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The order of charity

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The Order of Charity

This paper defends partiality as an inherent, essential part of ethical decision-making. First, the concept of charity as a kind of universal benevolence is spelled out, drawing on key ideas in religious thinking. I then argue that any justification of partiality must appeal to the good first, rather than rights. There follows a justification of partiality via an argument from the idea of control over the good. The next section seeks to harmonize particularistic preference with universal charity, explaining the concept of love of neighbour. There follows an outline of the key principles required for setting out an order of charity based on different kinds of special relationship. While not all of this theistically driven approach to the order of charity translates easily into secular moral thought, enough does to demonstrate that the view defended is at the least coherent and not to be dismissed lightly, and at best has much in it that is commendable to secular common sense.

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Keywords

charity; partiality; impartiality; the good; hierarchy of goods; love of neighbour; love of God

1. What is charity?

When we think of charity we find that the term, like so many others in contemporary moral philosophy, has taken on an attenuated meaning that has shed most of the rich adornments of previous ages. Think of terms such as 'prudence' and 'generosity', where the restriction to means-end calculations and to the spending of money is all but ubiquitous. The term 'charity' conjures in most minds the image of Mother Teresa and the starving poor, or of a few pennies handed to a beggar, or even of the celebrity film star working 'for charity' to feed the masses or save the world from the latest threatened catastrophe.

At least some such archetypal acts are instances of charity, but the stripping down of the term has, as usual, meant a grave loss to ethical thinking, narrowing the horizons and etiolating one's moral landscape. Deriving from the Latin 'carus' or dear, the word applies to a range of kindly acts and feelings toward others, whether strangers or relatives, rich or poor, friends or foes.[1] It applies to

[1] Note, however, that the pre-Christian meaning of 'carus' was something like 'costly' (similar to the English 'dear' as opposed to 'cheap'). 'Caritas' had the sense of 'esteem' or 'regard', as opposed to love or affection. In the New Testament, the Greek term *agapē* was used for *love*, referring to love for a particular individual (e.g. 'the disciple whom Jesus loved', John 13:23), love for a particular group (Jesus's love for his disciples, John 13:1), and to love for one's neighbour (Matt. 22:39). 'Caritas' took on its Christian meaning of 'agapē', i.e. love, at least as far back as the fifth- century Latin Vulgate, and in English the first use of 'charity' in this sense can

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mere thoughts and feelings of a kindly disposition toward another, to benevolent concern for their welfare, to the relief of all kinds of suffering mental and physical, even to acts involving the conferral of public benefits and honours. ‘Charity’ applies to friendship itself: the Book of Proverbs (15:17) says, ‘Better a meal of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf where there is hatred’. The idea is one of friendship, though the word used is unambiguously ‘love’. Hence the title of this paper could as easily have been ‘The Order of Love’, though again modern misconceptions have made of the precious term ‘love’ what they have made of ‘charity’, albeit giving the former an even more distorted and exclusively emotional sense than the latter.

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In religious thinking, the idea of charity is explained in terms of love of God, and also of God’s love for man.[2] The former is supposed to mirror the latter as far as possible, that is to say, there should be no self-imposed limit to how much a person loves God, although as a matter of fact our finiteness means that such a limit will exist. More pertinently, charity in this religious sense invokes the idea of the love of people for each other not for their own sake, but for the sake of God. This will seem quite strange to secular ears: are we not supposed to love other people precisely for their own sakes and not on account of something else? Doesn’t it make charity between people purely instrumental? It does not, because the religious idea is not that you should love another purely for the sake of obtaining some other end (e.g., salvation for yourself, though that is the main instrumental reason) but that you should love another for reasons going beyond the mere lovability of the other. Surely, even without knowing the further reasons, this makes sense: for many (most?) people are simply *not* lovable all of the time, and some not at all. Yet we should love all others all of the time, so lovability cannot be a good reason. Compare a person who loves their sibling even though the latter is most unlovable. What reason might the former give for continuing to love them? Perhaps something like, ‘But she’s my sister’, or ‘Blood is thicker than water’. There is no instrumental reason given here

be dated to the twelfth century. (I am grateful to John Cottingham for pointing out the differences between the pre-Christian and Christian sense of ‘carus’ and ‘caritas’.)

[2] See, e.g. 1 John 4:10: ‘In this is charity: not as though we had loved God, but because he hath first loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.’

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for loving the sibling; rather, both responses point to a more important reason for the continuing love than mere lovability – the nature of the family relationship itself, which obliges one person to see the other *as a relative first*, not as someone lovable or unlovable.

Similarly, the idea of loving a person for God's sake points to a more important reason for loving others that goes beyond whether they have lovable qualities – namely, that they are first and foremost creatures of God, made in His image and therefore deserving to be loved as He loves them, with a desire for the best for them at all times. In the words of a saying whose origin escapes me, you should love what is loved by the one whom you love. The assumption, of course, is that you love God in the first place and so love others *because* He loves them. Thus in religious thought, charity or love has a twofold aspect – love of God as the author of everything, in particular of yourself and your fellow human beings; and love of yourself and your fellow human beings on account of God's being their author.[3]

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At its most general, love is an inclination towards something good or considered as good. Hence, speaking generically, the love of a plant for water, of a dog for a bone, of a child for an ice cream, and of myself for roast chicken, the work of Fra Angelico, and my best friend, are all of a piece. Speaking specifically, different kinds of love can be distinguished. That plants love water is simply a function of their innate tendency toward something good for them. They consider water good in the most attenuated sense. One might call this 'natural love', inasmuch as the inclination to the good derives not from knowledge but from nature. A dog's love for a bone is an example of sensory

[3] It might be objected (thanks to Philip Stratton-Lake for this point) that merely being created by him is not a good enough reason for the creator to love his creation (cf. a craftsman and his work). There would have to be other features in virtue of which the creator loves what he has created. Furthermore, although it might seem groundless for God to love His creatures merely because He created them, this could be a good reason for human beings to love each other. But then this feature – being created by God – would be a lovability feature that humans could not lose. In reply to both problems, I say that God loves His creatures not *merely* because created by Him, but because they were created with a certain purpose in mind – to know and serve Him, etc., and thereby to find their ultimate happiness. Our loving others for God's sake just *is* loving them for that quality – having been created with a certain purpose in mind. In *that* sense we all have lovable qualities of necessity.

My contrast, though, is with *those* lovability features and the *contingent* qualities of certain kinds of lovable behaviour and character that people possess, which are *not* sufficient grounds for loving all others all of the time. Hence I do not deny the existence of lovable qualities per se, only the existence of qualities, having nothing directly to do with being creatures of God, that can rationally ground exceptionless, universal love.

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love, that is, a love based on knowledge derived from the senses. A child's love for an ice cream may also be purely sensory if the child is young enough not to be able to exercise the power of reason; or else it will be an example of what we can call rational love, like my love for roast chicken, the work of Fra Angelico, and my best friend. Rational love essentially involves both reflection on what is good and an act of the will towards that good, as manifested by a choice to pursue it in appropriate circumstances.

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Within rational love we can distinguish a love of desire or concupiscence and a love of benevolence. With love of desire, it is not that you want good *for* the object of love, rather you want good *from* it. I love roast chicken because I want that succulent roast chicken taste. I love the work of Fra Angelico partly, if art is a basic good, for its own sake and partly because it uplifts my mind and stimulates profound and worthy reflections. In the first respect, loving it for its own sake, I do not want any good for it; how can you want something good for an inanimate object such as a painting? True, I want the works of the master to be preserved and looked after at all costs, but this is because I want something good for society, and preserving the work is a means to that. In the second respect, loving it for the state of mind it inspires, it is not merely that I do not want anything good for the work, but I positively want something good from it.

When it comes to my love for my best friend, or my family or others with whom I have close relations, the love is one of benevolence. Again, there are goods I want from them and which only they can provide; as Aristotle made plain, true friendship can and usually does co-exist with motives of pleasure and utility.[4] But my love of benevolence toward them is based on a desire for good for them, not from them. Love of benevolence is not, of course, restricted to love for those close to you. Whenever a person helps another with no expectation of return, whatever relationship or lack of one exists between the two, there is love of benevolence. And everyone believes that this benevolence should extend to all human beings: you should love your neighbour, where, for both theists and non-theists (in most – but not all – cases) 'neighbour' is construed broadly to cover every

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[4] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.3, 1156b6-17, in W.D. Ross (ed.), *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. IX (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925).

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human being.[5] On the other hand, I will argue that this universal benevolence can and must co-exist with a structure or hierarchy of partialistic preferences. Both universal benevolence and partiality are but complementary aspects of the fundamental idea that you should love God above all and your fellow men for God's sake.

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Yet surely God does not need to enter the picture, and if He does, isn't there something wrong with the picture? I do not intend to embark on an exercise of comparison and contrast between secular and religious morality in general or their approaches to the problem of partiality in particular. Only a few brief remarks are appropriate. First, it is doubtful whether the religious way of looking at charity can be translated without loss into the secular language of rights, dignity, our common humanity, and the like. Nor can it carry over into – to be even more specific – a pre-Christian, or at least non-monotheistic, world view such as that of Aristotle or the other pagan philosophers.[6] As to the first, it is a commonplace that, for whatever reason, universal benevolence as understood by monotheism in general and Christianity in particular usually mutates in secular hands into one or other variation on a consequentialist theme.[7] The language of rights and common humanity can take us as far as a notion of universal *respect* for others, couched in terms of negative duties such as non-violation of rights, not harming others, and the like, but benevolence as a positive duty is hard to capture. The consequentialist, by contrast, has to hand the positive notion of promoting utility, which seems to lend itself to characterization as a kind of universal benevolence. Maximization of the good,

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[5] It is sometimes forgotten that the standard interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29) among Christian theologians takes 'neighbour' to be construed globally. For a representative sample of glosses on the parable, see Aquinas's *Catena Aurea* or *Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected out of the Works of the Fathers* (Southampton: The Saint Austin Press, 1997), vol. III: 370-7. The interpretation of the man who fell among thieves as being, in a manner of speaking, Adam himself, representing all human beings since we share a common nature, was a universal teaching of the Fathers, held int. al. by Ss Augustine, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Irenaeus, and Clement, and by Origen. A more recent, standard discussion of the subject, says: 'Our fellow man here [in the context of the obligation to love our neighbour] means absolutely every man without exception': T.J. Higgins, SJ, *Man as Man: The Science and Art of Ethics* (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books, 1992 [orig. pub. 1958]): 333.

[6] To be sure, though, there is evidence that both Plato and Aristotle were monotheists of a sort.

[7] The other theme is, of course, Kantian. In many respects the ends-in-themselves ethic of Kant has similarities to the strictly theistic; indeed, Kantian morality, on its face, is loosely theistic. But I will leave considerations of Kant and strictly theistic universal benevolence to another occasion.

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however, is decidedly not what a religious morality has in mind by the love of all people, for general reasons that would take us too far afield if explored here.

Specifically, though, when it comes to partiality, which is firmly rooted in religious thinking, consequentialists veer between, on the one hand, the sort of act consequentialism of William Godwin in the *Enquiry*,[8] which seems to recognize no place for partialistic preferences in the utility-maximizing scheme of things, and the apparently more 'sophisticated' consequentialism found in Godwin's reply to Samuel Parr's critique.[9] In neither case, however, do the demands of partiality, which are sometimes unconditional and absolute, find an easy place. Here we can agree with John Cottingham's trenchant criticisms of the idea that partialistic acts and attitudes can be governed by utility, whether in rule or in act.[10]

On the other hand, reversion to an age of supposedly healthy pagan virtues, at one time advocated by Cottingham, seems to leave little if any room for a concept of universal benevolence worthy of the name.[11] In his writings from the 1980s and 1990s, he proposed that we abandon the Christian command to 'be perfect'[12] with the Aristotelian slogan of 'nothing to excess'.[13] He did not think that this 'autocentric perspective' was inconsistent with a saintly life of 'maximal altruism',

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[8] W. Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 3rd edn [1798] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), Book II, Chap. II, p.169. See pp.168-177 for the infamous discussion of Archbishop Fénelon and the valet, in earlier editions the chambermaid.

[9] See S. Parr, *A Spital Sermon, Preached at Christ Church, upon Easter Tuesday, April 15, 1800; To which are Added Notes*, in *The Works of Samuel Parr*, vol. II, ed. J. Johnstone, (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1928), pp. 357-623; W. Godwin, *Thoughts Occasioned by the Perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon, Preached at Christ Church, April 15, 1800*, in J.W. Marken and B.R. Pollin (eds) *Uncollected Writings (1785-1822) by William Godwin* (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968), pp.281-374. The relevant points in both are summarized in P. Singer, L. Cannold, and H. Kuhse, 'William Godwin and the Defence of Impartialist Ethics', *Utilitas* 7 (1995): 67-86. An act consequentialist approach to partiality can be found in R. Arneson, 'Consequentialism Versus Special-Ties Partiality', *The Monist* 86 (2003): 382-401. The 'sophisticated' consequentialist account of partiality is found, for example, in P. Railton, 'Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13 (1984): 134-71, reprinted in S. Scheffler (ed.) *Consequentialism and Its Critics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988): 93 -133.

[10] See J. Cottingham, 'Ethics and Impartiality', *Philosophical Studies*, 43 (1983): 83-99; 'The Ethics of Self-Concern', *Ethics* 101 (1991): 798-817 at 802-5; 'The Ethical Credentials of Partiality', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 98 (1997-8) 1-21 at 1-8.

[11] Cottingham, 'The Ethics of Self-Concern': 808-13.

[12] Matt. 5:48.

[13] 'The Ethics of Self-Concern': 809.

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noting only that such a life would require psychological feats that are impossible 'for most people, for most of the time' to achieve.[14] For this bulk of mankind he offered the first half of the rule of Polemarchus combined with a 'less ambitious negative duty': 'help your friends, and do not harm your neighbours' is a 'promising first attempt at a minimal definition of morality', where 'neighbour' can be construed globally.[15]

Yet it is unclear how a saintly life of maximal altruism, founded on universal benevolence, could have any place in Cottingham's proposed framework.[16] What could be the motivation for such a life? Why should such a psychological and emotional leap even be contemplated? If the more moderate, autocentric life is good enough, why should anyone bother with anything more? Moreover, why, for the bulk of mankind, should only the first half of Polemarchus's rule apply – why not 'harm your enemies' as well, or at least be wholly indifferent to your neighbours whether or not they are your foes? Further, and more pertinently for present concerns, Cottingham's rule turns a norm of charity into a norm of *justice*, since not harming your neighbour partakes precisely of the latter and not the former. It would seem an impossible feat to take the admirable but less demanding of the precepts of charity or of justice as espoused by the Christian and other monotheistic traditions and tack them onto a 'healthy pagan' perspective, whether Aristotelian or otherwise, in the hope of achieving a moral viewpoint that gives universal love its due.[17]

This impossibility might be thought to undermine the very idea that partiality and universal charity can go hand in hand. Maybe the religious way of thinking of these things just does not make

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[14] Ibid: 810, 815-16.

[15] 'Ethics and Impartiality': 98.

[16] Note than it is important to distinguished between universal benevolence and maximal altruism. My concern here is with the former, not the latter. Neither seem to me to be compatible with, or at least well motivated by, Cottingham's approach discussed here. See the following note for an important qualification concerning Cottingham's current view. I discuss saintly morality and maximal altruism in my paper mentioned there.

[17] I wish to make it clear that Cottingham no longer subscribes to the overall position he adopted in his writings from the 1980s and 1990s. For his present position, see: 'The Self, The Good Life and the Transcendent,' in N. Athanassoulis and S. Vice (eds), *The Moral Life: Essays in Honour of John Cottingham* (London: Palgrave, 2008): 231-74; 'Impartiality and Ethical Formation', in B. Feltham and J. Cottingham (eds), *Partiality and Impartiality: Morality, Special Relationships and the Wider World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). In the first paper he replies, inter alia, to the more detailed critique of his earlier views that set out by David S. Oderberg in 'Self-Love, Love of Neighbour, and Impartiality', in *The Moral Life*: 58-86.

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sense? I think that they can be harmonized, and the best way of seeing how is to examine the theory and principles of charity with a view to showing the cohesion between partiality and universality. The contrast word 'impartiality' is best avoided, however, on the one hand because of its vagueness and on the other because of its too-close association with consequentialism. These opposing vices have made the term almost useless as an umbrella under which discussion of partialistic preference and its relation to charity should be conducted. Having said that, although I will make little use of the term in setting out the theory of charity, it must inevitably appear when commenting on the views of other writers on the 'partiality/impartiality' debate. Further, I contend that although the religious outlook on charity cannot be translated wholly into secular terms, much of it is commendable to the secular mind, to the extent that such a thing exists given the diversity of views as to what secularism amounts to. At least one might claim that the bulk of the following ideas should not, to misuse a phrase from theology, be 'offensive to pious secular ears'. It must be borne in mind that when it comes to morality, as in all things philosophical, epistemology must never be confused with metaphysics. If the theistic approach to charity is congenial to a secularist, it does not mean that the secularist is a theist without knowing it, or that theism must be a part of their explicit moral theory. One can know things without knowing the consequences of what one knows. In any case, although the theory of charity in religious tradition has its translatable and untranslatable parts, it is the former which will make up the larger part of what follows.

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2. Basic justification: is partiality part of morality?

First, we need to consider some foundational issues concerning the justification of partiality, before moving to an account, later in the discussion, of how it fits together with universal charity. In the next section, I will consider a more specific justification of partialistic preference, one that has not to my knowledge been aired in the literature.

Some defenders of partiality have argued that, at least in some cases, the demands of morality and the demands of love and other special affections for kith and kin conflict. Susan Wolf is

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an exponent of this view.[18] She first contrasts what she calls Extreme Impartialism with the Moderate Impartialism she defends. The Extreme Impartialist believes 'a person is morally required to take each person's well-being, or alternatively each person's rights, as seriously as every other, to work equally hard to secure them, or to care equally much about them, or to grant them equal value in her practical deliberations.'[19] This she claims to be 'patently absurd' for familiar partialist reasons to do with the entailment by Extreme Impartialism of the implausible thesis that I can never legitimately have preferences for one thing or person over another even though, objectively, they are of equal value. By contrast, Moderate Impartialism holds that a person should act only in ways he believes any reasonable person would permit, that he must hold himself to the same standards expected of others, and that he be practically moved by the thought that all people are as deserving of 'the fundamental conditions of well-being and respect' as he and his loved ones are.[20]

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Now, although Wolf makes occasional remarks to the effect that Moderate Impartialism gives impartiality a more limited place in morality than the extreme version,[21] her official position is that moderate impartiality is the *central core* of morality, and that partialistic preferences are endorsed by it. In other words, Moderate Impartialism allows special relationships since it does not require that *we* value every person as much as every other, even if, objectively, they have equal value. Wolf also makes congenial points concerning the impartialist justification of partiality on the ground of what sorts of social structures are most conducive to human flourishing.

To the familiar charge that the Moderate Impartialist justification of partiality gives the wrong sorts of reason for valuing and cultivating special relationships, Wolf responds that the problem lies not with impartiality as the core of morality, but with the thought that morality should be a more complete guide to life than it can be. For a start, she says, there can be 'reasonable moral disagreement'[22] over where to draw the line between impartialist demands and what one may do for a

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[18] S. Wolf, 'Morality and Partiality', *Philosophical Perspectives* 6 (1992): 243-59.
[19] Ibid: 244.
[20] Ibid: 246.
[21] Ibid: 246, for example.
[22] Ibid: 252.

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friend or loved one. Her first example concerns whether a ticket-taker may let a ticketless friend into a concert ahead of a queue of ticket-holders who have been camping outside the booth on a cold and rainy night. Wolf reports that, applying the standard of what one would reasonably expect of others, she would not 'take it amiss' if the ticket-taker let in his friend so the latter might have a wonderful experience he could not otherwise afford. Letting in thirty friends a week might be excessive, but one friend is all right.

Wolf is correct that there are grey areas in morality, at least in the sense that it may be hard to know which of two courses of action one should follow. The greyness, however, can be resolved at the second level by allowing, in such a case, either course to be followed, as long as the course has a reasonable justification behind it. It does not follow, however, that we should, as Wolf advocates, be 'tolerant about some moral issues',[23] where for her such tolerance is manifested by a fair exchange of opinions between both sides of an argument, with each seeking 'to accommodate the other'.[24] That Wolf sees nothing wrong with the ticket-taker's allowing in a friend ahead of others is somewhat alarming, since any reasonable person (to use her way of talking) should regard this behaviour as patently unfair and as violating even moderate impartialist standards. It is not a question, as she puts it, of people with stricter views 'loosening up' and being more 'lenient',[25] but of taking impartiality seriously, especially when it concerns, as it always does in central cases, procedural behaviour by people responsible for allocating benefits and burdens to others in a disinterested and non-partisan way. Again, although Wolf says that she would be inclined to ignore friendship when it came to voting for tenure for a colleague, she allows that reasonable people may disagree and so need to find a modus vivendi acceptable to both sides – as though voting for a friend's tenure *because* they were a friend could ever be reasonable.

Worse, however, and more important theoretically, is Wolf's assertion that morality simply *does not apply* in certain cases of 'radical choice'. Her case for consideration is the mother who must

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[23] Ibid: 252.
[24] Ibid: 252.
[25] Ibid: 252.

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decide whether to hand over her criminal son to the police. If he is not caught, an innocent man will be convicted and imprisoned. There is, she acknowledges, no question that 'impartial morality' would forbid the mother's protecting her son at the cost of an innocent other's suffering. But, she complains, 'we are talking about a woman and her son.'[26] Here, she says, we have not a conflict between impartial and partial moral viewpoints, but between morality – conceived impartially – and 'the demands of love'. All of morality stands on one side of the dilemma, but the woman is faced with the decision 'whether to attend ultimately to moral concerns at all.'[27] In such a case of radical choice, opines Wolf, the mother must be at least willing to consider acting immorally, and even to act immorally, adding that such willingness 'is compatible with the possession of a character worthy of respect and admiration.'[28]

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There is, it seems to me, a double failure in Wolf's approach to such problems. On the one hand, by identifying the core of morality with impartial constraints, she fails to integrate partiality into an overall moral theory. In other words, she does not take the possibility of moral rules of partiality seriously enough to allow morality any way of handling such cases as those above in which an agent's actions could be guided decisively by moral considerations – and this in cases which, if morality were ever needed as a guide to action, cry out for moral guidance. Moreover, by allowing that a person should (in some non-moral sense of 'should') ever be willing to act immorally, Wolf makes a mockery of morality itself. And to add that immoral behaviour could ever be worthy of respect and admiration is, if not incoherent, then highly disturbing. On the other hand, however, Wolf fails also to take impartiality seriously enough. Even her own moderate impartial principles are impotent, not just in the face of radical choice but in cases, such as that of the ticket-taker, which seem to beg for an impartialist answer. On Wolf's view of things, it is hard to see where considerations of impartiality exert anything other than the faintest of attractive forces. In general, the thought 'Well, reasonable people can disagree about morality, and in some cases you can be reasonable by ignoring morality

[26] Ibid: 253.
[27] Ibid: 254.
[28] Ibid: 255.

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altogether' betrays a failure to take impartiality seriously, a failure to take partiality seriously, and an overall failure to take seriously the idea of morality as a guide to life, especially in the hard cases where it is most needed.

3. Basic justification: rights or goods?

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Partialistic preference, if it is to be justified, must fit within an overall theory of the good for human beings. It cannot be founded on a self-created 'autocentric' narrative in which one, as it were, constructs one's ethics from the inside out.[29] Nor can it be founded on considerations of global utility, no matter how 'sophisticated' or in how indirect a way such considerations play a part in moral theory. The reasons why a person acts morally must be transparent to his practical reasoning, in the sense that if one were to cite, to oneself or the object of one's agency, even the most abstruse or remote of reasons for doing what one does in respect of the other person, that reason should not be repugnant to our best and most reasonable views about why one is acting in that way. So, to take a simple example, a person has an absolute and unconditional moral obligation to provide sufficient for their family ahead of all others. Now let us leave aside plausible doubts about whether any form of consequentialism can countenance absolute and unconditional obligations at all. Suppose some version can. Nevertheless, that version will base the obligation on the ultimate, if remote, ground of global utility. Yet it is repugnant to all that is good and right about a person's provision for their family that he should cite, to himself, or his family if asked (perhaps it is a family of philosophically curious people!) global utility, or the sum total of human happiness, as the reason why he provides for them as he does. Similarly for such partialistic acts as helping one's friend over others, doing duty as a Sunday referee at one's local football club, or supporting one's country in time of war.

Moreover, whilst partiality cannot be justified in terms of impersonal utility, where by 'impersonal' I mean that the identities of the specific persons to whom one is closely related fade out of the picture when it comes to ultimate justification, the principles underlying partialistic preference

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[29] This is the earlier position of John Cottingham. For an extended critique, see Oderberg, 'Self-Love, Love of Neighbour, and Impartiality', in *The Moral Life*. For Cottingham's present view, see 'The Self, The Good Life and the Transcendent' and 'Impartiality and Ethical Formation'.

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must also make reference to persons in general, to agency, and to the good that objectively fulfils persons as agents. Yet at the same time, there is some truth in the thought behind Godwin's famous question as to what magic there is in the pronoun 'my'.[30] In one sense, there is no magic whatsoever. Some partialists, I contend, have been overly concerned with trying to forestall the Godwinian worry at the expense of further necessary justification. This concern is found in Bernard Williams, for instance, for whom the mere fact that someone is my wife is ground enough for saving her in preference to somebody else.[31] Heard in one way, Williams is right: there would be a large number of 'thoughts too many' were a person to justify his action by elaborating to himself a set of arguments, beginning with fairly abstract premises, from which he concluded that it was permissible to save his wife; to speak nothing of the fact that in such a situation his wife would end up dying before he had got through even a fraction of the reasoning!

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Nevertheless, to adapt an example of Alasdair Macintyre's in his complaint against Williams on this score, suppose I wished to save my partner in crime from the police in preference to an innocent bystander, or my abductee from her frantic parents.[32] Would the mere fact that it was *my* partner in crime, or *my* abductee, carry any weight? One would think not. Hence we need to attend to far more than the merely personal nature of our relationships to be able to justify preferential treatment.

What about an appeal solely to the *rights* generated by one's relationships? It is evident that one's close relationships generate reasonable expectations of a certain kind of preferential behaviour: Fred's spouse expects him, with good reason, to pick up the children from school rather than go out for drinks with his mates; Jane's book club expects her, with good reason, to attend to at least some of

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[30] Godwin, *Enquiry*: 170.

[31] B. Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 18.

[32] Macintyre's example is saving one's mistress rather than one's wife: see his review of Williams's *Moral Luck*, entitled 'The Magic in the Pronoun "My"', *Ethics* 94 (1983): 113-25 at 123. The example is not quite apposite since Williams could reply that the fact that both people are 'mine', as it were, means that the pronouns cancel each other out and there can be no obvious preference to be accorded one's mistress. Still, that would not be good enough, since presumably the point is that there should be an obvious preference *in favour* of one's wife.

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its meetings rather than always be doing other things; Bill's community expects him, again justifiably, to contribute at least some small part of his time, money, or effort to communal things rather than spending it all outside that locale. Relationships generate expectations that need to be met; is this not enough to ground partiality?

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It is part of the story, but only a small part and by no means a foundational one. For one thing, if the rights-based defence of partiality were to be extended so as to base all expectations on prior commitments such as promises, the problem would be that most such expectations are *not* based on promises, at least not explicit ones; and the notion of an implicit promise, whilst coherent, again will not cover all cases. Is there even an implicit promise to my local community to contribute something to its activities? More strikingly, is there an implicit promise to my second cousin twice removed that I will even consider leaving her any money in my will, let alone decide to do so? Yet I am perfectly entitled to do so in preference to most other people, certainly non-relatives. More importantly, the appeal to rights based on reasonable expectations simply pushes the question one stage back: if promises or other undertakings are what ground the reasonable expectations, am I free not to make them? If there is some other ground, what is it? Am I free not to get myself into situations where such expectations are likely to be generated, say by living a life free of all but the barest commitments to others? What makes an expectation reasonable?

Perhaps, instead, we need a broader notion of rights to ground partiality. Alan Gewirth, for one, has sought to give a justification for partialistic preference in terms of a principle of universal human rights.[33] Since it is a human right voluntarily to form associations, whether family, community, nation, and so on, there is an impartial justification – in the sense of one applying equally to all agents irrespective of their particular circumstances – for being, at least to some extent, unimpeded in the exercise of preferences for those groupings and their members as against others. The justification, argues Gewirth, applies indirectly, in other words not at the level of individual action but at the level of rules and institutions that express the human right to form such associations. So, to use his example

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[33] A. Gewirth, 'Ethical Universalism and Particularism', *The Journal of Philosophy* 85 (1988): 283-302.

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of a baseball game, the umpire can call a batter out and force him from the box against the batter's will without thereby violating his freedom, since the umpire's action is in accordance with rules justified by the universal right to free association; the batter 'has freely consented to play the game and to abide by its rules.'[34]

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Although Gewirth's general approach to justifying particularistic preferences is admirable, it has serious problems showing it to be inadequate. One of the main ones is that many, perhaps most, of the associations and institutions within which partiality is either permissible or obligatory are not voluntary. More precisely, they are not voluntary in the sense required for his argument and certainly not for all of the agents who belong to them, yet whose practice of partiality with respect to them is every bit as justified as it is for those who do act freely in the required sense – say in constructing or maintaining the institution, entering into the relevant relationships, and so on. Gewirth recognizes the problem in respect of one's country: 'There is a crucially important respect in which one's country is not a voluntary association, adherence to whose rules is at the option of its members.'[35] He tries to solve the justification problem by appeal to the idea that the 'universalist principle' of human rights includes not just freedom of association but 'equal protection of the freedom and basic well-being of all the inhabitants'[36] of a country, where he means 'freedom' in a broader sense than mere freedom of association. This in turn justifies a 'minimal state' that allows enforcement of the criminal law, and so infringement of freedoms at the individual level without violation of rights – due to the justification of such infringements at the universal, impartial level.

By bringing in further kinds of justification, Gewirth shows that if partiality is to be justified in all its various manifestations, a number of principles need to do work; justification cannot be reduced to a simple formula of voluntary association. This in itself does not undermine his project, but it fails on its own terms since although the protection one receives from the state might justify certain preferences one has for that state of which one is a member over others, how does it justify a

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[34] Ibid: 293.
[35] Ibid: 299.
[36] Ibid: 299.

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member's preferences for *other members*, i.e. for one's fellow countrymen? Is it that each of us receives protection from everyone else as well? This is a highly artificial generalization, realistic in times of war perhaps, but not in ordinary times. Moreover, exactly which protections justify which partialities? Is there a narrow *quid pro quo* of some sort, or a larger idea at work? What if the state protects some of my interests but not others: is my partiality to be circumscribed, and if so how?

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Moreover, what about institutions such as the family? People voluntarily create families, but they are also born into them: no consent is had or possible. Gewirth does not extend his 'equal protection' justification to families, so what should be said of familial preferences when there is no question of voluntary association? Surely he cannot want to say that Fred is allowed partiality towards his son since he voluntarily produced him, but not towards his mother because he didn't ask to be born. The baseball game model might work well for clubs, start-up communes and political parties, but it has nothing to say to any person who finds herself belonging to something not of her own making (at least partly). Yet if we do what Gewirth does not, and extend his equal protection idea to families, or perhaps to those familial relationships that are non-voluntary, we end up with absurdities: are we then to say that I am not even *permitted* to exercise partial preferences in favour of my second cousin twice removed, who lives on the other side of the country, because in no sense can I be construed to receive any protection from him or to share with him in any kind of mutually protective relationship? What if we cannot stand the sight of each other? Are we still forbidden to exercise any special preferences towards each other (e.g. to bequeath everything I have to him because he is my sole surviving family member)? No defender of partiality should countenance such a thought. That my cousin is *my cousin* does matter, and can sometimes be enough for partiality towards him.

It is not simply that he is *my* cousin, but that he is my *cousin*. In other words, reference must be made by partialists to the nature of the institution within which partial preferences operate. We must go beyond rights to the *goods* that underwrite them. Family, for example, is a basic good; more accurately, it is an *instance* of the basic good of friendship. Family is a *good* institution: it allows and promotes the flourishing of human beings according to their natures. The sort of story one can tell

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about this good, and about goods generally, is a familiar one I shall not rehearse.[37] The general point, however, is that partialistic preference can only be justified by reference to the goods secured by the institutions, and behaviour according to those institutions, within and in harmony with which such preferences are exercised. The relationship between a particular preference's being for someone specially related to *me*, and the good which is secured by such a preference is not one of instrumentality but of *instantiation*. Hence Fred's decision to spend evenings with his children rather than the neighbour's children is not a means to any end of global utility. Rather, it is an *instance* of behaviour in accordance with a basic good that contributes to human flourishing. Now the distinction between being an instrument and being an instance might seem recherché or of little theoretical importance, but it is neither. Fred's decision is not a means to an end, and were he to articulate it in that way to himself or others as the reason why he spends evenings with his children, he would rightly be seen as thinking perversely, in just the sort of way partialists deride. By contrast, for him to see his behaviour as instantiating a good (more precisely, as instantiating a kind of behaviour that is in accordance with a good) is for him to see the identity of his children as *his* as something of the utmost importance. Fred is not interested in contributing to the good of family life as such: arguably, he could do that by spending time with his neighbour's children (albeit in a much more attenuated way than with his own). He is interested in *instantiating* the good of the family in *his* life, and spending time with *his* children precisely instantiates that good in his life.

It might, however, be thought that for Fred to articulate to himself or others the thought that what he is doing is instantiating a good would also be perverse. Yet why should this be? Of course he need not make such an articulation in the normal run of things; but neither, outside the philosophy classroom, need I tell someone that I have bought a car that instantiates the colour red. I have, simply, bought a red car and that is good enough. Similarly, it is good enough for Fred, if asked to justify

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[37] See further David S. Oderberg, 'The Structure and Content of the Good', in D.S. Oderberg and T. Chappell (eds) *Human Values: New Essays on Ethics and Natural Law* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; rev. ed. p/back 2007): 127-65. For a less classical approach coming from the school of 'new' natural law, see J. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

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himself, say by an act consequentialist, to retort, ‘But they’re *my* children!’. Or, in a more realistic situation, were Jane to be asked why she picked up her son rather than her son’s friend when they both fell over in the park and she could only come to the aid of one of them, it would be enough for her to exclaim, ‘But it’s my son!’. Note that, almost certainly, her emphasis will be not on the word ‘my’ but on the word ‘son’. Both words are essential to a full justification of what Jane does, but whatever work the pronoun ‘my’ does is only effective in conjunction with that done by the term it qualifies, which latter indicates, in one way or another, the institution grounding the relationship, and the good grounding the institution.

There is, then, a dual aspect to partiality. That particular people stand in particular and special relationships to each other justifies certain kinds of preferential treatment within those relationships. It is not that such treatment is only ever permissible, but that it is sometimes obligatory because it is obligatory for all human beings to secure the goods instantiated by the given relationship, and doing so sometimes mandates certain kinds of behaviour.[38] In addition, however, complete justification must also refer to the way in which particular relationships and the behaviour in accordance with them instantiate goods. They are not means to the achievement of goods but ways in which such goods are *realized* in human life. We can call this second aspect of justification the ‘impartial’ aspect if we like, but not much is gained by such terminology. The term ‘impersonal’ is even less helpful. Perhaps the best way of thinking of it is in terms of the *universal* foundation for partiality. To an impartialist, such as a consequentialist, it will sound strange that the universal foundation for partiality requires *unequal* treatment by an agent of others. Yet this apparent strangeness only results from a failure to understand what the universal element amounts to. What is good for people requires that they exercise preferences for those with whom they are in special relationships, *not* that they promote global utility or the greatest overall happiness. When seen rightly,

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[38] Wolf seems to miss this when she criticizes extreme impartialism for supposing that if two things have equal value it does not follow that one is required to care equally about each (‘Morality and Partiality’: 244-5). True, but this observation does not capture the *compulsoriness* of unequal treatment in certain circumstances.

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what should be apparent is not tension but harmony between the particular and the universal aspects of human good.

4. The argument from control for an order of charity

Reflection on human goods shows that certain kinds of institution and relationship fulfil our natures. Those institutions and relationships require that there be some sorts of partialistic or preferential treatment by an agent for others who belong to the same institutions as the agent or are in those relationships with him. But it is doubtful whether mere reflection on the relevant institutions and relationships can yield much of substance concerning whether there is an *order* or *hierarchy* of preferences. For instance, we know that family and friends are goods, but can we infer from the natures of family and friends that your family should generally have more priority in your day-to-day life than your friends or vice versa?[39] What kind of ordering should we expect in our special relationships, given that they are all important and fulfilling? How does one's own self come into the picture?

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By this last question I raise the issue of charity toward oneself. We can agree with Aristotle that a person cannot be *unjust* to themselves,[40] but a person can *love* themselves, that is be charitable toward themselves in the sense of 'charity' described earlier.[41] Should one love oneself more than other people? That is, should the proverb 'charity begins at home' apply to oneself first and foremost? To think that it does strikes most modern ears as almost barbaric, a recommendation of selfishness and narcissism. Yet there are good reasons, consonant with the overall idea of an order of charity, for the thought that love of self comes before love of others.

Note first, then, that what we are concerned with is not self-love as 'rank egoism' or selfishness,[42] nor a love of others that might be called concupiscence – love of another for one's own

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[39] Here I am using the term 'friendship' in the non-technical sense familiar from common usage. In the technical sense of the theory of human goods, friendship is a basic good that is composed of various parts, one of which is family and another of which is friendship in the common sense, among other elements.

[40] *Nicomachean Ethics* V:11, 1138a5.

[41] One can also be charitable to oneself in the colloquial sense of 'cutting oneself some slack' or 'giving oneself a break', but this is not the sense I mean here.

[42] As pointed out by Cottingham: 'Ethics and Impartiality': 90; 'Partiality and the Virtues', in R. Crisp (ed.), *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996): 57-76 at 65.

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sake, i.e. for whatever pleasure or usefulness they have for oneself. Our concern is with genuine benevolence or charity, whereby one wishes the good of a person for that person's own sake, because they are capable of being good and pursuing the good, and one wants them to be and pursue the good, and to help them where possible. (Again, in theistic terms the idea is that ultimately one should love others for the sake of God, hence from the religious viewpoint love of another for their own sake is to be contrasted not with love of them for God's sake but with love of them for one's own sake.) Now if a person (A) has this attitude of benevolence to another (B), then the relation of charity between them will be a kind of partnership or union. Person B wants to pursue the good and be good; person A wants this for B as well, and to help him. Yet A also (ex hypothesi) wants to be and pursue the good. But the relation he has to himself is evidently not one of partnership – it is one of identity. So the basic reason A has to want the good for B,[43] namely that there is a kind of union or partnership between them in the pursuit of the good, must, *logically*, be outweighed by the reason A has to want the good for himself, namely that he has a nearness to himself outstripping all others – for nothing is as close as identity. Another way of putting it is to say that the very reason a person has for loving another is at the same time the reason he has for loving himself more.[44]

A further way of putting the same point concerning the necessity of self-preference is in terms of an argument from *control*. Charity is more than benevolence. Wishes are admirable but cheap. Complete charity requires beneficence as well: as we all know, actions speak louder than words (and much louder than thoughts). So in order fully to love someone, a person needs at the very least to be disposed to act concretely toward the person loved in a way intended and likely to protect and promote[45] that person's good. But it is only rational to act (or be disposed to act) in such a way to the extent that one has *some* amount of realistic *control* over whether the good of the person loved is

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[43] 'Basic' in the sense of the general reason that motivates love for all human beings, as opposed to more particular reasons having to do with one's attitude to this or that individual.
[44] This argument is nothing more than an unpacking of the brief statement of the idea by St Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* II.IIae, q.26, a.4, resp; see *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas,* trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1916), vol. 9: 336-7.
[45] And to enhance, stimulate, encourage, and so on for all the proper attitudes one may have, and actions one may take, toward a person's good.

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protected and promoted. To be disposed to do good to a person and yet have no realistic prospect of making any difference to that person's good[46] is irrational; or if not irrational, then it is insincere or hypocritical – perhaps a kind of 'babbling', as Cottingham, echoing Aristotle's discussion of akrasia, puts it in respect of impartialists who perforce do not live up to the norms of their own position.[47] Yet we can see immediately that *whatever* control one may have over the good of another, one must have *more* over one's own good.[48] Can we think of an even remotely plausible scenario where one has more control over the good of another than one has over one's own good? Moreover, what else is there to motivate the degree of love one has for a person other than that (a) they are a person (and so capable of being good and pursuing the good) and (b) one has some amount of control over the ways and extent to which that person is and pursues the good? It follows, then, since one necessarily has the most control over one's own good, that one *must*, on pain of irrationality, love oneself to a greater degree than one loves anyone else, however close they may be. Self-love in its priority of degree over love of another, then, is a *rational* obligation.[49]

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Just as the argument from control justifies charity toward oneself over others, so it also grounds an order of charity as between the various relationships that radiate outwards from oneself to the entire world. Charity requires love of another in the sense of wanting the good for the other and being prepared to do good to the other, i.e. contribute to the other's good. But we have more control over the good of others the closer they stand in relationships to us. The more proximate, the greater the control; the more remote, the less the control. Hence there can only be a reduction or fading out of charity proportionate to the remoteness of the relationship. This is why charity is stronger with respect

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[46] Let us leave aside possible mismatch between the control one has and the control one *believes* one has. A person may believe they have control and not have it (or the converse), such that they will not be irrational if their belief is reasonable, and so on. Spelling out these details is tangential to the main argument, and in fact irrelevant to one's own case, where it is certain that a person who believes they have no control over their own good is either irrational or in some other way malfunctioning cognitively.
[47] 'Ethics and Impartiality': 93.
[48] Another way of putting the point is to observe that although one can have a *bare* disposition to act equally for the good of oneself and others, the existence of degrees of control means that one cannot be equally *ready* to act for the good of oneself and others.
[49] Although Aquinas does not spell out an argument from control for the priority of self-love, it seems consistent with the argument he does give, and a natural corollary of it.

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to family and close friends, strong – albeit less so – toward more distant friends and acquaintances, less strong – though still distinctive – toward one's community, reduced again toward one's country and its inhabitants, yet still stronger with regard to one's country and its inhabitants than to other countries and their inhabitants.

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It must be emphasized, though, that the differential bonds of charity are not a function purely or even primarily of space or time, but of control in a deeper sense – the kinds of emotional and psychological bonds that give one more access to, and control over, the good of another, with both space and time, of course, being important factors. The permissibility of leaving money in trust for a descendant yet to be born in preference to a stranger living near me here and now, for example, shows that mere geography or contemporaneity is not necessarily the deciding factor in one's reasonable partiality. It might be, however, as when I prefer, with justification, to help a friend or stranger living close to me over another living far away, simply because of the physical proximity. The point, however, is that a number of factors enter into the judgment as to which proximates take precedence over which others, and as to preferences between proximates and strangers.

5. Universal charity and love of neighbour

Before moving on to some of the principles governing the order of charity, we need to see first how universal charity harmonizes with partialistic preference. As we have seen,[50] the precept 'love thy neighbour', according to the traditional interpretation, takes my neighbour to be any human being without distinction. Universal charity means that it is simply in virtue of sharing a common nature that every one of us is bound to love every other; in theistic terms, we are all made in the image of God. Yet this is only the starting point for moral reflection, not the terminus. First, we must note that the love of all human beings could not possibly involve a love of *unqualified* beneficence, since we cannot do good, or even be disposed to do good, to every human being simpliciter, given our limited psychological and emotional (not to mention material) resources.[51] Secondly, however, the same point

[50] See note 5 above.
[51] For a theist, the only exception is that we can *pray* for all human beings, which is an instance of beneficence, not mere benevolence.

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about limited resources does not apply to the love of benevolence: it would be curious to argue that we are not psychologically capable of unqualifiedly *wanting* the good for every human being,[52] as though doing so would induce in us a kind of mental exhaustion.

Thirdly, given that beneficence cannot apply globally in an unqualified way, and given that charity includes beneficence, it follows that to *that* extent charity cannot apply globally in an unqualified way. So to whom does it apply? Again, the standard – and quite plausible – view is that it applies to those in need, by a kind of moral law of gravitation (to put the point metaphorically but vividly). That is to say, the closer the relationship and the more severe the need, the greater the obligation of charity – but the idea needs unpacking. The obligation involves both action and attitude. Overlying the wholly general and equal benevolence for all human beings is an unequal benevolence based on the psychological reality of degrees of closeness and the constitutional limitations on a person's spreading their affections over every other person without distinction. Moreover it is not just a question of affection but of natural limitations on meaningful ties, whether it be to physical proximates, town, city, community, club, political organization, country, and so on. Psychological integrity demands that the dispositions to action on the part of an agent must bear some fairly close relation to the attitudes the agent has, or could realistically have, to the potential object of the action. We would think a man very odd who said to himself: 'I love all people equally. I love my wife too – she's a person, after all. But because she is my wife, my beneficence is primarily directed at her.'[53] Beneficence and benevolence cannot come apart altogether. A person wants to do preferentially well by a proximate precisely *because* he loves them or has some other positive attitude or affection toward them of a degree or intensity exceeding that which he has to non-proximates or those in lesser proximity.

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Charity, then, requires acting in particular circumstances toward particular people with whom one is in some relation of proximity. The proximity need have no passive element: the aid worker who

[52] Note – wanting the good for every person, not wanting to *do* good to every person.
[53] Modulo other family relationships, etc: we can easily make the thought more complex, but not more natural or admirable.

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chooses to travel to the wilds of Borneo to provide medical care for people she has never met, and never would have known anything about but for her choice, still exercises the virtue of charity even though the proximity is self-imposed. (If doing this involved wrongful treatment of her own nearest and dearest, of course, she would *not* be exercising such a virtue, she would rather be doing good to some at the expense of others to whom she had a more serious obligation. So says the partialist, and I agree.) Moreover, the differential beneficence shown to others must, as I have argued, be grounded on differential benevolence.

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If differential benevolence and beneficence, then, are to coexist with *equal* love for all human beings, since charity in a fundamental sense applies to every human being without distinction, we have to say something like the following. As far as benevolence goes, charity requires that we want the same generic good for ourselves and for all of our fellow human beings without distinction or qualification. As far as beneficence goes, it must mean that we ought to have a *disposition* to do good to others that is qualitatively equal in respect of those others and equal to my disposition to do good to myself. But this disposition *must* be subject to qualification: that our general inclination to do good to ourselves and others in equal manner is also an inclination to do good in unequal *measure*, depending on which relations of proximity I am in with respect to other people, where the measure is also governed by the severity of the need of those who are my proximates. Further, that differential beneficence must be grounded (at least in usual cases) in a benevolence that is also unequal in intensity or measure. Finally, for reasons I have already given, the intensity or measure of benevolence and beneficence one has towards oneself will and must be greater than one has towards other people.[54]

6. The order of charity: principles

Let us now look in more detail at the sorts of principles that should be applied in working out what order of charity fits well with the overall scheme just sketched. First, there are three things that need

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[54] This, at least, is how I interpret *Summa Theologiae* II.IIae, q.26, aa.4, 6, as do writers who base their moral philosophy on the same foundation: see, e.g., Higgins, *Man as Man,* pp.332-7; P.J. Glenn, *Ethics* (St. Louis, Missouri: B. Herder Book Co., 1930), pp.183-9.

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to be considered – the person who is the proposed object of one's behaviour, the good involved, and the severity of that person's need in respect of that good.

As far as the person goes, the concept of proximity suggests something like the following presumptive order of preference: one's spouse; children; parents; siblings; other relatives; friends; people in the same place; the same country; all other people. A few observations should be made.[55] There are two standpoints from which to assess love toward another to whom one is closely tied. The objective standpoint concerns the esteem, reverence or honour in which one should hold the other on account of what they represent, such as their status public or private, their virtue, or their role in respect of one's own life. The subjective standpoint concerns the intensity with which one naturally feels affection for another based on the closeness itself. Objectively, your parents are held more dear than your spouse or children since your parents produced you in the first place and gave you life. Subjectively, your spouse and children are held in more intense affection since they form the nucleus within which you have started a new family unit: you *leave* your parents to start a new life with spouse and children. This subjective preference for your own family unit goes hand in hand with the significant objective factor that your new family is also an addition to society and hence to the common good, and so is itself worthy of honour on that score. The combination of greater intensity and equal or near-equal (though not superior) objective status means that, overall, spouse and children come before parents. On the other hand, spouse comes before children since your spouse has an objectively higher claim to honour than your children inasmuch as you choose your spouse – at least partly – to be the parent of your children in the first place. You become one with your spouse and children are the natural outcome of that unity. Indeed, it would seem that no parent has a duty to honour their children, since it is hard to see what status would justify such honour. Rather, parents have a duty of *care* for their children. Hence the equal (though not necessarily greater) intensity of

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[55] Many of the following observations are taken or adapted from, or else expand and elaborate, the discussion by Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* II.IIae, q.26, aa.8-11; Eng. trans: 344-51. In general, this section follows closely the discussion in q.26.

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love for one's spouse, coupled with the objective honour due to them, creates a partialistic presumption in their favour over your children, for whom there is intense affection but no honour.

Another observation is that there is nothing magical about concepts such as country, community, or others with a significant spatial element. Space is only important to the extent that it enables or disables psychologically and emotionally realistic charitable behaviour toward others. Were countries or cities not to exist or have the political and social role they now occupy, some other spatial arrangements might come to the fore more than they do at present, such as regions, villages (less important for many than they used to be), or for that matter tribes, clans, geographically salient areas that are not of much socio-political relevance today, and so on. That there must be some such structures in some preferential hierarchy is evident; hence the wrongheadedness of the idea of the 'global citizen' who, due to 'globalization', is supposed to have no salient geographical ties (apart from the Earth itself, absent intelligent life on Mars) and to be able to spread her charity indifferently over the whole world (perhaps in order to 'save' it). Moreover, it is not as though a true global citizen could be created simply by tying the peoples of the Earth ever tighter together, whether through political centralization or various forms of 'interdependence'. No matter how tight the bonds (or the noose, more appositely), the very idea of geographically neutral charity is incompatible with fundamental and unalterable facts about human nature.

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As well as the person, the order of charity is concerned with the goods involved in a relationship. There are three genera of goods: spiritual goods; intrinsic natural goods; and extrinsic natural goods. Now talk of spiritual goods is where some untranslatability appears (as mentioned earlier), but much of the idea can be captured if we think of 'spiritual' in a broad sense as referring to goods that pertain to a person's character and moral development. Thus a parent's teaching a child how to behave involves attention to spiritual goods; that the parent normally educates their own child and not that of a person living down the street is a matter of obligatory partiality in respect of spiritual goods. When a person devotes a lot of time and attention to dissuading a close friend from going down a path that could wreck her life, that involves attention to spiritual goods (and perhaps bodily ones as well). To take a more poignant example that gets closer to the religious sense of 'spiritual

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goods', I am not especially interested in what arbitrary people on their deathbeds have to say about their past lives. But I would make a very great effort were a close friend of mine, on their deathbed, to insist I come to listen to something of great importance they had to tell me about, say, something they had done in the past that they wanted to get off their chest. Intrinsic natural goods, on the other hand, concern health and physical well-being as well as mental or psychic well-being but looked at in abstraction from one's moral state: teaching one's child to read means attending to an intrinsic natural good of mental well-being. And the extrinsic goods are those instruments to the pursuit of intrinsic goods – money, property, relationships of pleasure and utility, among others.

One principle is that spiritual goods take precedence over natural goods modulo proximity and need. A parent should be prepared to expend a great amount of time and effort in the moral education of their child; the same, though to a lesser degree, for teacher and pupil. But suppose Fred sees his next-door neighbour Frieda's child misbehaving: must he put much effort into correcting the child if Frieda is not around and the child is not harming anything of Fred's? Some but not much seems the answer; it is not extremely necessary to correct the child, at least if the misbehaviour is not serious. Generally, it is not Fred's business, it is Frieda's, and Fred can get on with other things. But suppose Fred heard the child swearing like a trooper; most of us would be inclined to tell the child off in the absence of its parent, and rightly so. And if not, certainly if the child were desporting itself in a very undignified way. This might count as a more serious necessity requiring intervention, even if it meant some inconvenience on Fred's part. He might even neglect his own child for a moment to correct another's.

When it comes to matters involving extreme spiritual necessity, a person ought even to risk their own life to help their neighbour. For a religious believer, such cases are not hard to imagine. For a secular person they would be more rare, but perhaps we can think of an example. Take the dying neighbour – let's say a mere acquaintance – who begs you to contact her long-estranged only son to effect a reconciliation that, if it happened, would give the neighbour ultimate earthly happiness before she died and also transform the life of the estranged offspring. How far might you go to contact the son, supposing: (a) the need was certain; (b) the prospect of help was certain; (c) there was no other

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way the son could be contacted – only you had heard from him in the last five years; (d) you would not cause any greater harm by helping than that to which you would expose yourself. Suppose the son is living in a remote and dangerous part of the world and you have the means to get in touch with him. Now your dependants, if you had any, would have the right to forbid you to go because of the risk, and you owe them a duty of justice, not merely of charity; but suppose they consented. Such a case, given its extremeness, would I think make it permissible for you to risk your life. But this shows that the case does have to be extreme, and it may be that for a non-theist no case would be extreme enough. Yet this latter reaction merely reinforces the idea that charity has an order and that one may not, willy nilly, take any risk for the benefit of any person.

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What about where there is no spiritual good at stake, merely an intrinsic natural good such as life itself? In general, no one is obliged in charity to take extraordinary means to preserve their own life, so a fortiori they have no obligation in charity to take such means to preserve another's life. Note the qualification 'in charity': there may still be duties of justice. A person is obliged in justice to take extraordinary measures to save the life of a spouse or child, given the explicit or implicit, and unqualified, undertaking to care for and protect them. Does this mean a person is bound in justice to take extraordinary measures to preserve their own life for the sake of their family? Consider the man who is unsure whether to undergo a highly dangerous and burdensome but potentially life-saving operation, and is urged to do so by his wife and child. It seems to me that the issue is again one of the undertaking to care and protect: if the spouse and child are dependants, there may be a duty of justice. If the child is an adult, so to speak, and quite independent, and the wife is capable of supporting herself or receiving reliable support from elsewhere, it is not clear that a duty of justice exists. The wife and child might in some sense be emotionally dependent on the husband, but that does not make them dependants with a right to care and protection. Is there a duty of charity – that is, must the husband undergo the operation out of love? Again, it is not clear that such a duty exists, though were the husband to undergo the operation out of love this would belong to what might be called the 'perfection of charity', in other words it would be an admirable act of great love, yet nevertheless exceeding the kind of love a person is obliged to show another no matter how close.

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This sort of case might be contrasted with a possible obligation in charity where the person for whom one considers risking one's life is someone whose welfare is necessary for the public good. Must I throw myself between the assassin's gun and the president? If I am a paid Secret Service agent, I am obliged in justice to do so. If I am Joe Public there is no such obligation; at least it is not clear that citizens have made any implicit undertaking to risk their lives for their leaders. Still, I should love my country and be disposed to act to preserve and promote the common good; perhaps such love obliges me to risk my life, at least if the potential victim's welfare really were a matter of public importance.

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Let us explore self-preference a little further. Objectively, we should love those who are better than us. That is to say, people who are higher in virtue deserve greater honour and esteem: one should, as it were, humble oneself before the good (though not necessarily the great). So the love due objectively should be manifested by appropriate self-effacement and humility as regards the superior virtue of others. Subjectively, however, we naturally and rightly hold ourselves nearer than others (recall: there is nothing so near as identity) and so love ourselves with greater intensity. I should humble myself before a saintly person, but I will still go home and cook *my* dinner and prepare *my* lectures and attend to the duties of *my* state in life. Moreover, despite my esteem for those better than me, I am still permitted to desire my progress in virtue to surpass that of others, even the saintly person, since charity is for self-perfection. Why do we love? Because we want to be good, and we love more because we want to be better. There is no paradox here: for a religious believer, it is *in* loving God and neighbour that she perfects her own self, so she cannot want one without the other; for a non-religious person, too, love of neighbour goes hand in hand with one's desire to be good, since love of neighbour (in all its fullness) just *is* being good.

When it comes to spiritual goods, some self-preference is obligatory. One may never do anything wrong for the benefit of another person, no matter who they are or how great their need. This is indeed a kind of partiality to self: you prefer, rightly, not to engage in immoral behaviour, in behaviour that shows or contributes to a vicious character, for another's benefit. On the other hand, it might be permissible to forgo some spiritual benefit for the spiritual or maybe merely material benefit

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of a neighbour, if your own loss is not serious. For instance, suppose meditating helps Bill to be a more patient person; still, he may set aside an evening's meditation in order to counsel his friend on an important personal matter, or even to help his friend fix her car.

All things being equal, one should prefer one's own bodily good to a neighbour's bodily good if they are of the same kind. It is not a duty of charity to lay down your life for another, but an act of heroism, part of the perfection of charity mentioned earlier. But if a neighbour's bodily good is of a higher kind than your own, you may sacrifice your own good. So, for example, you may risk your health to save another's life, say by donating an organ. Must you? In general, the greater the proximity, the greater the burden of charity, in accordance with the idea that charity radiates outwards from nearest and dearest. The point at which a duty of charity shades into something supererogatory will depend on many specific circumstances peculiar to one's own situation, but that there is such a boundary, albeit a rough one, is clear enough: a husband who refused to donate a kidney to save the life of his wife would be failing in charity; a person who refused to do so for a distant cousin generally would not. With regard to the 'all things being equal' mentioned earlier, sometimes one must prefer the equal bodily good of a neighbour to one's own, where the common good requires it. Hence firemen, policemen, soldiers, and the like, have a duty to risk their lives for the public welfare: again, though, this is best categorized as a duty of justice rather than of charity.

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As to the order of charity between neighbours, some brief observations are in order. With regard to general benevolence, charity makes no distinctions. As concerns particular ties it does, with respect to both their subjective and objective aspects. So you are at least permitted to prefer the company of a virtuous acquaintance to that of a vicious relative. Subjectively, you may feel a more intense affection for the relative than the acquaintance. Objectively, the acquaintance deserves more esteem. Since personal relationships should never be based merely on affection (at least among mature persons), one may and perhaps must prefer the company of the acquaintance due to their edifying characteristics. But what if visiting saintly aunt Gertrude carries no pleasure whatsoever, whereasa your trouble-making cousin is more fun than a barrel of monkeys? If the cousin provides the occasion of wrongdoing, i.e. scandalizes you, then Gertrude must come first. If the cousin does not

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endanger your own good character, then you would be permitted to spend your time with him, assuming various affections based on kinship, friendship, gratitude for past benefits, and so on. You may even desire that your cousin surpass aunt Gertrude in virtue, and try to be a good influence. The general point is that the objective aspect of charity does not always prevail over the subjective aspect. The objective aspect demands greater respect and honour for the other person, but the subjective aspect demands more spiritual and material assistance. Sometimes, though, there can be cases where one's all-out preference should simply be for the better person, for instance voting for the more honest and upright candidate in an election (assuming equal competence), where there is a duty of charity to one's community to promote the common good. Another case would be where a near and dear person simply forfeits a claim to preference: you are permitted (though not necessarily obliged) to deprive a prodigal child of her inheritance in favour of a virtuous stranger.

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When contrasting relationships of consanguinity with friendships, a number of points should be made. Blood relationships are generally more stable and founded in the nature of things, whereas friendships are a matter of choice and may be more congenial and hence preferable to certain kinships.[56] Nevertheless, other things being equal more love should be shown to a relative than a friend in things belonging to the kinship, such as sharing concern over family affairs, seeking advice on family problems, enjoying family celebrations and sharing bereavements, and so on. More material assistance should generally be shown in blood relationships than friendships: a person should attend to a needy parent or sibling before a needy friend. Indeed, if being in a particular friendship prevents one from attending to needy parents, for example, then the friendship should be given up. On the other hand, there are various special ties that require one to give precedence to them over, say, family ties in matters pertaining to those special relationships. For instance, a person working for a company should heed her manager in preference to her parents in matters concerning her conduct as an employee.

[56] Cf. Proverbs 18:24: 'A man amiable in society, shall be more friendly than a brother.'

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In family relationships, although there is a certain natural order of preference (both subjective and objective), no family member has a significantly larger claim on one's charity than another, so if one were, say, to have more intense affection for one's parents than one's spouse it is not as though one would be acting in a seriously immoral way. But one can have excessive attachment to one relative (or friend, for that matter) over others, and here the problem is not the disparity between the intensity of that attachment and the others but the excess itself. In universal benevolence, there can be no excess in one's love for one's fellow human beings (and for God), but particular relationships need always to be moderated by a due sense of proportion. Hence the deleteriousness of modern conceptions of romantic love, where the lover puts the beloved 'on a pedestal' and 'adores' them or even 'worships' them. The images of idolatry are no accident, nor are they when one speaks of one's football hero as an 'idol' or of some celebrity as an 'icon'. The theist will say that such language and its connotations involve an unhealthy misdirection of a person's natural yearning for something of transcendent value. A secularist, if they are not true to their principles by dismissing such talk as puerile or a symptom of arrested development, might minimize it as 'harmless', just like the T-shirt worn by a woman in a recent television advert, that proclaimed: 'My religion is football; my church is Stamford Bridge'.[57] Perhaps such a secularist should have a closer look at the politics and sociology behind such apparently innocuous manifestations of pseudo-religiosity.

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7. Conclusion

That the concept of charity can be reduced to some kind of order governed by a set of principles will strike most contemporary ethicists as somewhat bizarre. Perhaps many think that in 'affairs of the heart' there is no logic, and maybe even no ethics.[58] Others might think that some order may be possible in principle but that it is difficult to see how one would go about finding it. Yet others are simply diffident about the very idea of trying to apply abstract rules to concrete situations that go beyond the artificial examples of the philosophy classroom. I do not pretend in this paper to have

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[57] Stamford Bridge is the home stadium of the famous Chelsea Football Club.
[58] Recall Susan Wolf on 'radical choice' discussed earlier.

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responded completely to all of these concerns. I have, simply, sketched an outline of the sorts of rules and the kind of thinking that ought to be applied to considerations of partiality. In the end there is, as good ethicists know, an ineliminable element of example and of practical wisdom in handling specific cases. Ethicists, I submit, should equal their theoretical concerns with a desire to develop rules of conduct that can serve as a guide to life. If moral philosophy is not for this, then one might wonder what it is for.[59]

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[59] I am grateful to my colleagues at the University of Reading for the many helpful comments received on an earlier version of this paper.