larger set of values a beneficiary may have, fails to account for a beneficiary's fuller conception of her own good, or disregards the wider side effects of her action, the choice of means that benefactor uses are much more likely to undermine the beneficiary's independently controlled resources. When a beneficiary depends on these resources for future choices, these side effects can undermine her free agency in the future.

[1] Questions about the proper motive for beneficence are raised in Michael Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories" *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976), pp. 453-466; Marcia Baron, *Kantian Ethics Almost Without Apology*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999). For work on how demanding beneficence should be, cf. Richard J. Arneson, "Moral Limits on the Demands of Beneficence?" in *The Ethics of Assistance: Morality and the Distant Needy,* Deen K. Chatterjee, ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 33-58; Liam B. Murphy, *Moral Demands in Nonideal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Paul Hurley, "Fairness and Beneficence," *Ethics* 115 (2003), pp. 841-864.

Free agency is understood here as a person's unimpeded ability to deliberate about her values, to choose from those values, and to make those choices effective in action. The thinner notion of free agency overlaps with the thicker notion of autonomy; below, I will draw on ideas about autonomy that are relevant to the more minimal notion of free agency.[2]

Free agency is often a clearer objective than autonomy when we interact with others, particularly in cases of beneficence. It is often hard to know whether another person has satisfied the necessary criteria for autonomy on many views. More importantly, we have much less power to influence—for better or worse—some of the psychological conditions necessary for others' autonomy.[3] We can, however, have a significant influence on the conditions for someone's free agency. Our ultimate hope should be that others are fully autonomous, and we must do what we can to preserve and respect their autonomy. However, a focus on free agency more directly aims at the basic idea that (barring exceptional circumstances) we must prevent our actions from impeding a person's freedom to control her own life. Although a person's deliberation is also to some extent private, there are still many familiar ways we can impede free deliberation and choice. We may directly or indirectly threaten a person, manipulate or bully her, induce guilt or shame, threaten to withhold something she desperately needs, or cause her to regard the help we offer as conditional on her acceptance of the values we prefer. If we do so, it is not far-fetched to suppose we tamper with her ability to make her own choices. The argument below will consider more subtle influences one person can have on another's deliberation and also show that a focus on free agency makes clearer the relationship between the set of options a person has and her freedom.

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[2] The intersection between free agency and autonomy entails that impeding someone's free agency is impeding her autonomy. We can also promote someone's autonomy by promoting her free agency, but there may be conditions for autonomy that promoting free agency leaves untouched. The point is that autonomy is a broader notion than is necessary here.

[3] For example, a number of views of autonomy require certain procedures for choice that involve reflection and/or endorsement. Because these are dependent on private mental states, our ability to tell whether another person has satisfied these criteria is minimal. Although we can encourage others' reflection and endorsement, it will be very difficult for one person to directly promote these in another. For a general account of what different views of autonomy require, see Marilyn Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 19-25.

I will begin with a minimal conception of beneficence. An action is beneficent if it is intended to benefit another person with an aim to enhancing her good, primarily by satisfying her desires, helping her realize what she values, meeting her needs, promoting her interests or protecting her from harm. A beneficent agent's intention to promote the beneficiary's well-being is a substantial part of her reason for acting. Beneficence has moral content. The auto mechanic who fixes your car helps you realize one of your ends, but her action is not beneficent when her reason is simply to do her job and be paid for it. At the same time, she might beneficently fix your headlight for free when she realizes you have emptied your checking account to pay for repairs on your clutch.

Typically, the kind of beneficence we most admire also involves an attitude of benevolence in the form of goodwill, care and concern, and the agent's interest in the beneficiary's well-being.[4] Beneficence need not be benevolent to be good beneficence. The argument here applies both to benevolent and non-benevolent beneficence but, in the main example I offer below, Albert Schweitzer is benevolent. Benevolence offers benefactors a strong motive to attend to the effects of their actions on beneficiaries, but the example shows that it does not necessarily protect beneficiaries from harm to their free agency. Obviously, a benefactor who is malevolent, callous, or negligent is more likely to fail at good beneficence. However, well-intentioned and benevolent benefactors are very capable of inadvertently doing significant harm.

I am concerned here with non-paternalistic beneficence, where the ends, needs, interests, protection and so on are all chosen by the beneficiary herself, and she welcomes the beneficent action. Even in such cases, I will argue beneficence can fail in a crucial respect when the benefactor is insufficiently aware of the harmful effects his actions have on the beneficiary's options for future deliberation and action. This is true whether or not the beneficiary does enjoy some benefit from the action. Section One contains a definition of the type of dependence that occurs most often in beneficence,

[4] Some discussions of benevolence include benevolent action, or what I am calling beneficence, within the concept of benevolence. Cf. Yuval Livnat, "On the Nature of Benevolence," *The Journal of Social Philosophy*, 35 (2004), pp. 304-317. The distinction between beneficence and benevolence is meant to highlight the fact that some beneficence does not include benevolence.

and offers an example of harmful beneficence. Section Two presents conditions for good beneficence: beneficence that preserves free agency and shows respect for beneficiaries.

1. Beneficence and Dependence

I focus on beneficence that involves a relationship of dependence between benefactor and beneficiary. Dependence is frequently a significant feature of beneficence. Those most in need of help are often required to depend on others to satisfy their central ends. If the free agency of dependent beneficiaries is threatened by beneficence, this raises a serious question for moral theories that require us to help those who cannot meet their own needs. The conditions for good beneficence offered here show that harmful beneficence in cases of dependence can be avoided, although this requires more of agents than is often assumed.[5]

The argument is not that free agency is more likely or enhanced when a person relies on herself to satisfy her ends. Few people can satisfy all their ends without help from others. Dependence is a necessary part of many relationships we deeply value. There is nothing inherently desirable about avoiding it.

Dependence is a matter of degree. In the weakest sense, we are always dependent on others not to interfere with us as we carry out our ends, and almost always dependent upon them to cooperate with us. The more robust form of dependence within beneficent relationships is the dependence an autonomous person, P1, has when first, P1 believes it necessary that someone besides herself, P2, contribute to the realization of a central element in P1's conception of her own good (that is, P2's action is a necessary means to a central end P1 has). Second, P1 does not have recourse to other sources that would provide comparable means to the end (that is, P2's action is the sole means currently available). Third, P1 has an expectation that her end will be satisfied by P2's particular action or set of actions. Thus, a relationship of robust dependence exists in beneficence when P1's good is significantly affected by the actions of another person, P2, and P1 necessarily relies on P2 for this result. Dependence of this kind can occur between

[5] The harms described here may occur when dependence is not present. Dependence is not necessary for these harms, but it increases the risk.

strangers but also occurs in personal relationships, for example, between friends, parents and children, long-term partners, or teachers and students. Material needs that a person cannot satisfy through her own agency can be the cause of one person's dependence on another, but this is not the only dependent relationship that is appropriate for beneficence. Someone may be beneficent by providing us with information we need to act, or helping us realize which ends would better promote our own good.

Beneficence involving dependence is neither better nor worse than beneficence where a beneficiary's acceptance of help is optional—in the sense that her end is less pressing (and therefore not a central end) or she has recourse to other means to her end. Nor does beneficence always involve robust dependence. We can help someone to lighten her burden or show concern for her even when she could help herself. When someone's beneficence also involves your dependence it is because you cannot refuse that beneficence except at some significant cost: You cannot realize the end without the help that is offered (unless you get similar help from someone else). Thus, you are not robustly dependent on me when I give you advice on caring for your premature infant if you can get that information on your own. But if you depend on my beneficence alone to adequately care for, feed, clothe or inoculate your baby, you do become so dependent.

How can beneficence undermine free agency? The example that follows has features that are not uncommon when beneficence is called for: A beneficent agent with expertise and access to resources, and beneficiaries whose poverty and oppression make it hard to realize their ends. The very features that make a person greatly in need of beneficence also make her more vulnerable to a loss of free agency, when her resources are damaged and her options are narrowed.

The Alsatian doctor Albert Schweitzer, as portrayed in the movie *Le Grand Blanc de Lamberéné,* dedicates his life to benefiting the people living in Gabon. Although he is less famed now, in his time Schweitzer was thought of by many in Europe and the Americas as a great humanitarian and a paradigmatic benefactor. The film portrays Schweitzer as a sympathetic, but ultimately tragic, figure. We see that, although Schweitzer's actions do unjustified and unnecessary harm to the free agency of beneficiaries, he makes significant sacrifices to be of service to the Gabonese, has deeply benevolent

feelings towards them, and successfully helps them satisfy some of their central ends, by providing health care and other material aid.[6]

The problem with Schweitzer's actions is not primarily paternalism, understood as providing benefits to a person that she would refuse or reject, or as benefiting someone unable to make a free or informed choice.[7] The Gabonese adults in the film are able to make free and informed choices and they welcome Schweitzer's medical treatment and material aid. Schweitzer does engage in one major act of paternalism: He gives the tribal leader Mata a placebo, rather than telling him that he is dying. This assuages Mata's fear and temporarily alleviates his suffering, but also prevents him from adequate preparation for his funeral ceremony. Otherwise, Schweitzer does not force the Gabonese to accept help that they do not want and does not directly contravene their choices.

Nevertheless, Schweitzer's beneficence creates a significant difficulty for some, particularly with respect to the goal of political independence. The film presents political independence as important to almost all the Gabonese, even if some concealed their approval of it to avoid annoying Schweitzer. Schweitzer was not opposed to anti-colonialism on principle. Rather, he did not understand its importance to the Gabonese and occasionally displayed a kind of annoyed bafflement about their passion for it.

One issue of conflict concerned resources. Schweitzer resisted the desire of the local people for greater control over the clinic, and, in spite of his sympathy for their suffering, he was not sympathetic to their hope to acquire the skills he himself had. Thus, one issue is that he did not fully appreciate their desire to develop and exercise their own talents. A second issue is that Schweitzer's beneficence causes a division in the community between those who sought the material goods from Europe that he provided and those who thought it better, for economic and political reasons, to focus on economic self-sufficiency. One problem for those accepting the goods Schweitzer offered is that they became less focused on meeting their own economic needs and they were not able to engage in the usual economic give and take that they had traditionally relied upon as subsistence farmers prior to Schweitzer's arrival. By giving up

[6] *Le Grand Blanc de Lambéréne,* directed by Bassek ba Kohbia, 1995. I do not claim that the film represents the historical Schweitzer correctly.
[7] Cf. Gerald Dworkin, "Paternalism," *The Monist* (56), 1972, pp. 64-84.

the cooperative and reciprocal agricultural practices they had previously engaged in, their standing entitlement to the assistance of others was severely weakened. As they were ultimately interdependent with others in the larger community even with the goods Schweitzer provided, this later put them at a disadvantage. It became harder for them to realize their ends when others, who now mistrusted them, refused their cooperation. Further, surrounding communities who were focused on the self-sufficient model became alienated from those perceived of as relying on Schweitzer. In losing the help of these communities, those close to Schweitzer lost a significant resource they needed after the colonial period, when self-sufficient farming became the primary economic option.[8]

Schweitzer's inability to recognize the importance of eliminating colonialism to those around him was a major failing. Beneficiaries' needs and ends are nested within the broader context of their lives. Ignoring or misunderstanding this context is a hazard for both benefactors and beneficiaries. In Schweitzer's case, the issues that arose about how to develop and use resources can be explained by the desire of the colonized for economic self-sufficiency and political self-respect. One aspect of colonial rule—in Africa and elsewhere—was the view that those ruled were inferior to Europeans and thus incapable of economic and political self-determination. Further, the colonial economic system was designed to provide raw material for European economies. Cheap raw materials were sent to Europe but colonies depended on expensive imports of finished goods. Those hoping for self-rule therefore believed that economic self-sufficiency through a focus on providing for their own needs would facilitate political independence by removing economic dependence on Europe. Thus, those within the movement aimed to remove not only the external causes of incapacity, such as economic dependence on Europe and European political domination, but also to overcome internalized conceptions of inferiority. These goals were linked, in that economic self-sufficiency, particularly during the transition away from colonialism, would

[8] Dependence on material aid can make beneficiaries vulnerable to later economic changes. E.g., this occurs when food provided for famine relief competes with locally grown food. The drop in prices can sometimes make it impossible for farmers to raise the money they need to plant for the next year. See Frances Moore Lappe, *World Hunger: Twelve Myths* (New York: Grove Press, 1998), p. 134.

both increase the possibility of independence and also decrease the sense of internalized inferiority that colonialism caused.[9]

In this context, why did Schweitzer provide inadequate and harmful beneficence in spite of his clear desire not to harm those he worked for? The explanations are interrelated. First, Schweitzer had an extremely limited understanding of the Gabonese perspective, their culture and way of life, their values and the place of some of their values in their overall conception of their good. Bassa, a character close to Schweitzer, points out that although Schweitzer has treated thousands of patients, he has made no attempt to learn their language. He made insufficient effort to understand the particulars of people's lives and this kept him from seeing the wider effect his actions had on those lives. Second, Schweitzer does not attend to the possible psychological impact that his relative wealth and power might have on those with far fewer options. He unintentionally leaves some with the belief that his beneficence would be more secure if they complied with his preferences, for example by not openly supporting the anti-colonialist movement.

I have so far focused primarily on benefactors, but to understand the impact of dependence in beneficent relationships on free agency, it is also necessary to consider the effects on the beneficiary. The limitations on options that make beneficence so important to beneficiaries also threaten to lead to even narrower options in the future when the benefactor's action impedes the use of other resources. When beneficiaries are dependent, beneficence sometimes interferes with their internal (self-respect, confidence) or external (economic, social or political) resources. It is well known that international aid to underdeveloped countries sometimes fails when the aid has an analogous type of unintended side effect on resources. [10]

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[9] Cf., Edmund J. Keller, "Africa in Transition: Facing the Challenge of Globalization, *Harvard International Review*, (29), 2007, pp. 46-51; Valentine Udoh James, "The Importance of Self-Sufficiency To African Countries", in Valentine Udoh James, *Sustainable Development in Third World Countries: Applied and Theoretical Perspectives* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishers), pp. 142-154; Zine Mugabane, *Bringing The Empire Home: Race, Class and Gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[10] Cf. Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (New York: Zed Books, 2002).

A second aspect of the problem is less often noticed: the benefactor's choice can have effects on the beneficiary's resources (whether deliberate or inadvertent) that can interfere with the beneficiary's ability to freely deliberate and choose. Below, I will argue that perhaps the most worrying effect of Schweitzer's beneficence was its effect on the deliberative process of those he tried to help. When beneficiaries have limited resources, dependence can threaten their deliberative options in three ways: by restricting their autonomy of action, by interfering with the formation of choices, and by reducing their self-esteem.

First, dependence can impede our ability to act, for example if we unnecessarily give up one resource in order to acquire a resource through beneficence. Losing one resource for another may not always be problematic; sometimes such shifts in resources can have long-term benefits. It can be a harm when it occurs unnecessarily, for example when it is not a necessary condition for the benefit received but occurs because the benefactor fails to recognize his impact on resources. A reduction in our options can also affect deliberation. When circumstances frequently frustrate the realization of our ends or significantly narrow our options, this can sometimes affect our capacity to deliberate freely and choose in the future.

In understanding how some kinds of dependence can undermine free agency, it is useful to draw a further distinction between what Gerald Dworkin calls *autonomy of judgment* and *autonomy of action*, two notions closely related to what I have called free agency.[11] Autonomy of judgment is the free exercise of the capacity that allows one to both judge and choose. It is therefore incompatible with brainwashing, hypnosis, compulsion, deceit, insanity and anything else that interferes with the voluntary status of an agent's judgment. Autonomy of action is the freedom to follow the course one has decided upon. It is usually assumed that autonomy of judgment is a prerequisite for autonomy of action, but less noticed are the complex ways these interrelate. Loosely, autonomy of judgment is the absence of internal constraints on a person's deliberation and choice, and autonomy of action is the absence of external constraints on

[11] Gerald Dworkin, 'Moral Autonomy,' in *Morals, Science and Sociality,* T. Engelhardt and D. Callahan, eds. (Hastings-on-Hudson, NY: The Hastings Center, 1978), pp. 156-170.

her actions.[12] Thus, a political prisoner might still have autonomy of judgment. She can autonomously judge that her imprisonment is unjust, that it is carried out by an unjust regime, and that, when she is free, she will work to overthrow that regime. However, she does not have autonomy of action. That form of autonomy has been restricted by her jailers.[13]

We can conceptually separate the notions of autonomy of action and judgment, but they are importantly interdependent. The negation or absence of one affects the presence of the other. What is most relevant to the issue of dependence is that the belief that you lack autonomy of action often erodes your autonomy of judgment. The expectation that you will rarely (or never) get to carry out your ends or act on your values can have a serious effect on your deliberative process. To take a case that does not involve beneficence: If I believe, like Charlotte Vale in *Now, Voyager,* that I am doomed to spend my life placating my ill domineering mother for fear any rebellion will cause her to disown me or to die, I am unlikely to formulate many independent projects if I regard such projects as impossible to carry out.[14] When there are extreme, seemingly insurmountable constraints on my range of options, it may be more rational to resign myself to my circumstances to avoid the depression and frustration the absence of freedom causes. Gradually, situations where our options are exceedingly narrow can erode our willingness to reflect on other possibilities or to develop plans and values of our own.

Long-term restrictions on political and social freedom can also erode our inclination to deliberate freely and to act on our decisions. Perhaps this is why autonomy of judgment receives much more theoretical attention in the philosophical literature: in a sense, it is what gives autonomy of action its

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[12] See also S.I. Benn, 'Freedom, Autonomy and the Concept of a Person,' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1976), pp. 109-30.

[13] Locke famously claims that a person held in prison with the door unlocked is not free when someone has caused him to believe that the door is locked and thus he cannot escape. Such a person lacks autonomy of judgment and thus autonomy of action. When Odysseus chooses to be bound to the mast in order to hear the Sirens without jumping overboard, he has autonomy of judgment without autonomy of action. (Later, upon hearing the Sirens, he lacks both sorts of autonomy.) Locke's example shows that we should assume a fairly wide notion of constraint when considering autonomy of action. A person is constrained from acting not only when she is forcibly prevented from acting, but also when she lacks the resources, both epistemic and material, to act. Unless this wide notion of constraint on freedom is granted, we would have to say that a person trapped at the bottom of a well is free to rise to the surface, because she could do this *if* she had a ladder.

[14] *Now, Voyager*, directed by Irving Rapper, 1942.

importance. We tend to be troubled by restrictions on autonomy of action when a person is capable of thinking and deciding for herself. Yet, an agent who has autonomy of judgment can conceivably exercise it even when a range of actional options is temporarily closed to her.[15] Schweitzer had a similar effect on the autonomy of judgment of some Gabonese. The background condition of colonialism already impeded their options, but his beneficence unnecessarily made things worse for them, even if he also helped them in certain respects.

Those most attached to Schweitzer's beneficence were reluctant to consider participating in the anti-colonialist movement, in spite of their underlying sympathy for the cause. They feared doing so would risk Schweitzer's ire and thus his continued medical and material help. Some also wanted to avoid seeming ungrateful. The goal of greater economic self-sufficiency, which was part of the movement, also presented a dilemma to those who felt dependent on Schweitzer's largess: what if he withdrew his help and they lost the European goods he offered? What if the movement failed and he was no longer available to protect them from hunger in their new way of life? They would be much worse off. Thus, they felt unable to deliberate fully about options they might have had were they free from these concerns about losing Schweitzer's favor or seeming ungrateful.

Why, we might ask, did they not directly ask Schweitzer to promise to continue his beneficence, or that he not favor those who were not openly political? A problematic feature of relationships of beneficence in cases of economic or other kinds of inequality is that negotiation is very risky for

[15] The argument here is not that lack of autonomy of action immediately forecloses autonomy of judgment, but that most adults will not form ends they regard as unrealizable. We form ends in light of our options. When our options narrow significantly in the sense that our power to act is curtailed, as when we have few resources, we have much less reason to reflect on choices. However, even when our autonomy of action is restricted, we can exercise autonomy of judgment in forming attitudes about our lives. Further, retaining autonomy of judgment can be important in cases where liberty is restricted because one may have later opportunities to resist these restrictions. Slaves in the American South provide a significant example. By utilizing a small range of autonomy of action (for example, by learning how to read) during their captivity, they often increased their opportunity for escape, as well as their opportunity to work towards the liberation of other slaves. See Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981); Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (New York: Collier, 1962). At the same time the restriction on options also made avoidance of reflection on choices a kind of survival strategy for many slaves, as explored by Tony Morrison in *Beloved* (New York: Knopf, 1987).

beneficiaries. Beneficiaries are aware they have no right to the goods the benefactor offers. Negotiation may be unwise when those benefactors are the only secure means to one's ends. This problem can be addressed, but only when benefactors are sufficiently aware of the effects of their attitudes and actions.

Beneficence that involves dependence can interfere with the beneficiary's formation of values and choices. While it is exacerbated by restrictions on autonomy of action, this effect can also occur when autonomy of action is not directly curtailed. In such situations, this happens in three ways: it affects the preferences of the dependent person, it interferes with her reflection on and choice of values, and it reduces her self-esteem.

The first effect that beneficence can have on deliberation is that the goods offered or promised (for example, health care, food, education, and access to technology) potentially affect the future preferences of those who receive them. While this is not immediately problematic, it can become so if the future satisfaction of these preferences creates too great an incentive for the beneficiary to relinquish resources she currently relies on to realize what she values. For example, to give the Kayapo Indians of the Brazilian Amazon the opportunity to document a plight partly caused by settlers' encroachment on their land, the owner of the Body Shop chain gave them a television and video equipment. They had not been exposed to television and had no access to it, and so they sold some land to buy a satellite dish. The suggestion here is not that the Kayapo did not make their choice freely. However, if they were to impoverish themselves to satisfy present preferences they could curtail their future autonomy of action.

A second effect that undermines free agency is that the great need for certain goods, combined with the benefactor's (unstated or even unconscious) expectation that the recipient will take up particular values and attitudes, can interfere with the beneficiary's deliberation in several ways: (a) he may not reflect adequately on his values and attitudes out of concern that doing so would lead him to display values and attitudes the benefactor will disapprove of; (b) he may not believe he is free to choose his own values and ends without penalty (e.g., the loss of beneficence); or (c) he may decide to adopt values and attitudes he believes will better secure the benefactor's inclination to benefit him, e.g., because such values and attitudes will make the benefactor more likely to approve of him or take an interest in him.

In the Schweitzer case, the recipients of his generosity developed a feeling of gratitude and loyalty toward Schweitzer. This made it difficult to disagree with him when their values and ends conflicted with his own personal values (for example, regarding politics or social mores) or with his conception of their situation. When the beneficent agent is offering a good that greatly increases well-being (e.g., clearly rising living standards, greater social status) or something nearly impossible to forego (e.g., protection of one's children against deadly disease) the beneficiary will have a greater—and harder to resist—incentive to display the attitudes and values that might please the agent.

Even when we are not desperate for survival, mere social interdependence can have a problematic effect on our values. It is fairly common, for example, for people to unreflectively internalize values that will make them successful with others, e.g., their employers. However, relationships of dependence can affect values even more profoundly when people have very minimal power in comparison to those they depend upon and they lack the needed resources to change their situation. This can be illustrated by imagining how the 'Deferential Wife' described by Thomas Hill ended up in her predicament. Although this is not a case of beneficence, it illustrates the penalty on free choice that another person can exact when we are dependent on them and have few other options. As Hill describes the Deferential Wife, she is "utterly devoted to serving her husband." So,

> She buys the clothes he prefers, invites the guests he wants to entertain, and makes love whenever he is in the mood…She loves her husband but her conduct is not simply an expression of love. She is happy, but she does not subordinate herself as a means to happiness…On the contrary, she tends not to form her own interests, values, and ideals; and when she does she counts them as less important than her husband's.[16]

In my re-imagined version of the example, the Deferential Wife was once a young woman who desired economic security, a socially accepted form of sexual companionship, social status, and freedom

[16] Thomas Hill, "Servility and Self-Respect," in *Autonomy and Self-Respect* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 5. Hill's example is not about the effects of dependence but about the absence of self-respect. My addition to the example shows that the abuse of power within dependent relationships can cause loss of self-respect for the dependent person.

from unwanted sexual advances, but could only satisfy them through marriage to a husband who could provide them. Unfortunately, the seemingly jovial fellow she married soon turned out to be the Domineering Husband. As she gets older, the Domineering Husband threatens to leave her when she fails to reflect his values and meet all his needs. Since she fears losing the benefits of the life with her husband, and the life of a middle-aged divorcée involves economic hardship and loss of social status, she begins to display the attitudes and values that will maintain the relationship. After a while, she no longer bothers to reflect on her adopted interests, values or ideals or those she might develop independently of her husband. Her acquired values, combined with her belief that she cannot realize her aims (or perhaps even survive) without him, cause her to adopt the belief that the proper role of a woman is to serve her family.[17]

Applied to beneficence, the Deferential Wife example illustrates a danger of beneficence involving dependence, particularly under the conditions of inequality that are likely to exist between benefactors and beneficiaries. This potential for distortion of beneficiaries' deliberative process relates to a well-known problem in humanitarian aid. The heads of foreign non-governmental aid organizations in the Third World may be more likely to assist those they regard as sharing their political or religious outlook; this naturally increases incentives for people to adopt that outlook. Particularly when people are desperate, their perceptions of benefactors' beliefs, values and attitudes can alter the sorts of plans and values they adopt so that they conform to the (real or perceived) expectations of their benefactors.

The concern that one person's actions may change another person's values in ways they would not endorse requires significant qualification. Our values can be changed in ways that are not the immediate result of reflective rational processes, for example through experiences or through exposure to those with different values. In other words, we may not endorse changes to our values until they have already changed, e.g., as a result of personal experience or information about alternatives. Nor are all actions intended to change others' values disrespectful of free agency or otherwise problematic. Education, for example, may change people's values—note how people who benefit from the oppression of others fear certain kinds of education. Thus a change in values, per se, is not a serious worry from the point of view

[17] Hill, "Servility and Self Respect," p. 6.

of free agency; attempts to change people's values can respect and even enhance free agency when they do not involve manipulation or unjust coercion, and instead rely on persuasion, education, or widening their set of experiences.

A further objection arises, however: some people's values may be disturbing enough to justify our pressuring them to change those values or offering them incentives within beneficence to change those values. Sometimes this issue is easily resolved. Often, no good can come from a beneficent relationship with someone whose values are repellent. And there is, of course, no duty for benefactors to act contrary to their own values. In other cases, we may want to help people but find it impossible to respect some of their values. Some people value norms, roles and practices that oppress women. Or, a benefactor may work in a community that practices female genital mutilation. Both of these undermine women's free agency. If our role as a benefactor gives us a certain power and influence over people is it wrong for us to pressure them to change oppressive values and practices in order to promote someone else's free agency? Note that an attempt to change the practice of female genital mutilation within communities would be for the immediate benefit of children even if the harm occurs throughout their adult life, making this primarily a kind of paternalistic beneficence. The wide influence a benefactor may sometimes have over people's lives can enable such acts of paternalism, even when the primary beneficence is not paternalistic.

The problem here lies not in the failure to respect whatever value people see in female genital mutilation or oppressive practices generally; values that cause harm to others are not worthy of respect. Instead, efforts that entirely bypass people's free agency are usually doomed to fail and may even be hazardous for those one hopes to benefit. Providing incentives to parents not to mutilate their daughters could potentially protect the daughters, but could lead to other harms: both children and parents could suffer violence at the hands of those who support the practice or the daughters could be abandoned by their parents or ostracized by their community.[18] Pressure, or even shaming, might induce people to adopt

[18] It's tempting to say that a person fleeing genital mutilation is better off away from their community. In some cases, they might be. However, it is only in truly extraordinary cases where women in this situation have other resources or options. Unless one is able to provide these, an action to prevent the practice of FGM has to take into account these potential harms. It is very difficult for women to get political asylum

other values, but this process, to be successful in removing harm, requires a change in behavior. This will not occur unless they eventually come to endorse the value. A more reliable way to address people's desire to engage in practices harmful to women will almost invariably require that some (particularly the women) be willingly involved and committed to this goal. Here, the responsibility to fully understand people's circumstances and attend to the likely effects of certain actions on their lives is indispensable.

Something similar can be said about a benefactor's attempt to address the oppression of women. In principle, it is not objectionable to state one's honest disapproval. Disagreeing with people is not necessarily disrespecting them, particularly when it is clear we will we not penalize them for their views. A trickier issue arises when people attempt to give or withhold desperately needed resources in order to pressure people into transforming their values or when beneficiaries fear they might lose benefits as a result of benefactor disapproval, as in the Schweitzer case. It is worth remembering that the aim that is justified here is to remove the harm to those oppressed, not merely to give them or their oppressors better values. If the goal is to remove oppression-related harms people suffer, this may be next to impossible without involving their free agency in some way.

With respect to the oppression of women, the responsibility to listen, give credence to and understand the views of the women concerned is unavoidable. The benefactor must consider what beneficiaries believe will better or worsen their situation and she has a responsibility to weigh most seriously what they say about their own lives. A more promising method than pressure is one often used by international aid organizations: Provide aid directly to women and provide aid that targets twomen's needs. Increasing women's access to resources is a mechanism to help them overcome their oppression. This aid is usually not tied to requirements about how the women live or what values they have. Rather, it

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to protect themselves or their daughters from FGM. See Timothy Egan, "An Ancient Practice and a Mother's Asylum Plea," *The New York Times,* March 4, 1994. For a discussion of difficulties suffered by those who oppose the practice of FGM, including social shunning, see Tina Rosenberg, "Mutilating Africa's Daughters: Laws Unenforced, Practices Unchanged," *The New York Times*, July 5, 2004. Rosenberg's article also states that progress in ending the practice has been made in Mali by local groups and the involvement of religious leaders.

decreases their oppression indirectly by increasing their economic and social status.[19] When we find ourselves in the position of a benefactor who has a higher social, economic or political status than those we try to help, it may be tempting to forget that what constrains the free agency of those who are poor, uneducated or oppressed is almost always a lack of resources and options, rather than an actual inability to reflect on their choices. Respect for others' free agency will partly require benefactors to avoid these biases.

A third problematic effect involves the loss of self-esteem that can result when we depend on someone else to meet our central needs or ends. This is more likely when we depend on someone who does not fully respect us. It can be difficult to remain utterly unaffected by the subtle attitudes of someone who has significant power over our lives but does not hold us in esteem. However, self-esteem can be affected in conditions of inequality when we are not being actively disrespected, simply as a result of one's powerlessness in comparison to others, and the inability to act effectively when resources are absent.

Rawls ties self-respect (self-esteem) to others' appreciation of one's individual abilities and talents and refers to the conception that is of concern here:

> We may define self-respect (or self-esteem) as having two aspects. First…it includes a person's sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out. And second, self-respect implies a confidence in one's ability, so far as it is within one's power, to fulfill one's intentions.[20]

When conditions do not allow people the opportunity to fulfill their intentions (as when resources for autonomy of action are curtailed), this can erode their confidence in their own agency. Rawls' inclusion of the bases of self-respect among the primary goods suggests a concern similar to the one raised here. Someone's confidence in her ability to realize her end can be conceived of as a resource or good—

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[19] For an example of a change in the social status of women brought about by their access to and control of water, see Jeffrey Rothfeder, *Every Drop for Sale*, (New York: Penguin, 2004), pp. 80-84.

[20] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 440. See also pp. 178-182, 440-446.

something she needs to carry out her conception of the good. Interference with her ability to use or access this good interferes not only with her ability to carry out her aims but also with her tendency to make future plans. The plans we make are shaped by our view that we can realize them. Even the options that occur to us will narrow considerably when we lose faith in our efficacy as agents.

We have reason to object both to disrespect and to the active undermining of our free agency. These objections arise in several scenarios. 1. We object to someone who interferes with the result of our action. 2. We object to someone who interferes with our ability to act and judge freely, for example by restraining, deceiving or coercing us. 3. We object to someone who interferes with our ability to reflect on and realize our ends, if, for example, they reduce our efficacy by removing resources we need for future action, or undermine our self-esteem and thus make us lose confidence in our choices by attitudes of disrespect. 4. We object when someone creates an atmosphere in which it becomes difficult to choose rationally or authentically because they cause us to fear losing something of value. The first and second scenarios tend to be the ones we initially think of as cases where free agency is not being respected or is being actively undermined. However, what has emerged in the discussion above is that the third and fourth scenarios can take place within acts of beneficence and may be made worse by the structure of beneficent relationships that involve dependence.

2. Conditions for Good Beneficence

A well-intentioned benefactor is someone who desires the well-being of the beneficiary and whose primary intention is to promote that person's well-being**.** Two conditions ensure that such a benefactor performs good beneficence:

(1) The benefactor has genuine respect for the free agency of the beneficiary and intends to preserve the background conditions necessary for the beneficiary's continued free agency. This feature is necessary (but not sufficient) to ensure that an atmosphere of problematic trade-offs does not develop and that the beneficiary's self-esteem survives, and he has confidence that he can carry out ends in the future.

(2) Benefactors are morally and practically competent in the choice of means to the beneficiary's ends. What is meant here by moral competence is similar to what Aristotle means by *phronesis*, often

translated as 'practical wisdom' or 'practical intelligence' in that both involve the skillful choice of effective and consistent means to ends.[21] Most relevant to beneficence is the capacity to make three kinds of choices: (a) choose efficient means to the end; (b) choose means that are compatible with the pursuit of the beneficiary's other values and ends; and (c) choose means that are compatible with other morally salient features of the situation, including effects on beneficiaries' resources or self-esteem.

The first two conditions for good beneficence require choosing means that are likely to bring about the end, do not have unnecessarily restrictive effects on the beneficiary's other resources, and do not create unnecessary conflicts with or undermine the beneficiary's other ends and values. The means must therefore fit within the beneficiary's overall conception of her good. The last condition includes the sensitivity to perceive and avoid factors that may create an atmosphere of pressure that leads a beneficiary to change her values or ends to secure beneficence. These two criteria can be mutually supporting: The ability to convey respect to others also may depend on sensitivity to features of situations that can degrade or undermine the self-regard of those with whom one interacts. A sensitive person is capable of recognizing and anticipating her likely effect on others. Here, sensitivity is used in the ordinary sense to describe a person who is attentive to psychological and emotional facts relevant to her interaction with others, and whose perception of these facts tends to be accurate. Beneficence involving dependence often, but not always, involves imbalances of social and economic power and prestige. In such cases, dependent beneficiaries may be reluctant to speak up for fear of offending or alienating benefactors. In cases where social, cultural or class differences exist, a benefactor may also need to attend to these differences in order to better understand the effects that his choices and actions have on beneficiaries. Failure to attend to these differences was a significant problem for Schweitzer. Such conditions will exist in a variety of cases of beneficence.

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[21] *Phronesis* has some features that do not fit here. In particular, it is not the case that the benefactor must be fully virtuous or possess all the virtues. For a detailed discussion of *phronesis* and the unity of the virtues, see Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 66-120. For a discussion of the role of practical wisdom as the capacity to promote ends within a conception of one's good, see Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 56-117.

The conditions for good beneficence deserve some analysis, especially from the perspective of the beneficiary. Respect may seem like an obvious condition for good beneficence, but the respect needed will demand more of us than the standard attitude of respect we must have towards others. Respect within beneficent relationships, as described here, naturally involves what we generally owe to others: recognition of their full moral equality, and acknowledgement of their right to control their own lives.[22] A more demanding standard for respect in beneficent relationships arises however, because our actions may have a harmful effect on their ability to act freely. To avoid this, we often must understand a great deal about beneficiaries' lives. Such understanding always requires open communication with beneficiaries, the ability to understand what they tell us, and a willingness to give credence to their own understanding of their lives.

There are two reasons beneficence requires more than just a bare acknowledgement that others have the capacity and the right to reflect and choose freely. Beneficence often takes place when someone has significant need. In such cases, a person's ability to control her own life may already be compromised by poverty, injustice and oppression, or other external constraints on her resources. Thus, our effect on her resources must be carefully weighed. Second, her values and world view may be very different from our own, and so we must ensure we do not inadvertently impose our values upon her. Respect for free agency generally requires leaving people alone to control their own lives and let them realize their own ends. However, if we want to be good benefactors when someone's ability to realize her ends depends on us, we are required to consider whether there are conditions that prevent her from controlling her own life so that we do not exacerbate those conditions or otherwise worsen her situation. In some cases, fully respecting a person includes regretting injustices or other misfortunes that have left her with little power to act on her own behalf and in significant need. If we fully value another person's free agency, we will see as undesirable those things that unjustly threaten it. In beneficence, such attitudes must be

[22] For a view of recognition respect, see Stephen Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," *Ethics* 88 (1977), pp. 36-49. About recognition respect, Darwall says that "to say that persons are entitled to respect is to say that they are entitled to have other persons take seriously and weigh appropriately the fact that they are persons deliberating about what to do."

accompanied by actions that prevent unnecessary constraints on her deliberation or action as the result of our own actions. Understanding prior constraints on people's lives will be relevant to this effort. Failure to recognize relevant background conditions and constraints that affect the results of our action, for example, oppression, psychological effects of prior political and social violence, illness, or cultural norms greatly increases the likelihood that our action will be inappropriate or harmful.

In many cases, the agent herself has no significant power to change the fundamental conditions that hamper the beneficiary. The goal is at least to ensure that the agent's help does not worsen people's current situation or unnecessarily constrain their options. It may demand too much of a benefactor to promote the free agency of beneficiaries by removing any unnecessary obstacles to their future action. It is a good thing to provide a limited benefit, e.g., in the form of material aid, as long as those benefits do not inadvertently worsen the person's situation. Still, the obstacles to a person's ability to control her life are sometimes a better target for beneficence than aid that meets physical needs alone. When benefactors can see the ways that a person's good is impaired by outside constraints she cannot herself address, they may be better able discover what the beneficiary most needs. For example, political or social empowerment can be as conducive to someone's long-term good as material aid.[23]

The aspect of respect that attends to someone's need to control her own life is one reason why unconscious biases, even on the part of well-meaning benefactors, can so impair the ability to act well. One such attitude is to (perhaps unconsciously) blame beneficiaries for their difficulties or to see relative powerlessness as casting doubt on their right to control their own lives. Of course, some beneficiaries might be partly to blame for their difficulties, but almost never does this remove their right to control their own lives. Avoiding such biases does have a performative aspect. Wherever possible, beneficiaries should try to place those they help into a relationship of actual equality, at least in the context of communication. Thus, they must avoid inadvertently intimidating beneficiaries or otherwise keeping them from speaking on their own behalf. If you intend to help people, they should have some sense of control over the actions

[23] These are often connected in that greater material resources can sometimes increase social and political standing. However, it is usually better to structure material aid in such a way that it promotes social and political standing.

you perform. Clearly, they should be able to forbid you from choosing means to ends that are contrary to their values (which would be paternalistic in any case); you are also under some (limited) burden to at least consider providing help they might desire more than the help you are offering.

The second condition for good beneficence is moral and practical competence. Most well-intentioned attempts at beneficence deserve praise, even when not ideal. Even so, we must admit that acts of beneficence can be better or worse or can fail altogether. You are better off if I prevent your starvation through my famine relief program. But if I flood your region with so much cheap grain that it undermines the local economy, I can threaten not only your future ability to support yourself but also your range of choices later.

It's worth asking what beneficiaries can do to protect themselves. The idea that benefactors will choose harmful means to meet someone's self-chosen ends might lead us to ask whether beneficiaries could more effectively control the help that benefactors provide. Suppose that contractual or quasi-contractual arrangements clearly stating the terms of the help were possible. Would these protect beneficiaries? One reason these would be of little use to beneficiaries is that effective contracts require sanctions. Further, when we count on the benefactor's greater knowledge or competence in certain spheres, we often cannot assess beforehand whether he will act competently. In rare cases, we can closely direct the help we receive, but we will nearly always have to trust, or at least rely on, our benefactor.[24] Thus, even if contracts were practical, they would not prevent harmful beneficence. Often, we cannot precisely set out what it is we want a benefactor to do for us because we need the benefactor's expertise. We may also develop a long-term relationship with a benefactor who must be authorized to work independently (as was true in the Schweitzer case) and we cannot begin each day laying out constraints on the benefactor's action. In general, beneficiaries must rely on benefactors' knowledge, ability and

[24] In *Moral Prejudices* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 116-117, Annette Baier emphasizes that contracts are not good models on which to base consent to risky relationships because contracts are explicit and depend on sanctions for their enforcement. Legal and even social sanctions cannot be brought to bear on those who fail to treat one with respect. Even actual contracts do not wholly eliminate the risk or the need for trust. For the difference between trust and reliance, see Karen Jones, "Trust as an Affective Attitude," *Ethics* 107 (1996), pp. 4-42.

competence to choose well. A benefactor often has access to things of great value to beneficiaries, and they usually cannot absolutely guarantee by their own actions that the benefactor's actions will conform to their values or result in something that promotes their good.

In addition, benefactors often have to act independently and without consultation; in doing so they can unintentionally interfere with, undermine or disrespect free agency. Although non-paternalistic benefactors do not choose the end, it may be necessary for them to choose the means to the end. For example, Mary has a young son and has long been trying to arrange a more flexible schedule so she can spend more time with him. However, her boss, Ted, dislikes Mary, regards her as a troublemaking feminist, and refuses to allow her to alter her schedule. Suppose that Lou, Mary's good friend, is much better at negotiating with Ted than Mary is. Lou offers to intercede for Mary. He comes back and tells her that Ted has reconsidered; Mary can leave the office by 3:00 P.M. each day provided she remains in phone contact.

Mary is delighted. However, when Lou recounts his conversation with Ted, Mary realizes that Lou primarily appealed to Ted's sexism by emphasizing that Mary is on the verge of being an inadequate mother by working in the first place. Mary is particularly distressed because she realizes Ted's new perspective on her may mean she is even less likely to get the challenging work assignments she craves or a promotion to a position with greater responsibility. Lou was well-meaning but failed to account for Mary's other ends and the way these are now affected by the means he has chosen. Mary could not have told Lou *how* to negotiate with Ted, as the ability to relate to Ted is the very thing she lacks. She could not have chosen the precise means to her end. At the same time, Lou's choice of means was not apt. In this case Mary's overall free agency is not greatly compromised—but some of her other ends have been jeopardized and her options will now be much more limited.

The example shows that the character and competence of benefactors unavoidably play a significant role in good beneficence. Benefactors need skill in realizing ends but also must be able to see how those means fit within beneficiaries' outlook and conception of the good. Choosing the right means

depends on having reliably good judgment in the situation and in attending to other elements in the beneficiary's conception of her good.

That beneficiaries must depend on benefactors to choose the means to their ends raises several problems. First, the benefactor may choose inexact or inapt means to the beneficiary's end. But two cases can be even more significant. In the first case, the benefactor chooses means that conflict with other significant ends in the beneficiary's conception of her good. In the second, the benefactor chooses means that undermine resources the beneficiary needs to pursue her other ends in the future.

In the Schweitzer case, bringing about a beneficiary's self-chosen ends was not sufficient for good beneficence. Schweitzer provided the Gabonese with things they clearly valued: control of disease, better health, access to food, and basic education. But the help he offered conflicted with their other ends and values, such as eliminating colonialism or developing their own medical and technical skills—so he may have worsened their future prospects. His actions are objectionable not only because some of his actions inadvertently conflicted with his beneficiaries' values and ends; he also undermined their confidence and other resources crucial to their ability to act on choices in the future. And he unintentionally disrespected them by giving them the impression that they could secure his continued help by conforming their values and actions to his apparent preferences. A deep attitude of respect is a powerful motivation to take up the challenge of trying to learn enough about others to prevent one's attempts to help from having harmful side effects. Unfortunately, some people who care deeply about promoting others' good are practically inept, and unable to choose the better option in complex circumstances. (One kind of competence that might still be useful for such people is the ability to see that you are not the right person for the job.) It is easy for benevolent and kind agents to harm others inadvertently, particularly if those others have markedly different life circumstances or world views.[25]

[25] The practices of beneficent institutions and agencies suggest an awareness of this problem. The training they provide is partly an attempt to avoid the common mistakes of beneficence. When individuals volunteer, for example, in a homeless or battered women's shelter, they are frequently required to undergo some period of education in order to deepen their comprehension of the issues the clients face and prevent attitudes of paternalism and blame. Some agencies also require interviews with potential volunteers,

This is sometimes a benign problem when we help people with substantial resources to meet their own ends, but the results for vulnerable beneficiaries can be tragic.

Because I have shown that the responsibility of benefactors to prevent harm to beneficiaries can be substantial, we might worry this will weaken the motivation for beneficence. Many people's well-being depends on second-order beneficence, primarily in the form of donations to agencies, advocacy organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It's not hard to imagine a casual philanthropist concluding, 'if I have to do all that work, then forget it.' People's interest in such distant beneficence, particularly toward the most vulnerable, can be weak. Judith Lichtenberg offers many reasons why people do not give, including the fact that distance causes the suffering of others to become abstract to us.[26] Further, she argues, the language of moral obligation "sticks in people's craw," which suggests that adding to their obligation might deter them further.[27] This would be troubling, given that so many people depend, indirectly, on the help that donations make possible.[28]

However, casual second-order beneficence brings with it a much lighter responsibility than direct engagement in beneficent relationships. A second-order benefactor's own actions do not impede a beneficiary's ability to deliberate and they are not directly involved in choosing the means. The beneficiaries are unlikely to be aware of the donors' attitudes towards them and their deliberation and choices are affected very indirectly by the donors' actions, which merely make the direct benefactor's actions possible.

Nevertheless, such donors do have some responsibilities to those who depend indirectly on their donations because the donation may facilitate beneficence that may harm others. As always, what they

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partly to screen out inappropriate people but also to ensure some level of respect and moral competence among volunteers.

[26] Judith Lichtenberg, "Absence and the Unfond Heart: Why People Are Less Giving Than They Might Be," in Chatterjee, *The Ethics of Assistance*, pp. 75-100.

[27] Lichtenberg, p. 79.

[28] Note that many cases where beneficence is called for are cases of injustice. In particular, NGOs often focus on local and global injustice. Ameliorating injustice in a public way is a higher priority than private beneficence and it is far better if the harms of injustice that benefactors try to address are removed through instituting justice itself. However, in situations where this is not likely to occur, beneficence is still necessary.

ought to do depends on what they can do. In most cases, people engaged in secondary giving can look carefully at how a given organization conceives of its work and consider whether it shows both a high degree of respect for those it intends to benefit and an appropriate level of concern for its effects on them. Organizations such as Oxfam, Doctors Without Borders, Partners in Health, Human Rights Watch and many others make a significant amount of material available to potential donors. It does not place a great burden on us to read that material before deciding to donate. Donors can also consult with reliable, well-informed people (e.g., those who engage in direct beneficence in the relevant area or those knowledgeable about the region or issue) about where to put their money.

Further, second-order benefactors can avoid being paternalistic or pitying as they think of the poor or vulnerable that their donations are intended to benefit, as such thinking denies people's agency. These attitudes about the poor proliferate mostly because of the way poverty is presented to us and our distance from the poor, so some potential donors may need further education to let go of such attitudes. Those who are worse off still have views about how they want to live their lives, and these must be respected, even if such thinking dissuades people who would be more strongly motivated by pity. The best aid organizations, for example, present the people they help as distinct individuals rather than mere objects of pity. Wanting to ensure that the work one is supporting increases people's ability to control their lives and lead a life they would choose does motivate many potential donors to look closely at the organizations they support.

Does increasing the second-order donor's responsibility even this much deter people from giving? To answer this question, consider two people. The first would be the person who is already concerned about helping the poor, the vulnerable or others who are unable to satisfy their ends without help. Such a person is unlikely to be dissuaded by the responsibility to make a reasonable inquiry to see that her money is doing good, rather than harm. A second sort of person may want to give but guilt or other discomfort keeps her from thinking for long about the conditions of people's lives or their suffering. There might be some reason for NGOs to try to reduce this person's discomfort or otherwise make it easy for them to donate. However, this does not mean we also must let them off the moral hook entirely. Although

people like these may do some good through their donations, they do so primarily by accident and are evading a rather undemanding moral responsibility. Further, it may matter less than we might think if people do not give when the result is that bad philanthropies are deprived of donations. If casual philanthropists give to organizations that are utterly unconcerned about the free agency of the recipients of their donations, those recipients may ultimately not benefit much from that organization's work or may be harmed by it.[29]

3. Conclusion

My argument has been that the conditions for good beneficence include more than the goodwill and good intention of benefactors. Even a benefactor's success at bringing about the ends a beneficiary has chosen may be insufficient for good beneficence. Success at realizing the beneficiary's ends is insufficient when that benefactor chooses means that thwart or are incompatible with other elements in the beneficiary's conception of her good, undermine resources needed for future autonomy, or show disrespect for the beneficiary. Even so, I concede that in certain pressing cases, some beneficence will be better than no beneficence. You may be better off if I save your life while also undermining your ability to pursue your future ends or if I disrespect you but give you something you desperately need. Even when the benefactor is disrespectful or incompetent, the benefit to the beneficiary can outweigh the harm.

However, harmful beneficence is only sometimes better than no beneficence at all and it is equally possible that, in the long run, harms even to very needy beneficiaries will outweigh benefits. Although it can sometimes be better for a person to receive harmful beneficence, we cannot be sanguine about the problems it raises. One reason why the benefit will sometimes outweigh the harm lies in individuals' very dire need for assistance, particularly in situations of deprivation and injustice. Those in great need must sometimes accept beneficence even when they know harms will accompany it.

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[29] Amy Wilentz describes several harmful economic effects of CARE's work in Haiti in the 1980s. For example, CARE oversaw the eradication of wild pigs to reduce disease and started an imported piglet program. However, they allowed large landowners to control the distribution of the imported piglets. The landowners charged a high price for them, which further impoverished peasant farmers who had depended on the wild pigs for food. See *The Rainy Season: Haiti Since Duvalier*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), pp. 243-265.

Substantially free agency may be a luxury some may relinquish when the help they receive is better than nothing. This is not a happy result though, and we should not be satisfied with it. We should be no more comfortable with a benefactor who unnecessarily undermines a beneficiary's free agency than we are with a doctor who amputates an infected limb when antibiotics alone would have saved it. Even in emergency situations, e.g., where saving someone's life does not leave time to consider her existing resources or her conception of her good, her eventual need for free agency cannot be fully set aside, but only temporarily overridden. Our moral standard for beneficence, like our medical standard for good care, should represent a set of 'best practices' even if we relax our standards in urgent cases.

Respect and competence are the primary agent-dependent conditions for good beneficence. Not every potential beneficent agent is able to satisfy these conditions. Some elements of competence may lie outside the will. And, although a basic attitude of respect for others is a minimum moral requirement on us, the significant effect we can have on beneficiaries' ability to choose and act freely requires more than mentally acknowledging the fact that they have the right to control their own lives. To prevent harm to others within beneficent relationships, full respect for others' free agency requires us to understand their lives and to act in ways that adequately reflect this understanding. We are familiar with the very real worry that far too many people are indifferent to the well-being of others. I have argued for a more unexpected worry: Some people are unwilling or unable to sufficiently understand the circumstances and perspective of others and, when this is the case, even those with a deep desire to do good are likely to do unwitting harm. This argument here suggests that the desire to help is not precisely the opposite of indifference. Someone who genuinely desires to benefit another can still display a kind of indifference to that person's free agency and in doing so, may neglect what is most important to the person herself.[30]

[30] I wish to thank Bernard Nickles, Lawrence Blum, Sally Haslanger, Karen Jones, Terence Irwin, Allen Wood, Susanna Siegel, Jessica Wilson, Eric Hiddelston, Jennifer Whiting, Christopher Sturr and Sigurdur Kristinsson for helpful comments on this paper.