

Is Sufficiency Sufficient? Prospects for the Sufficiency Threshold

By

Melissa Hiebert

B.A., University of Manitoba, 2010

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Philosophy

© Melissa Hiebert, 2015
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part,
by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

Is Sufficiency Sufficient? Prospects for the Sufficiency Threshold

By

Melissa Hiebert

B.A., University of Manitoba, 2010

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Scott Woodcock (Department of Philosophy)

Supervisor

Dr. Colin MacLeod (Department of Philosophy)

Committee member

ABSTRACT

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Scott Woodcock (Department of Philosophy)

Supervisor

Dr. Colin MacLeod (Department of Philosophy)

Committee member

The central doctrine of sufficientarianism is that there is a certain threshold below which people are said to be objectively "badly-off," and that providing benefits to people who fall into this category has a special moral urgency. A big part of sufficientarianism's success as a theory, then, relies on the ability to define the threshold in a manner that is non-arbitrary and that justifies a large difference in moral consideration between people who are on opposite sides of the threshold. This thesis examines some attempts to define such a threshold, and eventually concludes that no such threshold is available to us. However, while sufficientarianism may not work as a theory, sufficiency thresholds remain useful due to their practical ability to give useful instruction to policy makers in order to assist in resource distribution and the promotion of social justice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Introduction	1
Chapter 1.....	7
1.1 Sufficiency and Other Theories of Justice	7
1.2 The Sufficiency Threshold: Some Initial Attempts	18
1.3 Thresholds and Capabilities	33
1.4 Basic needs and Autonomy	44
1.5 Chapter 1 Conclusion	50
Chapter 2	52
2.1 Initial Observations of Attempted Thresholds.....	52
2.2 Thresholds and Theories of Well-being.....	55
2.3 Thresholds and Intuitions.....	62
2.4 Practical Thresholds.....	68
Conclusion.....	75
Bibliography	78

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the University of Victoria philosophy department, in particular Dr. Scott Woodcock and Dr. Colin MacLeod for all of their time and help with this thesis. I would also like to thank all of my friends and family for their continued support and encouragement (especially Zain, who has stood beside me throughout).

INTRODUCTION

In 2011, just over one billion people lived on less than \$1.25 a day, which is the threshold for extreme poverty as defined by the UN. (World Bank 2015) Included among these people are 963 million people who are undernourished, 884 million people who lack safe access to drinking water, 924 million who lack adequate shelter, and 218 million child labourers. (Pogge 2011) This sort of devastating poverty causes a large amount of suffering for those who have to live every day in discomfort and struggling to survive, and because of this most believe that we have an obligation to help raise the level of well-being of these individuals.

There are different reasons one might give for having the intuition that we have a moral obligation to raise the well-being of those who are poorly off. Some have the belief that we ought to help those who are poorly off because they are worse off than others, while some maintain that we ought to help people because they are objectively badly off.

Prioritarians and egalitarians have the former intuition and maintain that we ought to help those who are poorly off because they are worse off than others — prioritarians because they believe that assisting those who are worse off is of greater moral importance (regardless of the total level of welfare of any of the parties), and egalitarians because they believe that inequality is inherently bad. Sufficientarians, on the other hand, believe that our moral motivations stem from the latter intuition — that it is morally important to help those who are badly off simply because they are badly off.

The central doctrine of sufficiency claims that there is a certain threshold below which people are said to be objectively "badly-off," and that providing benefits to people who fall into this category has a special moral urgency. Sufficiency theorists reject rival theories of justice such as prioritarianism and egalitarianism. They claim that, in principle, it is not morally significant that some people have more than others; what matters is whether or not they have *enough* (where enough is some objective standard of whatever one takes to be the appropriate metric of distributive justice (for example, well-being, social and economic goods, etc.))

These differing intuitions about moral motivations give rise to different ideas about to whom we should distribute benefits, and how much we ought to prioritize providing benefits to those who are worse off over those who are better off. The form of sufficiency theory we consider also matters — for instance, where one chooses to set the threshold has the effect of excluding and including different people whose claims to welfare we ought to prioritize.

While these three theories can be extended more generally to involve the overall level of welfare of individuals, their use is often restricted to the realm of social justice or distribution of resources. Given that a person's access to certain basic resources or rights or opportunities (or whatever metric a person decides to employ) has a significant impact on their welfare level, it makes practical sense to focus on the key things we as a society are able to do in order to help people achieve a decent level of welfare. Also, restricting

the scope to social justice rather than welfare allows for a more practical conversation as to which benefits we have a responsibility to provide, and who has the responsibility to provide them.

In more concrete terms, choosing between the aforementioned ethical theories can directly impact the outcomes of distribution of resources to those who are considered poorly off throughout the world. If we adopt sufficientarianism and use it to direct our actions with respect to the global poor, we stand to implement policies that focus on raising the well-being of the worst-off above some critical level. Along these lines, we would prefer to develop policies that are framed in terms of low-bar goals for poverty reduction instead of policies designed to minimize inequality of resources. We would also forego policies that consider the interests of the rich alongside those of the poor, even if the concerns of the rich are considered as being of proportionally lesser moral importance. For instance, the prioritarian would favour a policy that would protect the interests of the rich if it can be shown that the rich would receive a greater benefit from that particular policy after accounting for prioritarian weighting. On the other hand, the sufficientarian would always favour the policy that was best for those who are under the threshold, regardless of how much the alternative would benefit the rich. However, some versions of sufficientarianism with low thresholds also seem to favour the rich, given that they have only a minimal responsibility to assist the poor in achieving the bare minimum, and no more than that. The higher the threshold is set, the greater the responsibility to those who are above it.

Moreover, if it is found that there is some specific point at which people cross over from being poorly off to well off, this could inform attempts at implementing other social minimums, such as minimum wages or basic incomes, as well as the construction of basic human rights. For instance, if we believe that the freedom from being objectively "badly off" is a human right, and we also believe that humans need x to be considered well-off, then it follows that x is a basic human right.

This thesis will examine and evaluate the prospects for sufficientarianism as an ethical theory, with specific focus on the plausibility of defining a sufficiency threshold, which is taken as being integral to the sufficientarianism project. A precise and objective sufficiency threshold is necessary because it provides an independent philosophical defense for sufficientarianism. Without a precise enough threshold, we run the risk of having a theory that is too underspecified to provide useful guidance. This is particularly true in borderline cases, and the more general the threshold, the more borderline cases suffer from a lack of guidance. Without an objective reason for adopting a particular threshold, it is difficult to see why we ought to adopt sufficientarianism over another theory of justice that makes use of the same distributive metric. The sufficientarian will have the added difficulty of explaining why there is an asymmetry involved in the pattern of distribution (and moreover, why at that place and not another), whereas there is no such explanatory problem when employing a prioritarian continuum or simply distributing goods equally. Also, in the absence of an objective threshold, we must arrive at an independent reason for adopting sufficientarianism, relying on our intuitions in

order to justify adopting it over alternative theories such as prioritarianism or egalitarianism.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the theoretical grounding for some of the sufficiency thresholds that one commonly sees employed at the theoretical as well as at the practical level. In the first section of chapter 1, I will review some of the different versions of sufficientarianism, including the various merits and drawbacks of each. The second section of chapter 1 will be devoted to examining specific attempts that have been made to define the sufficiency threshold and some objections against them. In the third and fourth sections, I will attempt to adapt some other closely related theories of justice to fit the framework of sufficientarianism, and I will argue that they, too, fail to provide the sort of thresholds sufficientarians need to render the theory plausible. Chapter 1 will conclude that there has been no sufficiency threshold posited so far that is both principled and not underspecified. Chapter 2 will first focus on attempting more generally to find a suitable sufficiency threshold by examining possible thresholds associated with three main theories of well-being, and I will advance the argument that there is no such threshold to be found no matter which account of well-being one adopts. The second section of chapter 2 will then examine whether or not there are any other reasons one might adopt sufficientarianism despite the lack of an objective, principled threshold. Specifically, this second section will examine two important thought experiments that are supposed to motivate sufficientarianism, and I will conclude that they fail to do so. The chapter will then conclude by noting that while we do not have any reason to adopt

sufficientarianism theoretically, minimum thresholds still remain relevant to social justice due to their widespread use, practical ability to set measurable targets, and the definitive guidance they provide to policy makers and distributors of life-sustaining (or life-enhancing) resources.

CHAPTER 1

1.1 Sufficiency and Other Theories of Justice

The doctrine of sufficiency, as stated by Harry Frankfurt, stems from the idea that “...what is important from the point of view of morality is not that everyone should have the same, but that each should have enough.” (Frankfurt 1987, 21) Frankfurt claims that if everyone had enough, it would be of no moral consequence whether or not some people had more than others. Frankfurt would maintain that our reasons for helping the global poor, for example, are not because we feel as though we have a duty to provide equal living conditions for everyone, but because the poor are very badly off and we feel as though they should have access to “enough” resources to live a decent life.

Frankfurt offers his sufficientarian position in the place of egalitarianism, which he thinks fails to properly capture our intuitions for why we have a moral obligation to help those who are badly off. Whereas egalitarians can be described as believing that comparative facts have moral significance and we ought to help the worst off because they are comparatively worse off than others, sufficientarians hold the intuition that we ought to help the worst off because they are objectively badly-off. Hence, egalitarianism can be defined as follows:

"Egalitarianism: One outcome is to be prima facie preferred to another in so far as (undeserved) inequality is minimized." (Crisp 2003, 746)

There are several forms of egalitarianism. Welfare egalitarianism — egalitarian in its most basic form — is the belief that justice requires us to equalize the well-being of individuals. Because of problems associated with this view (see Gosepath 2011, 3.4), other philosophers have chosen to promote equality of resources, or more precisely equality of equal basic freedoms and rights. (For example, see Rawls 1971, Dworkin 1981) This can also be cashed out in terms of equality of capabilities — that is, equal ability to achieve certain "functionings" (what one is able to do or be). (For example, Sen 1992) Some egalitarians are pluralists about what is valuable, but all believe that there is something valuable about promoting equality, and they take this into account when deciding how benefits are to be allocated.

Besides differing in fundamental intuitions about comparative welfare versus absolute welfare, many sufficientarians also believe that egalitarians have no adequate response to the often-cited objection against egalitarianism called the "leveling down" objection. The objection points out that egalitarians would be forced to prefer a world in which everyone were equal but worse-off rather than a world in which everyone was significantly better-off but with some disparities between individuals — an outcome which is obviously undesirable.

Whether or not the "leveling down" objection proves fatal to the egalitarianism project, the problems associated with egalitarianism have led philosophers to seek out other options. Some philosophers have turned to prioritarianism, which is a view

designed to give priority to the worst-off in society. (For example, see Parfit 1997) One basic form of prioritarianism can be defined as follows:

"The weighted priority view: Benefitting people matters more the worse off those people are, the more of those people there are, and the greater the benefits in question." (Crisp 2003, 752)

The view is fairly open in terms of exactly how much more it matters to benefit the worst off. Some philosophers are still dissatisfied with this theory, and believe that the weighted priority view does not elicit desirable outcomes. Moreover, while these philosophers share the same basic intuition as prioritarians— that we ought to give some priority to helping those who are badly off — prioritarians interpret this intuition to mean that we ought to always give at least some priority to the worst-off individuals because they are worse-off than others, while sufficientarians believe that this intuition instructs us to give priority to the worst-off individuals simply because they are badly-off. The outcome of this intuition for sufficientarians is the creation of a special category of well-being — the “badly-off” category, in which different sorts of moral considerations come into play. This notion that there is some privileged level below which different moral considerations apply is the main feature of all sufficientarian views.¹ The level at

¹ At least, I am considering all views that feature some sort of threshold beyond which different moral considerations apply to be sufficientarian. Some philosophers label views that involve prioritarianism below or above the threshold to be labeled “threshold prioritarianism,” but for my purposes I am considering any view involving a threshold to be sufficientarian in light of the fact that it shares the same basic intuition that “badly-off” is an absolute and non-relative term, and that they feature a threshold below which different moral considerations apply.

which people are considered to be below the critical “badly-off” level is dubbed “the threshold of minimum sufficiency” (henceforth the “sufficiency threshold” or just the “threshold,” for short).

The sufficientarian position has been taken up by a number of philosophers (for example, see Frankfurt 1987, Crisp 2003, Benbaji 2006, Huseby 2010) who are dissatisfied with egalitarianism and prioritarianism (though many sufficientarians use aspects of these doctrines in conjunction with the sufficiency threshold in order to create “hybrid” theories). Sufficientarianism can take several forms. Some interpret the theory as being morally indifferent to everything but raising as many people as possible from under the threshold to over the threshold at the expense of all else, though this leads to some obviously undesirable consequences. (Arneson 2005, 19) For instance, interpreting sufficientarianism in this way would mean that it would be preferable to provide an incremental gain to someone just below the sufficiency threshold in order to raise them just above it, at the expense of moving someone else from just below the sufficiency threshold down to a place of excruciating hardship. In other words, if two people were in a mild amount of pain causing them to have -2 utility points and the sufficiency threshold was set at 0, on this account of sufficientarianism we ought to raise one person up 2 points even if it was at the expense of torturing the second person so that they ended up at -200 utility points. Worries about interpreting sufficientarianism this way have led others to finding alternative versions of sufficientarianism. For instance, another basic

version of sufficiency involves simply prioritizing those who are below the sufficiency threshold, otherwise known as the single-level doctrine of sufficiency:

"The single-level doctrine of sufficiency: Priority is to be given to benefits to those below the good-enough level. Below the threshold, benefitting people matters the more of those people there are, and the greater the size of the benefit in question. Above the threshold, no priority is to be given and benefitting people matters more the more of those people there are, and the greater the size of the benefit in question." (Benbaji 2005, 318)

It is easy to see that this version of sufficientarianism is subject to a similar sort of worry as was already mentioned above, in that it is indifferent to an equally sized benefit to a person who is just below the threshold, and someone who is vastly below it. To avoid worries like this, one standard, more sophisticated version of sufficientarianism essentially involves using the threshold not only as a point under which absolute priority is given, but also as a point beyond which prioritarian considerations are no longer relevant. On this view we would still give absolute moral priority to those who are below the sufficiency threshold. In addition, below the threshold we would give greater moral weight to helping people the further below the sufficiency threshold they are. Above the threshold, no such priority is given. One version of a view that incorporates prioritarian considerations below the sufficiency threshold is outlined by Roger Crisp:

"Crisp's version of the doctrine of sufficiency: Absolute priority is given to benefits to those who are badly off. Below the threshold, benefitting people matters more the worse off

those people are, and the more of those people there are, and the greater the size of the benefit in question. Above the threshold, no priority is to be given, and benefitting people matters more the more of those people there are, and the greater the size of the benefit in question." (Benbaji 2005, 319)

However, this version is fraught with its own problems — for instance, all things being equal, if we can procure a sizeable gain for an ultra-rich tycoon at the expense of a slightly-less but still sizeable gain for someone who is living barely above the threshold, then this theory tells us that we ought to offer the benefit to the tycoon. In terms of utility points, if the utility threshold was set at 100, and we either had the option of moving person A up from 5000 to 5500 or person B up from 101 to 600, Crisp's version of sufficientarianism states that we ought to choose the former option. Due to the phenomenon of the diminishing marginal utility of resources it might seem like this is an implausible situation. However, one can imagine a situation in which a lot of resources are spent on rectifying a difficult to address concern for one person, whereas the large amount of resources it would take to address that particular concern could provide an easy benefit to someone with a much higher level of welfare. Even still, granting the benefit to the person with an incredibly high level of welfare seems like it might be an undesirable outcome. As an answer to this worry, another version of sufficientarianism claims that although absolute priority is still given to those below the threshold (and weighted priority is given to the worst-off below the threshold), when two people are

above the threshold, priority is still given to the worst-off person. This version, proposed by Campbell Brown, is called threshold prioritarianism:²

Threshold prioritarianism: Absolute priority is given to benefits to those who are badly off. Below the threshold, benefitting people matters more the worse off those people are, and the more of those people there are, and the greater the size of the benefit in question. The same is true above the threshold. (Brown, 2005)

We should note here, that both Crisp's version of sufficientarianism and Threshold prioritarianism differ from the single-level doctrine of sufficiency in that they instruct that *absolute* priority should be given to those below the sufficiency threshold. One consequence of views that instruct us to give absolute priority to those below the threshold is that we ought to always give even a small but non-trivial³ benefit to someone below the sufficiency threshold at the expense of very large gains to many people above it. Depending on where the threshold is set, this might not be an issue for some sufficientarians (I will discuss the relationship between threshold level and versions of sufficientarianism below). However, it is easy to see how some philosophers would object to the notion that if two people are separated by a very small unit of well-being, but that it just so happens that one person is slightly above the sufficiency threshold and another is slightly below it, we ought to prefer the smallest non-trivial benefit to the person

² Brown calls this version "threshold prioritarianism," though I consider any view that features a sufficiency threshold to be a version of sufficientarianism for my purposes.

³ Crisp puts in a non-trivial benefit clause to protect himself from the objection that a benefit might be completely trivial. It is possible there are problems with throwing in a clause like this, because it is unclear what "non-trivial" means. However, I will honour Crisp's wording.

slightly below the line to a very large benefit to the person slightly above the line. For example, if the sufficiency threshold is set at 200 units of some sort of welfare, and person A has 201 units of welfare and person B has 180 units of welfare, a threshold prioritarian would prefer a raise of 20 units for person B at the expense of a raise in 2000 welfare points for person A. This isn't a problem if we maintain that crossing over the threshold means the difference between a very poor life and a good life, though if the disparity between the two is less stark, this might seem like an undesirable consequence. This consequence is particularly undesirable if the threshold is set on the low side and person A is still in a position where one might typically consider them to be relatively badly off, even if not critically so.

Yet another version of sufficientarianism proposed by Yitzhak Benbaji avoids the worries associated with giving absolute priority to those below the threshold by scrapping the notion of giving absolute priority to those below the threshold, but still attempts to avoid the problems of weaker versions of sufficientarianism in which the weighting is not strong enough to avoid situations where a theory instructs us to grant small benefits to a large number of people significantly above the threshold at the expense of a larger benefit to someone below the threshold. His version involves several thresholds, each with differing levels of priority:

"The multi-level doctrine of sufficiency: Benefitting people matters more, the more priority lines there are above the utility level at which these people are, the more of these people there are, and the greater the size of the benefit in question." (Benbaji 2005, 321)

The issue with creating more than one threshold seems to be that if it was difficult to argue for one privileged threshold that was both principled and morally significant, setting several might be increasingly difficult.

It is clear at this point that there are numerous ways to define sufficientarianism as a policy for resource allocation. However, though they might differ in nature, the thread that ties them all together is that they all feature some sort of threshold beyond which different moral considerations come into play. Though detractors may object to any particular sufficientarian position on grounds that it elicits the wrong outcome in some illustrative case, this sort of objection could be leveled at most any ethical theory. Despite these worries, there is a far more concerning and fundamental worry facing all forms of sufficientarianism, and that is that it presupposes the existence of a privileged threshold of sufficiency; a specific point in the continuum of human flourishing, below which people are not living a sufficiently "good" life. Benbaji suggests the worry is two-fold, noting that "The plausibility of [sufficientarianism] depends on identifying a morally privileged utility level as the good-enough level, and making a case that this level has great moral importance." (Benbaji 2005, 317)

Indeed, several detractors have picked up on this troubling aspect of sufficientarian doctrines. Richard Arneson for instance notes that the “difficulty here is how one non-arbitrarily sets the threshold level. Why here and not higher or lower?” (Arneson 2005, 56) He claims that while we have a smooth continuum of different levels of well-being, no such line could be drawn where it could be said that above that line, a person has “enough.” Paula Casal has the same worry; she believes the most pressing issue for sufficientarians is to define the sufficiency threshold “in a principled manner that provides determinate and plausible guidance for distributive decision makers,” and goes on to argue that there is no way to do so. (Casal 2007, 313) It is clear that sufficientarianism as a viable ethical theory depends on the success of a well-defined and non-arbitrary sufficiency threshold. Without one, it seems impossible for the theory to get off the ground.

The task of the sufficientarian, then, is to flesh out the notion of a sufficiency threshold in a way that renders the theory plausible. However, determining where the sufficiency threshold should be set has important implications for determining which version of sufficientarianism is the most plausible, and vice versa. For instance, consider the outcome of setting the sufficiency threshold at a fairly high level of well-being. This would elicit an intuitively plausible outcome in cases where the doctrine of sufficiency instructs us to give the smallest possible non-trivial benefit to someone very far under the threshold, at the expense of moving several people who are well above the threshold to barely above it. Similarly, the worry about preferring to give a larger benefit to someone

far above the threshold at the expense of giving a smaller benefit to someone just above the threshold also seems to elicit counter-intuitive outcomes if the sufficiency threshold is set too low.

There is an obvious connection between the location of the sufficiency threshold and the potential for a given version of sufficientarianism to successfully elicit outcomes that are aligned with our intuitions. However, the task of determining whether there is a non-arbitrary⁴ and suitably precise way of defining the sufficiency threshold seems to me to be methodologically prior to determining what sort of form the sufficiency doctrine should take. If such a threshold exists, presumably there is something that grounds it beyond merely that it serves to aid the successful outputs of various intuitive cases.

Given that the existence of the sufficiency threshold is the fundamental component of sufficientarianism and that a successful elucidation of the view relies heavily on the location of such a threshold, the onus seems to be on sufficientarians to first prove that such a threshold exists extra-theoretically.⁵ Though most of the literature on sufficientarianism revolves around getting the calculus right, a few attempts have been made to define the sufficiency threshold. In the next section, we will examine some of these attempts and determine whether they can serve as the sort of normatively useful, non-arbitrary threshold(s) we are looking for.

⁴ I'm using "non-arbitrary" and not "objective," because it is possible that the threshold could in some sense be subjective but non-arbitrary.

⁵ I will examine later the possibility that the threshold will simply be wherever our intuitions say it should be, though in keeping with the various attempts made in the literature, I will assume for now that the threshold must be defined on terms beyond our intuitions.

1.2 The Sufficiency Threshold: Some Initial Attempts

Several attempts have been made to offer a definition of the sufficiency threshold. One natural assumption might be that the threshold may simply consist of having sufficient food, water, and other life-sustaining resources to maintain basic biological functioning. Frankfurt, one of the earliest proponents of sufficientarianism, starts off with the intuition that “a person who might naturally and appropriately be said to have just barely enough [to make life “marginally tolerable”] does not, by the standard invoked in the doctrine of sufficiency, have enough at all.” (Frankfurt 1987, 31) It is clear then, that he thinks the threshold is higher than merely meeting the basic nutritional and medical requirements.

In fact, Frankfurt believes the sufficiency threshold lies much higher — he goes on to claim that the threshold lies at the point where “more money will not enable him to become significantly less unhappy” and he does not have “an active interest in getting more.” (Frankfurt 1987, 39)

It seems as though the sufficiency threshold as Frankfurt conceives of it is much too high. It is not hard to imagine (and indeed, witness) a number of middle-class North Americans who are simply never satisfied, or who will regard themselves as being satisfied when they can buy a bigger house or own more than one car — things we generally consider as being beyond the realm of counting as below some level of sufficiency.

Indeed, many people reach the point of becoming millionaires and still maintain an active interest in getting more. Frankfurt seems to believe that people will hit some point at which their active interest in getting more will stop, but it is not clear that there is such a point. On the opposite side of the threshold, Casal notes that in the case of a person who is significantly below the poverty line, he or she might not be satisfied and still lack an active interest in getting more simply because they regard the chances of improving their situation as too minimal to bother trying. (Casal 2007, 313)

Crisp, like Frankfurt, attempts to provide us with a method for filling out the sufficiency threshold. Crisp believes that “absolute priority is to be given to benefits to those below the threshold at which compassion [of the impartial spectator] enters.” (Crisp 2003, 758) In other words, Crisp believes that the sufficiency threshold is set at the point at which people are badly-off enough that other strangers feel compassion towards them. One might object that we can always feel compassion for someone else no matter how well-off they are (for example, if a very well-off person has a severe headache), but Crisp holds that within the theory that sort of compassion is dubbed “mere benevolence,” and that compassion in the theoretical sense refers only to “compassion consisting in the attachment of special weight to the interests of those who are badly off.” (Crisp 2003, 758)

Crisp tries to explain where the compassion principle “gives out”— that is, the point at which people are sufficiently well-off that strangers no longer have compassion for their situation (or, presumably, the point at which compassion gives way to “mere benevolence.”) One initial suggestion he considers is that compassion is tied to needs;

that we cease to feel compassion when someone's needs are met. Crisp however rejects this proposal: "A problem with this proposal is that, on any plausible distinction between needs and, say, desire satisfaction or other components of welfare, needs give out before compassion." (Crisp 2003, 759)⁶

Regardless of whether needs give out before compassion, Crisp's eventually formulates a description of the sufficiency threshold based on what he calls "*The Sufficiency Principle*": "Compassion for any being B is appropriate up to the point at which B has a level of welfare such that B can live a life which is sufficiently good." (Crisp 2003, 762) However, it is not immediately clear what Crisp means by "a life which is sufficiently good," especially without reference to something beyond the principle, such as basic needs of the sort he has already rejected. For Crisp, it seems as though a life is "sufficiently good," if it is, "a life that elicits no 'theoretical compassion'," which is viciously circular.

Some multi-valence versions of sufficientarianism make use of more than one morally-privileged threshold. For instance, Benbaji's version of sufficientarianism makes use of three morally-privileged thresholds, which are what he labels the "luxury threshold," the "pain threshold," and the "personhood threshold."

Benbaji's view makes use of more than one threshold, and as such employs a slightly different approach than the other views. As mentioned above, Benbaji believes that benefitting people matters more the more priority lines there are above the utility

⁶ We will grant Crisp this now, but it seems unlikely that needs give out before compassion, especially given the robust accounts of human needs that Nussbaum and others present, which will be discussed below.

level at which these people are. So for instance, if someone is below the "personhood threshold" (roughly interpreted as being able to achieve complex desires, which will be explained in more detail below), then providing benefits to him or her would be morally more urgent than benefits to someone who is below the pain threshold but above the personhood threshold. Finally, providing benefits to people above the luxury threshold are the least important, and no priority is afforded to people above this threshold.

The view is that — roughly — people who are unable to fulfill the complex desires that make us "truly human" (such as forming relationships with others, spiritual fulfillment etc.) are the worst off, and deserve the most attention. Next come those who are able to fulfill those complex desires, but are still in frequent or long-lasting pain. Lastly, are those who have an incredibly high level of welfare (how high, we will see, is an open question.) Given these general characterizations of the thresholds, Benbaji's ranking seems plausible — we can imagine that someone who is unable to fulfill any desires beyond base desires such as eating and sleeping is worse off than someone who may be in some deal of pain, but still enjoys the fulfillment of complex human desires. Of course, it is obvious that the luxury threshold ranks higher than both of these lower thresholds.

It is important to note that Benbaji does not claim that it is an absolute moral priority to provide benefits to those who are below any particular threshold, just that they are afforded more priority than anyone in the levels below their own. Exactly what the thresholds amount to is slightly unclear at this point, so in order to get a better sense of

how the thresholds are supposed to work we will examine each threshold in more detail, and determine if they have objective plausibility.

Benbaji's idea of the personhood threshold relies on the idea that, following Mill, "a human's life is better than an animal's life," and that we are human in virtue of our "higher psychological capacities." (Benbaji 2006, 339) Benbaji believes that being a person is an all-or-nothing state of affairs, there is a threshold of personhood, where "a small drop in well-being can lead to a loss of his/her moral status as a person." Benbaji argues that when one loses his or her status as a person, his or her life is no longer worth living, claiming that "...when one falls below *this* [the personhood] threshold, one's life is not worth living anymore." (Benbaji 2006, 339) Therefore, Benbaji concludes, there is a definitive line at which a small drop in well-being can lead to complete change in moral status, and hence serves as one of the important sufficiency thresholds. (Benbaji 2005, 339)

There are a lot of different points involved in Benbaji's argument for the personhood threshold, so we will attempt to go through them one at a time. The first point he makes is perhaps the least controversial; generally speaking, the notion of "personhood" usually relies on some reference to "higher capacities" (for instance, David DeGrazia claims that some of the qualities a being must have to a "high enough" degree in order to be considered a person are "autonomy, rationality, self-awareness, linguistic competence, sociability, moral agency, and intentionality in action"). (DeGrazia 2007, 320) Though Benbaji does not spell out in a lot of detail exactly what he means when he

makes reference to “person-making” capacities, he does mention that one aspect is “our capacity to generate complex desires.” (Benbaji 2005, 339) In light of this notion of personhood, it seems plausible that we could imagine that life might be at least hindered if we lost several of those capacities listed above (for instance, if someone gets into a serious car accident and becomes a vegetable). To be clear, Benbaji doesn’t think that not having these qualities at all makes a life not worth living, but it is rather the *loss* of them that makes life not worth living. There are strong reasons for disagreeing with this premise, particularly on grounds that it seems to imply that those who have developed severe mental disabilities don’t have lives worth living. This suggestion seems critically problematic.

Even if we conceded that one’s life would be at least significantly hindered (but still worth living) if he or she lost her higher faculties, and hence could potentially provide some rationale for setting the threshold at this point, the argument still breaks down. It indeed may be the case that a being’s personhood (or loss thereof) does affect her well-being, though it is incredibly difficult to see how a person’s well-being affects her personhood in the ways described above. I cannot imagine a case in which someone’s status of well-being is so low that it robs them of their status as a person, in terms of being rational, linguistically-competent, self-aware, or able to form complex desires. Indeed, even the poorest person is obviously still capable of having “complex”⁷ desires like love or spiritual insight. In this sense, it is not entirely clear just exactly what situation

⁷ I’m assuming he means desires over and above base physical desires like the desire for food, warmth and sexual gratification etc.. We will leave aside the problem for now that “complex desire” is a fairly ambiguous term.

Benbaji has in mind when he claims that a decrease in well-being would lead to a decrease in personhood.

Perhaps a more charitable interpretation of Benbaji's argument relates to the fulfillment of (or at least having the capability to fulfill) complex desires, and not just the ability to have complex desires in the first place. On this interpretation, it is not the ability to have complex desires that leads to our personhood, but rather the fulfillment of these desires. Following these lines, if a being is only able to fulfill his base "animal" desires, such as obtaining food or water (or, often, not even those), then that being has lost its "personhood." (Perhaps this is a misnomer by Benbaji—on the desire-fulfillment interpretation of his argument, it might be more accurate not to claim that a being has lost its "personhood," but that he has lost his ability to live a "fully human" life. In other words, he no longer has a life worth living.)

Even this interpretation of Benbaji's argument doesn't seem to lead to the "personhood" threshold as he conceives of it. There are several complex human desires that are capable of being fulfilled even in populations faced with extreme material hardships — even the poorest populations can still have complex desires filled, for instance the desire for love, acceptance into a community, spiritual fulfillment, respect, etc.. Perhaps there are other complicated desires that are out of reach of being fulfilled (perhaps the desire to go to school or learn to communicate in written form), though presumably it is not important that *all* complicated desires are fulfilled (this standard would be incredibly high), just that *some* desires are capable of being fulfilled. It is hard

to imagine a case where someone is in a place where they have no hope of any complex desires being fulfilled.

Moreover, this interpretation of the view would seem to lend moral status to the fulfillment of complex desires that we would deem to have no moral worth, or even negative moral worth (for example, the desire to murder out of jealousy). One way to save the view here might be to claim that there are certain kinds of complex desires that are of moral worth, and that the lack of fulfillment of those desires leads to a loss of personhood (or, as rephrased above, the loss of ability to lead a “fully-human” life). We will examine some attempts to fill out what sorts of desires might count as moral worth for the leading of a “fully human” life (or rather capabilities for the fulfillment of certain desires) later, though in Benbaji’s argument, he makes no reference to the idea that there are certain complex desires that are of specific moral worth.

For either interpretation, it is unclear whether either personhood or leading a fully-human life are indeed “all or nothing” states of affairs. The former case is perhaps slightly less controversial, though DeGrazia argues that some animals “are not so well endowed with [personhood-relevant] traits that they clearly qualify as persons,” but that their “psychological characteristics” makes them ‘borderline persons,’ who “have full, or near-full moral status.” (DeGrazia 2007, 321) In this sense, it is not clear that there is a definitive line where one might say that a person either has personhood or they do not have personhood — it is, perhaps, still a matter of degree. In the case of the latter interpretation, what counts as a “fully-human” life seems as though it might be a matter

of degree and not an all-or-nothing state of affairs. If there are certain complex desires, the fulfillment (or capability of fulfillment) of which are of moral worth, then in cases of hardship some of those desires might be fulfilled, and others not, to varying degrees. It doesn't seem to make sense to say that if all but one complex desire is being fulfilled, then that life falls below what it means to have a "human" life, and is therefore not worth living — this, too, seems a matter of degree, and not the absolute threshold Benbaji imagines it to be.

As we have seen, the argument that Benbaji puts forward doesn't support the existence of a "personhood threshold," especially given that the idea of "a fully human life" doesn't add anything above and beyond what an account of, say, basic human capabilities would do. However, this is just one of the three thresholds he claims have special moral significance, the other two being the "pain threshold" and the "luxury threshold." Benbaji doesn't take a lot of time going into detail about either of these thresholds, and takes their import to be more or less self-evident. He does remark, though, that the "pain/pleasure distinction is qualitative and morally significant," and hence we can assume that he feels there is a very real and hard line that separates pleasure and pain; there is a distinct line demarcating the absence of pleasure and the beginning of pain, not just a continuum of various states of being. This may be accurate: "Recent results from the neurosciences demonstrate that pleasure and pain are not two symmetrical poles of a single scale of experience but in fact two different types of experiences altogether, with dramatically different contributions to well-being." If this is

true, we can indeed imagine it serving as a line at which a drop in welfare takes one from merely the absence of pleasure state to the presence of pain state, thereby having a significant effect on the moral status of the priority afforded them.

Benbaji points out that if we measure one's well-being at a specific moment in time, a painful experience is negative to the one who is experiencing it. Hence, on a sufficientarian account that uses pain as a threshold, absolute priority is given to those who are experiencing pain. For instance, the sufficientarian in this case would prefer to provide a pill to relieve a person from a minor pain, even if giving the same pill to someone else would cause them a large amount of pleasure. However, the situation becomes more complicated when we take into account the entirety of people's lives, as pains experienced over a life must be weighed and considered according to amount and intensity of pain. Benbaji does not go into detail on this, but does mention that:

"...facts about momentary welfare value form the basis for judgments about how good are the lives that are constituted by these moments. We understand notions of living a poor life or being needy, for example, as being conceptually related to the notions of suffering, pain, frustration, etc. Hence, if sufficientarian discontinuity is true with regard to pain, it would naturally be extended to the priority assigned to benefitting the poor and the needy." (Benbaji 2006, 342)

Benbaji believes that — generally — people who live below the poverty line will lead lives filled with pain as a result of a lack of material resources, and hence the pain threshold will favour benefits to people who are living in poverty.

However, just because there is a qualitative difference between pleasure and pain that would serve as a reason to reject the idea that there is only a quantitative difference in matters of well-being this does not mean that the pleasure/pain threshold is sufficient to serve as the sufficiency threshold. For one, it is unclear as to what counts as a pain, besides the obvious sorts of physical pain. The sufficiency threshold would plausibly extend to other sorts of pains, such as lack of personal freedoms or constant fear of coming to bodily harm. Even if one attempted to extend the notion of pain to encompass “all physical and mental discomfort,” this also seems too general — for instance, a rich person could claim to be miserable and in mental pain for years because he could not buy the yacht he wanted to, though I doubt we would feel an obligation to provide him with such. Moreover, it seems that we value things other than just pleasure or pain. As is the problem with most strictly hedonistic views of welfare, it is possible that the easiest and most cost-effective way to ensure pleasure for the greatest number of people is to inject them all with morphine, but this doesn't seem like a desirable solution to global injustice.

Lastly, Benbaji's “luxury threshold,” is much too narrow to serve (at least on its own) as a plausible sufficiency threshold. The threshold has a basis in Crisp's thought experiment, which asks us to imagine a super rich person and a super ultra rich person. Crisp reasons that even though the super rich person is slightly worse off than the ultra rich person, it would not make sense to prefer to forego a slightly larger benefit to the ultra rich person in order to give a lesser benefit to the merely super rich person. (Crisp 2003, 755) The intuition is supposed to be that at this level of well-being, we do not (nor

do we have reason to) prioritize the super rich person over the ultra rich person; it is supposed to demonstrate that there is a point at which prioritarian considerations no longer apply. However, one might reasonably ask, “At what point does one move from being well-off, to the point of living in luxury?” It seems that no non-arbitrary answer is readily available.

One final attempt at fleshing out the threshold comes from Robert Huesby, who also proposes a multi-level version of sufficiency. His version involves two threshold levels—a minimal threshold and a maximal threshold. The minimal threshold level is slightly vague, but he claims that it involves things such as food, clothing, and shelter. He doesn’t go into detail so much as to spell out exactly what is required for minimum sufficiency, but claims that “it is uncontroversial that means to subsistence is a necessary part of sufficiency.” (Huseby 2010, 180) It is possible that this intuition is accurate, though it does not point to a specific threshold of sufficiency rather than merely a continuum. It may seem obvious that we need food, clothing and shelter, but how “much” do we need of these things? Even in terms of food and water, the term "sustenance" is unclear — is it enough for sustenance to have the bare minimum in order to stay alive, or enough to biologically function at full capacity? Also, it seems that though we consider means to sustenance to be important, we also generally consider things like personal safety and freedom from slavery to be important minimum conditions as well. Huesby’s view makes no mention of these non-material basic minimums. It is indeed plausible that things such as adequate food and shelter are things we would want to include when attempting to

construct a minimum threshold. However, the threshold as Huesby outlines it is critically underspecified.

Huesby — along similar lines to Frankfurt — claims that the maximal threshold is relative to an individual's personal situation; he holds that “a sufficient level of welfare is a level at which a person is content.” (Huseby 2010, 178) “Contentment” as used in the formulation of this threshold is not dependent on the “absence of desire to further one's lot, but rather satisfaction with the overall quality of one's life.” (Huseby 2010, 181)

The maximal threshold as expressed above seems as though it might be vulnerable to the objection that one might require a large amount of resources in order to be content (he cites an imaginary case in which someone requires plover's eggs and an antique clarinet in order to be content). Intuitively, we don't seem to have any special obligation to provide such luxury items. In light of this potential objection, Huesby revises the maximal threshold, claiming that “people are sufficiently well off if their welfare level gives them a *reasonable chance of being content*,” and that it “doesn't demand that all people should actually be content. It only requires that most people would have been.” (Huseby 2010, 182)

Though it makes sense that we might want to avoid cases like the plover's egg case, we could easily imagine cases in which someone does need more resources in order to be content, and we intuitively believe that we have an obligation to provide them for him or her. Consider the case of someone with epidermolysis bullosa, a disease that causes the skin to break open at the slightest touch or scratch. Imagine that this person can only be

content in their bed if they have the finest, most expensive silk sheets ever made. Most people would be content if they had regular cotton sheets on their bed, and hence giving someone the resources to buy cheap cotton sheets gives them a "reasonable chance of being content." Hence, if we follow Huseby's reasoning, since "most people would have been" content with the cotton sheets, we have no obligation to provide the incredibly expensive silk sheets to the person suffering from the skin illness. However, this conclusion seems counterintuitive, as we could imagine most people would still reasonably think we have an obligation to provide the person with silk sheets.

So while Huesby's principle does rule out the case of the Plover's eggs, it seems as though it goes too far in assuming that there are no cases where we are obligated to provide more resources to someone over and above the resources that it would take to give the average person a "reasonable" chance of being content. Huesby might attempt to block this move by suggesting that what we mean by "reasonable" means something more akin to "reasonable given someone in his position," (namely, reasonable for someone who is ill or disabled), though it is difficult to see why we ought to apply this definition in the skin disease situation and not the plover egg situation.⁸

Also, though Huesby's second formulation of the maximal threshold seems like it might avoid the worry that plagued Frankfurt's theory — that people are often not content — it is not clear that it does. If it were the case that, in general, most people were content with a certain amount of resources, then it might seem plausible to set the

⁸ Thanks to Dr. Scott Woodcock for this point

threshold at the average level of welfare people seem to be content with. However, it is at least questionable whether many or most people are particularly content with any level of welfare, nor is it clear to what degree they must be satisfied with their life in order for it to count as being content (70% satisfied? 100% satisfied?).

Also, this formulation counts people who are content with their choice to live a relatively minimalistic life as being under the threshold, when it is not clear that this is the case. They could be perfectly content with their lives, though Huesby would consider them poorly off because they have less recourses than what would normally leave someone content. Huesby could potentially respond to this objection by claiming that the stipulation only applies to people who are content with less and not more, though it is not clear why we should count the attitudes of people who are content with less while discounting the attitudes of people who are discontent with more.

As we have seen, none of the above attempts to flesh out the threshold have been able to do so in the substantial, non-arbitrary way that sufficientarians need in order to render the theory plausible. Indeed, the relative lack of time spent on attempting to specifically define the threshold in the literature speaks to the difficulty of such a task. While we have already examined specific attempts to define the sufficiency threshold, there have been other attempts at defining various basic minimums (in terms of rights or capabilities), that while technically separate from sufficientarianism as a doctrine, could serve as the sort of threshold that sufficientarians need to render the theory plausible. In

the next section, we will examine some of these theories, and judge whether they could potentially stand in as the sufficiency threshold.

1.3 Thresholds and Capabilities

One problem with many of the threshold accounts above is that they generally only take into account material benefits when measuring well-being. Another, more robust approach is to consider what in addition to material well-being should be included in determining a sufficiency threshold — that is, to consider what humans need in order to be “sufficiently well off.” Though the concept of basic human needs (or alternatively, basic capabilities) is not usually used as a method of setting a sufficiency threshold, examining the capability approach (and other discussions about basic needs) can help to evaluate the possibility of a sufficiency threshold. It is possible that a suitably precise, non-arbitrary account of basic human needs could lend itself to a suitably precise, non-arbitrary account of a sufficiency threshold.

It is important here to distinguish between the concepts such as “quality of life” or “basic needs,” and what Martha Nussbaum and others have labeled “basic capabilities.” The formulation of the concept “basic capability” was a reaction to the fact that terms like “quality of life” or “basic human needs” (and the satisfaction of those needs) require us to defend a particular conception of what counts as a high standard of living— a conception that could be challenged based on varying individual, philosophical, religious or cultural

views as to what counts as a good life. Basic capabilities, on the other hand, focus on “what people are actually able to do and to be.”(Nussbaum 1999a, 228) What people are able to do and be (everything from "being healthy" to "voting") are called "functionings," and capabilities are the real opportunity to achieve these functionings. The "real" opportunity to do or be something means the things that one is actually able to do and be, given the limitations one faces on a personal or societal level. For instance, if I am physically able to work but there are no opportunities for employment, then I lack the capability to work. A basic capability, then, is “the ability to satisfy certain elementary and crucially important functionings up to certain levels” (Sen 1992, 45)

Phrasing well-being in terms of capabilities means that in order to be considered well-off, a person doesn't necessarily need X (where X is some material or immaterial good), rather, he or she needs the capability to have X (to a sufficient degree). The primary goal of this move is that it is supposed to avoid charges of imposing Western values on other cultures, or claiming that any one individual person must have X or else he cannot be considered well-off, no matter how he or she feels.

We can see how a notion of basic capabilities could lend itself to setting a sufficiency threshold. For one, shifting the focus away from how much one has to what he or she is able to do avoids the charge that sufficiency thresholds are too narrow, in the sense that they only deal with levels of material wealth. It also avoids the problems associated with views that rely on an individual's level of contentment in order to be considered above the sufficiency threshold on the capabilities account, it doesn't matter

whether someone is actually content or not with their level of well-being, but rather whether or not she has the capacity for certain human functionings (the enumeration of these functionings is open to discussion, as we will see later on).

Nussbaum is one proponent of basic capabilities who— if not explicitly a sufficientarian—is certainly sympathetic to the notion. She claims that “moving all citizens above a basic threshold...should be taken as a central goal.”⁹(Nussbaum 1999b,

43) Nussbaum lists several items which she believes are basic capabilities, as follows:

- 1) Life (of normal length)
- 2) Bodily health (adequate nourishment, shelter)
- 3) Bodily integrity
- 4) Senses, imagination and thought
- 5) Emotions
- 6) Practical reason
- 7) Affiliation
- 8) Ability to live in a relationship with nature
- 9) Play
- 10) Control over one's environment.

⁹ To be clear, Nussbaum's capability approach differs from sufficientarianism in some crucial ways, for instance she believes that it is unjust to sacrifice one person's capabilities in order to grant them to several others. (Nussbaum, *Frontiers of justice*, p.342) I will not discuss the other features of Nussbaum's approach here, other than attempting to use her list as a method for fleshing out the sufficiency threshold.

Nussbaum believes that the above capabilities are necessary for well-being because they come from “global overlapping consensus” — in other words, they are values found in every cultural tradition. She thinks this list of capabilities represents ‘A life worthy of human dignity...a life that leads to truly human functioning.’ (Nussbaum 1999a, 234) In terms of the sufficiency threshold, it could be possible to adopt this list and claim that the sufficiency threshold is the point at which someone has the above capabilities to a sufficient degree.

Leaving aside for the moment debate over whether or not the list represents the necessary and sufficient conditions for well-being, one problem that is immediately apparent is the fact that it is unclear to what degree we must have these capabilities in order for us to qualify as having them to a “sufficient” degree. It seems that maximal realization of these capabilities is much beyond what we would consider someone to need in order for her to be considered merely sufficiently well-off rather than perfectly well-off (for instance, we certainly don’t think we need to be able to enjoy recreational activities all of the time to live a merely “sufficient” life). It could be the case that the sufficiency threshold doesn’t need to be a minimum threshold, but rather something like the luxury threshold Benbaji proposes mentioned above. However, as we have discussed earlier on, setting the threshold to the point of luxury (or near enough) elicits some absurd calculus, especially in the absence of lower accompanying thresholds. It is possible to use the capabilities as a maximal threshold, though it seems like we would then need some sort of minimal threshold to avoid worries about preferring large gains to the seriously well-off

(but not quite over the threshold) to smaller but substantial gains to people who are very poorly off. Moreover, I do not believe Nussbaum herself intended this list of capabilities to represent a “perfect” life, but merely a life of minimum quality.

If we are to assume that there is some level of attainment of each of these items that truly represents a plausible basic minimum and not “the good life,” then we need to find some non-arbitrary way of defining what it means to have these capabilities to a “sufficient degree.” Leaving aside the question of how to set that level for the moment, even obtaining a minimum level of these capabilities might be too high to be considered a minimum threshold. For instance, when examining the list, it seems some of the elements of this list might not be equal in terms of their importance. If this is true, and we ought to focus more heavily on some capabilities than others, then the theory seems to suggest more of a multi-threshold approach rather than a single basic minimum. For instance, while owning property (which she includes as an important element of “having control over one's environment”) might be considered a good capability to have, it hardly seems on the same level of importance as having enough food to eat. (Nussbaum, 1999)

Practically, if we had to choose between owning property and having enough food not to starve, most people would likely choose to have the food. However, Nussbaum takes the items on this list to be non-fungible and to be taken as a cohesive group of capabilities, and not items to be “traded off” amongst each other. In this sense, on most any version of sufficientarianism, if one person lacked two capabilities, say, the ability to “live in a relationship with nature” (say they lived in a large urban centre with no opportunity to

seek out interaction with nature) and “Control over one's environment” (they are unable to purchase property), but another person had all of the other capacities and yet lacked access to adequate nourishment, the capability theorist would prefer to grant the first person the small amount of money needed to be able to own property, at the expense of providing adequate nourishment to the second. This seems like an undesirable conclusion, and hence it seems that some items on the list represent things that we would not consider to be essential to a single basic minimum. So while Nussbaum's list does seem to have some helpful import in regards to things that we generally consider to be valuable, it is not clear that the list as a cohesive whole can be used to serve as the sufficiency threshold that sufficientarians are looking for.¹⁰

Another theory of justice that makes use of a capability approach comes from Elizabeth Anderson. Her conception of "Democratic equality" is a reaction to Luck Egalitarianism (the view that no person should be worse off than another person due to "bad luck," that is, for reasons that are no fault of their own), which she believes focuses too much on the inequality of distribution of goods, and does not pay enough attention to the more important inequality inherent in society in the form of relations between "superior" and "inferior" persons. (Anderson 199, 312) She does note that certain patterns of the distribution of goods is instrumental in insuring the capabilities mentioned above,

¹⁰ It is not the case that there is no way to make use of Nussbaum's list – there might be a way to break it up so that some elements represent one threshold, and others a different threshold. But for now we will go with Nussbaum's interpretation that they all must be taken together as a cohesive whole.

but that she is more concerned with "the relationships within which goods are distributed, not only with the distribution of goods themselves." (Anderson 1999, 314)

Anderson instead focuses on an approach that is more similar to Nussbaum's capability approach, though Anderson's fundamental capabilities are much more limited in scope. Anderson claims that "surely there are limits to which capabilities citizens are obligated to provide one another," and maintains that democratic equality does not support the sort of comprehensive equality that she seems to think other capability approaches aim for. (Anderson 1999, 316-7) For Anderson, the only capabilities that are of moral importance are:

- 1) The capabilities necessary to enable them to avoid or escape entanglement in oppressive social relationships
- 2) The capabilities necessary for functioning as an equal citizen in a democratic state (Anderson 1999, 316)

A more comprehensive definition of her view is summed up by Arneson:

"The democratic equality ideal requires that all members of society should have a fundamental equal status, constituted by the real freedom possessed by all over the entire course of their lives to function as humans, to participate in civil society, and to participate in democratic political decision making. In other words, all persons are equally guaranteed the capacity to achieve a threshold acceptable level in these three domains, the generic human, the sphere of association, and the political." (Arneson 2000b,12)

Anderson notes that simply obtaining the equal ability to vote is not enough to qualify as having democratic equality. In addition to rights surrounding political participation (such as the right to free speech, participation in the democratic process, etc.) Anderson believes that the capability to things ensuring continued biological existence are necessary in order to be able to function as a citizen in a society (the "generic human" domain), as well as things like access to "the basic conditions of human agency" (i.e. knowledge of one's circumstances and options, etc.). She also believes that freedom of association, such as access to public goods, the social conditions of being accepted by others, and the freedom of being able to appear in public without shame are also important features of democratic equality. (Anderson 1999, 318)

Though Anderson sees her view as egalitarian in nature, we could instead characterize it as a sufficientarian approach to justice. Anderson seems to take it as the central goal of justice to raise people up to the level where they have the capabilities necessary for functioning as a citizen in a democratic society, and is indifferent to the further benefits one obtains once they reach that particular level of functioning. This seems to clearly pick out a morally privileged threshold.

Anderson's smaller, more focused list of capabilities does have some advantages over the broader list of capabilities that Nussbaum offers, relative to its plausibility as an objective sufficiency threshold. For one, having a much more narrow list of capabilities limits the possibility that some capabilities are more important than others, which prevents confusion regarding the ability to trade off certain items or question whether or

not a certain item is integral to the notion of sufficiency. Secondly, while Nussbaum's capabilities seemed to lead us to the problematic question of how much of a certain capability we required in order to be raised above the level of sufficiency, Anderson seems to be able to give us a clear answer: however much is required for functioning as an equal citizen in a democratic state.

Though it is difficult to pin down exactly what Anderson's threshold requires us to provide in real terms (this will be discussed in greater detail below), on some interpretations the threshold appears to be set quite high. For instance, one might argue that in order to fully participate in the democratic process, one must have sufficient access to things such as education, employment, and enough free time to engage with important political issues and options. If we take these things to be necessary for sufficiency, we could imagine that a single parent that works full time at minimum wage may still be considered under the threshold, because they lack the time to properly engage with political issues. Even still, the parent seems to enjoy a relatively decent life as compared to someone who is living in abject poverty. However, this interpretation of the threshold maintains that providing benefits to either is of equal importance. It seems unacceptable that endowing the person just under the threshold with the ability to engage politically is on par with providing food and water to the person in abject poverty.

In order to avoid this worry, Anderson could employ a sort of prioritarian weighting under the threshold, along the lines of some of the other sufficientarian proposals we have examined. However, it might also be unacceptable that we would

ignore providing benefits to a person who is just above the threshold, at the expense of someone who is just below the threshold. Along the lines of the above case, imagine two single parents who are both working at minimum wage jobs just above the poverty line, but one of those parents is able to free up their Saturday afternoon by getting their sibling to watch their child for a few hours. This extra free time is just enough that they are able to read up on the latest political news in order to stay informed (if they so wished).

Anderson's threshold would support granting the small benefit to the person without free Saturday afternoons, at the expense of raising up the person with the few hours of extra time to a much higher level of well-being. This is perhaps an unacceptable conclusion. As Arneson points out, "Democratic equality holds that once someone is above the basic capability threshold, justice is unconcerned with whether or not his life goes better or worse. Why not?" (Arneson 1999b, 12)

Moreover, the answer Anderson could provide as to "how much" we need of something seems straightforward, but becomes more elusive once we examine exactly what that entails. For instance, Anderson does illustrate some things that she takes as being integral to functioning as an equal citizen in a democratic state, such as equal political participation, free speech, being free from public shame, etc.. However, it is unclear in real terms how much we require of some of these items. If we are to require education in order to participate in the democratic process, is it sufficient enough that we only have a basic knowledge of the political process, or is it required that we have a thorough background in political policy, as well as education in how to engage with and

deliberate over political matters? Even the capability to appear in public without shame is not precisely delineated — is it enough that one is accepted by a critical mass of people, or is it necessary to be accepted by all people? It is also unclear what sorts of things a person should not be shamed for — for instance, a person who committed a heinous and vicious crime may not be able to appear in public without being ostracised by others, though this seems not to be a failure of justice.

Moreover, the threshold itself is elusive in terms of the real things that justice requires us to provide. Consider the following example. It is the case that in our current western society, everyone legally has the ability to participate in political life equally, but some people are able to have a greater influence than others. For instance, wealthy people have the opportunity to lobby governments, fund campaigns, and control the media to their own advantage, whereas the average person does not have these sorts of opportunities. Presumably, in this case Anderson would not propose to provide everyone with enough money to buy out their own newsgroup (nor would that be possible), so the alternative one would have to adopt is to decrease the influence the wealthy have on the outcomes of elections and political policy so that everyone has the same influence.

The problem with this approach is that it effectively erases the sufficiency threshold for any particular capability. There is no place — in real terms — where someone can be said to have enough of something. For instance, no one ever has "enough" of a capability to participate in political life, merely more or less relative to other people. In this case, the issue isn't that some people have too little of a capability, it

is that other people have too much. Besides going against the fundamental principle of sufficientarianism (that providing benefits to people matters because they are objectively poorly off), there is not always an impetus to provide benefits to those who are worst off — often, justice requires simply taking away benefits from those who are better off. For this reason, it is more difficult than it seems to adapt an egalitarian view to fit into the mould of sufficientarianism.

1.4 Basic needs and personal autonomy

Nussbaum is not the only philosopher to employ a concept of basic human needs in order to inform moral actions, nor does the concept of basic needs necessarily lead to adopting a capability approach. The concept of basic human needs is evoked by many philosophers in order to determine a basic minimum, though the outcomes differ substantially. For instance, David Copp uses the concept of basic human needs as a starting point, though he ends up taking a different line of reasoning. Copp first distinguishes these basic needs from the things required to meet them (for instance, distinguishing “mobility” from the different things that different people would need to obtain that basic need.) Similar to capabilities, Copp’s approach to the basic minimum involves enabling people to meet certain basic human needs (for instance, by creating institutions to help people meet those needs), rather than providing each person with specific goods or services.

However, Copp's definition of basic human needs differs from Nussbaum's enumeration of basic capabilities. He claims that our basic needs are the things we need to keep us away from harm (or probability of harm). This may seem similar to "pain," though there is a significant distinction between harm and pain. In order for this conception to work, we need a definition as to what counts as "harm." He reasons that one's life would be "blighted" if he or she is unable to choose "...how to live her life and to implement her choice, if she is not able to form her own values and evaluate her life in relation to them and to choose a life and to live a life that suits them." (Copp 1998, 125)

Copp believes that autonomy and rationality are the central features of being able to live a life that one chooses, and hence he claims that harm consists of "being deprived of the things that are indispensable to one's acquiring and preserving over one's life the status of autonomous rational agent," given "the laws of nature, unalterable and invariable environmental facts, or facts about human constitution." (Copp 1998, 125)

So, if we were to take Copp's version of the basic minimum and use it to set a sufficiency threshold, the resulting theory would instruct us to give absolute priority to helping those who are unable to live a life that is in accordance with their own values. This includes giving absolute priority to those who lack the things that are "indispensable" to "acquiring and preserving...the status of autonomous rational agent," so that they are able to form their own values and evaluate their lives in relation to those values. (Copp 1998, 125)

Copp is not the only one whose conception of a basic minimum involves maintaining some sort of autonomy. For instance, Dale Dorsey claims that the best life for a human being is for him or her to be able to live what he calls a “proto-autonomous” life — that is, being able to choose to live one’s life in a desired way from a range of available options. (Dorsey 2008, 438) Hence, Dorsey thinks that the basic minimum is possession of minimal autonomy, which has two requirements. The first of these requirements is that:

(1) The life one actually leads should conform to one’s conception of the good; an agent should be, at least to some extent, proto-autonomous.

To clarify (1), it is not necessary for one to live any sort of life they choose — all that matters is that they obtain a minimum amount of what they consider “the good life.” For instance, Dorsey notes that if someone wanted to be a revered painter but only ends up being able to work as a “thankless middle school art teacher,” this could pass the test — one need not be able to live the life one most values living or is in maximal agreement with one’s conception of the good life. According to Dorsey, one’s life need not even include most aspects of an agent’s conception of the good — he claims that “it is enough that the life the agent chooses reflects the agent’s conception of the good by containing at least some global project or activity that forms part of a life the agent values living.” (Dorsey 2008, 439)

However, minimal proto-autonomy is not good enough to arrive at the basic minimum, which requires genuine autonomy and not just proto-autonomy. In order to obtain genuine minimal autonomy, one must meet the second requirement:

2) One must avoid having the global activities of one's life dictated or handed down; basic minimum must be open to the agent from some range of global options.

This second component of Dorsey's basic minimum is included in order to block various objections, for instance having the autonomy to choose between several equally awful circumstances. This is a point that Copp also touches on above, when he claims that a person is "harmed" if she is not able to choose her own values.

Hence, if we are to adopt Dorsey's theory of the basic minimum and use it to construct a sufficiency threshold, the resulting theory would instruct us to grant absolute priority to providing benefits to those who are unable to live a life that is (to some degree) in accordance with their own conception of the good. This includes providing benefits to those who do not have some range of global options amongst from which to choose.

Initially, it seems that Copp's and Dorsey's theory of a basic minimum might not address circumstances in which one can still obtain some conception of the good life while still living a life we would generally consider unacceptable (for instance, having a loving family while living in devastating poverty, or living as a slave). However, both address this worry by noting that devastating poverty limits one's choices. Dorsey claims

that “When one’s deliberations are taken up with acquiring the next meal...this is incompatible with minimal autonomy — one’s life is, in essence, dictated by the moment-to-moment pursuit of this basic necessity.” (Dorsey 2008, 439) Echoing this sentiment, Copp claims that “it is a commonplace that people who lack the basic necessities of life have limited options,” and hence cannot act autonomously. (Copp 1998, 126) With these statements, it is clear that both Dorsey and Copp believe that basic physical necessities must be met in addition to obtaining the deeper elements of what we consider “the good life.”

Nevertheless, Dorsey acknowledges the point that on his account, someone might be able to obtain his level of basic minimum even if she lives a life that seems unacceptable by our accounts, such as living the life of a slave. He asks us to consider a case in which a slave "Sarah" is still able to maintain a loving relationship with another slave throughout her life, and that she values this relationship. Dorsey bites this bullet, and claims that though we might view Sarah as someone who is living below the basic minimum due to the fact that she is a slave, this is not the case. He maintains that as long as she is able to obtain some element of her own valued projects, that she could count as having achieved the basic minimum. (Dorsey 2012, 69)

Though the initial worry was that maximal autonomy would be much too high to be considered a basic minimum, Dorsey responds to concerns that his minimum might represent too low of a threshold. He mentions that while we might have moral obligations to provide more than mere minimal autonomy (such as the items that

Nussbaum lists), these obligations are not necessary to a minimum threshold. Hence, we might have independent reasons to free Sarah from slavery that have nothing to do with the basic minimum. He notes (as we have discussed above), that having a lower threshold tends to favour those who are below the threshold (for instance, by requiring those far above it to be reduced to nearly above it, in order to provide smaller gains for those below the threshold). He thinks this, in some cases, might violate our intuitions, but notes that “if a view of the basic minimum must violate intuition, it seems that it ought to violate intuition in favour of the worst off.”¹¹ (Dorsey 2008, 441)

One issue with Copp and Dorsey’s account is that being able to obtain one’s conception of the good life might not specifically (or at least wholly) involve resource distribution, and failing to obtain certain things does not seem to be a failure of justice. (For instance, if all I want out of life is to marry and I am unable to do so despite having the legal ability to do so, this trouble seems outside the realm of morality, and not a failure of justice.) In order to avoid this sort of concern, it might make sense for Dorsey to include a clause about having the capability to obtain some aspect of the good life, rather than actually obtaining it, along the lines of Nussbaum.

What might be the most concerning worry for Dorsey and Copp is the same as the one that plagued Nussbaum’s approach — that is, with regards to the extent to which their criteria of autonomy needs to be fulfilled. In Dorsey’s case, we would need to

¹¹ Dorsey is open, however, to the idea that the basic minimum may not be the first priority of justice, but merely an important one. He is agnostic on the question of the specifics of how much priority ought to be afforded to those below the threshold. (Dorsey 2008, 442)

determine an account of how many options we must have available in order to be considered “autonomous” instead of merely “proto-autonomous,” and to what extent must we achieve our conception of the “good life” in order for it to “count.” If my conception of the good life consists of becoming a revered artist, is it sufficient enough for me to have time to doodle on a napkin on my daily coffee break? It is unclear, given Dorsey’s account. Moreover, Copp and Dorsey both claim that there are things that are indispensable to maintaining the status of autonomous rational agent. Dorsey and Copp both mention things such as food, water, healthcare and sanitation, and physical and psychological integrity. (Copp, 1998, 126) In addition, Copp suggests that things such as self-respect, self-esteem, companionship, social acceptance and recognition are necessary for maintaining the status of rational and autonomous agent. (Copp 1998, 126) However, neither goes into detail about how much of these things we need in order for an individual to maintain her autonomy, nor do they offer in any detail a list of things that are needed in order to preserve autonomy over the course of an individual’s life. One of the earliest worries of sufficientarianism, if we recall, was that the sufficiency threshold tends to often be vastly underspecified. It seems that Copp and Dorsey’s attempt to define the sufficiency threshold as pertaining to one’s ability to obtain and preserve autonomy falls victim to similar worries.

1.5 Chapter 1 Conclusion

Though examining different accounts of basic needs has given us some further insight on how one might flesh out the sufficiency threshold, there is no particular account that directly lends itself to serving as an adequately specified and non-arbitrary threshold that would render sufficientarianism plausible. As such, it seems there is no readily available definition of the sufficiency threshold. In chapter 2, we will examine some general approaches one might take to define the sufficiency threshold based on three theories of well-being. After concluding that there is no particular threshold implicit in any theory of well-being, we will then examine whether we ought to accept sufficientarian on other grounds, including whether or not it produces outcomes that are more in line with our intuitions than other theories. Lastly, we will examine whether or not it makes practical sense to adopt sufficientarianism as a moral theory in certain contexts.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Initial Observations of Attempted Thresholds

In the previous chapter, we assumed that it is crucial for the success of sufficientarianism to first define the threshold in a viable manner that is both non-arbitrary and reasonably precise. Then, we examined some attempts that have been made in order to define that threshold, as well as some associated difficulties for the background theory underlying each of these attempts. At the end of the chapter, it was concluded that none of the attempts to define the sufficiency threshold were successful.

This chapter will attempt to examine some of the thresholds outlined in the first chapter in more detail, including what threshold attempts have in common with each other — namely, that they all contain an implicit judgment about what is good for individuals. By grouping the sufficiency thresholds together based on what sort of things they implicitly consider to be good for people, we will be able to see if there are objections that can be presented against the proposed thresholds more generally, rather than individually. It will become clear that no theory of well-being has a built-in threshold that is non-arbitrary, and hence any attempt to construct a sufficiency threshold in a principled manner (that is, relative to a theory of well-being), will fail.

In the absence of a principled sufficiency threshold (or, one that arises as a natural consequence of a certain theory of well-being), the only recourse for the sufficientarian is to consider non-principled reasons for adopting sufficientarianism. The second part of

this chapter will determine whether or not there is an intuitive reason to adopt sufficientarianism, and lastly, if there is a practical reason to adopt sufficientarianism.

If we examine the proposed thresholds in the first chapter more closely, some commonalities are apparent. For instance, we can see that each threshold proposal contains an implicit judgment (or at least a partial judgement) about what is good for humans — one that serves as a general basis for determining the nature of the threshold. The sufficiency thresholds discussed in the previous chapter can be roughly grouped into two categories: those that hold that the threshold relies on a person's attitude towards their own well-being, and those that rely on an objective conception of well-being that is considered good for all humans, regardless of their attitudes towards their own perceived state of well-being.¹² This debate is longstanding, and is summed up succinctly by Richard Arneson:

“Philosophers perennially debate the nature of the good for humans. Is it subjective or objective? That is to say, do the things that are intrinsically good for an agent, good for their own sakes apart from further consequences, acquire this status only in virtue of how she happens to regard them? Or are there things that are good in themselves for an individual independently of her desires and attitudes towards them? (Arneson 2000, 37)

¹² Of this latter category, we could further divide it into views that consider certain things objectively good for all people in a certain place/time, and views that consider certain things objectively good for all people at all times. I will consider both of these views to be in the “objective” camp for now.

When discussing the nature of the good for humans, philosophers typically follow the classificatory scheme of Derek Parfit, who divides well-being into three categories — mental-state theories, desire-fulfillment theories, and objective list theories. (Arneson 1999, 115) According to mental-state theories, a person is considered well-off if they are happy or content, and according to desire theories a person is well-off if their desires are satisfied. These two theories are both subjective, in the sense that they claim that what is good for a person is determined by that person's evaluative perspective. (Arneson 1999, 116) On the other hand, objective-list theories claim that there are things that are good for everyone, regardless of whether they prefer or desire them. In other words, with objective list theories, "there is a fact of the matter as to what is prudentially valuable for a person...and no person's evaluative perspective necessarily fixes what is genuinely prudentially valuable." (Arneson 1999, 116)

Along these lines, we would consider a threshold that makes use of a list of things necessary for well-being (for instance, Nussbaum's list of capabilities) to be an "objective list" threshold. Some of the other thresholds are less easily classified within this tripartite scheme, though we could suggest that thresholds relying on the happiness or contentment¹³ of an individual (such as Frankfurt's threshold) could be considered "mental-state" thresholds. Lastly, any thresholds involving the satisfaction of a person's own desires or living a life involving the fulfillment of personal autonomy (such as

¹³I am using happiness and contentment here as interchangeable for my purposes, though it is possible that they come apart — for now, I am using contentment as a less-demanding level of happiness.

Dorsey's threshold) could be considered "desire-satisfaction" thresholds. Indeed, it seems as though for any particular threshold to be relevant, it must correspond to a particular theory of well-being.

While deciding which of these approaches to defining the threshold we should take is no easy task, it should be noted that the problem of determining which theory of the good is correct is by no means specific to sufficientarians. For instance, it is an open question as to what shortcoming should be taken into account when considering what things should be measured in terms of prioritarian weighting (for instance, a lack of personal satisfaction or a lack of some particular good). Indeed, even an egalitarian must settle similar questions; of course equality is considered the most basic aim, but what sort of equality is of moral importance? Just as there is no ready answer for the sufficientarian in regards to thresholds, there are no easy answers to these related worries for the prioritarian and the egalitarian. Nevertheless, it can be useful to sort the various sufficiency thresholds into one of these three categories of well-being, and then examine each theory of well-being as a whole to determine whether or not they have any obvious or natural thresholds built into them.

2.2 Thresholds and Theories of Well-Being

It might be beneficial at this point to revisit some of the threshold proposals mentioned in the first chapter that correspond to the three theories of well-being and the reasons why we rejected them in order to see if we can generalize those objections to apply to any

threshold based around the same theory of well-being. One objection to Nussbaum's roughly objective-list account of well-being is that it seems there is no place that we can objectively pick out a point at which someone moves from having "not enough" to "enough" of some particular good (or capability). With any objective-list without specifically-defined parameters like Nussbaum's, obtaining a particular list item is not an all or nothing state of affairs. If there is to be a definitive threshold evident when dealing with objective-list accounts of well-being, the items on the list would have to tend towards being very specific, such as "having 2000 calories of food per day" — a person either has 2000 calories of food per day or they do not. One issue with making items this specific, especially when it comes to list items that are meant to address more abstract aspects of human life is that the list items will become incredibly large in number, and increasingly difficult to defend. Also, some list items may end up being arbitrary. If our goal, for instance, is to make sure people have enough leisure time, then we have to set a specific point at which someone moves from having enough leisure time to not enough leisure time. When trying to set specific limits like this, we run the same risk of being arbitrary as we did with the vague list items when we required them to a "sufficient" degree. It might be possible to structure a specific list of objective goods in this manner, but it would be very difficult to defend the objectivity of such a list.

It may be noted that societies do seem to have laws in place that are meant to reflect thresholds of basic capabilities (such as labour laws limiting the normal work week in America to 40 hours). A sufficientarian who seeks to set the threshold using an

objective list account of well-being could argue that while there is no specific point that marks the passage from enough leisure time to not enough leisure time (for instance, in France the number of hours in a standard work week is set lower, at 35 hours per week), there are some cases in which it is clear that one does not have enough leisure time (for instance, if someone was forced to work 80 hours in a standard week).¹⁴ This, however, seems to suggest more of a prioritarian approach — once we introduce a continuum of reasonable options, there is no point at which we can objectively set a cut-off point. A sufficientarian requires an objective line, beyond which one moves from "poorly-off" to "well-off" — as is a general problem with setting sufficientarian thresholds, there does not seem to be a specific point at which one can be said to have "not enough," leisure time, only a continuum of options that are closer to or further away from ideal. This is not to say that these sorts of thresholds are not useful or practical (see section 2.3 for more discussion of practical thresholds), just that they do not reflect a specific and objective point at which one moves from having "not enough" to "enough."

Taking a desire-satisfaction approach to the construction of a sufficiency threshold seems to suffer from a similar problem. Surely we would not set a sufficiency threshold at the point where every single desire of a person was satisfied, but it remains unclear to the extent a particular desire must be satisfied, or how many desires must be satisfied, in order to qualify as being above the threshold. Any attempt to set a limit on the number of desires that must be satisfied or to what extent they must be satisfied seems as though it

¹⁴ Thank you to Dr. Colin MacLeod for this point.

would also be incredibly vague, and certainly not based on any particular principle. If we are to adopt a desire-satisfaction account of well-being, it seems as though no principled way of setting the threshold is available to us.

The last option we have available to us is to examine if there are any thresholds available to the proponent of mental-statism. In the first chapter, it seems that the threshold most aligned with mental-statist approach to well-being was Frankfurt's threshold — that is, that we ought to focus on raising people up to the point of contentment. Again, all that a prioritarian would have to do to object to this threshold is to disagree there is some privileged point at which a person moves from being content to not being content. Similarly, there is no clear point at which it can be said of a person that he or she has a significant amount of positive mental states to be considered sufficiently well-off — this, too, seems to exist as more of a continuum rather than suggesting any discreet point at which one moves from being not well-off to being well-off.

A second threshold we examined that has to do with a mental state conception of well-being is the pain threshold posited by Benbaji — one of three thresholds he mentions, but the only one that strictly has to do with mental states. There were a few reasons why initially it seemed as though the mental state of pain would not serve as a realistic threshold. One main objection was that it might be the case that a rich person could claim to be miserable and in mental pain because he could not buy the yacht he

wanted to, and it seems as though we have no reason to provide him with such. It seems as though relying on mental-statism as a measure of well-being seems to lead us to the seemingly counterintuitive conclusion that a rich, unhappy person is worse off than a poor, happy person (and thus leading to the conclusion that we ought to devote our efforts to assisting the rich and unhappy person).

Upon closer examination, this objection is not as devastating as it might seem at first. Our intuitions to the contrary can be explained away in a manner that is palatable. For instance, consider a moderately rich but unhappy person and a poor and unhappy person. The rich person, while they may be unhappy in certain aspects of their life, still enjoys a life absent of the sorts of compound pains that a person in severe poverty experiences. Hence, practically speaking, the rich person is going to have significantly less negative mental states to worry about. Moreover, we can imagine that — in most cases — the presence of constant hunger or fear of personal safety is a far greater pain than the ones the unhappy millionaire would experience. So, in addition to having more pains to worry about, the unhappy poor person would also generally experience a greater intensity of pain. Also, in the case of the unhappy millionaire and the unhappy pauper, we can imagine that the unhappy millionaire has a much greater chance of obtaining positive mental states in the future, whereas the pauper's chances are much less promising. When considering the realities of the world, it seems as though in the great majority of cases, we would still be obligated to assist the poor person over assisting the rich person. The consequence of this view is that if it was genuinely the case that an extremely poor monk

was content, he would indeed be better off than the rich and constantly unhappy person. However, this seems as though it is an acceptable outcome (in terms of conforming to standard intuitions).

If we assume that there is indeed a genuine separation between experiencing pleasure and experiencing pain (and not just a continuum of various mental states), then if there is a potential for an objective, definitive threshold, the pain threshold initially seems like an ideal option — the sufficiency threshold is the point at which one stops being in pain. As was noted above, the results this elicits is clear given an isolated situation at a specific point in time, like in the case of providing a pill to prevent someone's pain instead of giving a pill to someone else to whom it would bring a lot of pleasure. Even when only considering a specific point in time, setting the threshold at the point of pain has the potential to elicit either intuitive or unintuitive results, depending on the version of sufficientarianism proposed. For example, any version of sufficientarianism that gives absolute priority to those under the threshold would prefer to alleviate someone of a mild finger prick at the expense of providing any number of pleasures to a large number of people. This seems like an outcome that we would most likely want to avoid. However, on a version of sufficientarianism that gives some priority — but not absolute priority — to those below the threshold, using pain as a threshold might elicit more intuitive outcomes.

One large issue with setting the threshold at the point of pain, is that it only presents a definitive threshold for a single, particular situation; at any given moment, a person is either in pain, or not in pain. However, if we are to consider sufficientarianism as a theory that provides a practical position over an extended period of time, the pain threshold becomes less plausible. People often suffer from various pains throughout their lives, such as headaches, injuries and other illnesses, but we still consider people who experience these sorts of mild, infrequent pains during the course of an otherwise pleasant life to be well-off. Since, practically, we cannot take into account every single momentary instance of pain for every person and somehow attempt to alleviate the pain accordingly, we might be tempted to suggest that a person is below the threshold if they experience severe or extended pain over a certain period of time. It is easy to see how the pain threshold quickly moves from being an objective threshold to a continuum of pain levels — how much pain does a person have to experience over an extended period of time to be considered below the threshold, and for how long does the pain have to persist? If we attempt to use pain as a threshold in a way that actually provides some sort of moral guidance, our privileged pain threshold starts to look more like a prioritarian continuum.

After examining three main theories of well-being and using them to attempt to construct an objective, morally privileged threshold, it seems clear that there is little built into them that could serve as a point at which a slight move represents a large change in moral status. At very least, there is nothing inherent in these theories of well-being that

suggest adopting a sufficientarian position over a prioritarian position of well-being. However, just because we cannot find a principled manner in which to set the sufficiency threshold, does not yet mean that we ought to reject sufficientarianism. Though we cannot find a principled basis to adopt sufficientarianism as a theory, we might consider adopting it on grounds that it is the theory most in line with our intuitions. In the next section, we will examine whether or not sufficientarianism is the moral theory best in line with our intuitions.

2.3 Thresholds and Intuitions

In the first chapter, it was assumed that the task of defining the threshold was methodologically prior — that is to say, as Casal puts it, that the threshold must be set “in a principled manner,” and not merely in an ad hoc way that elicits intuitively correct outcomes. (Casal 2007, 313) Indeed, in all of the attempts we have examined in the first chapter, the strategy has been to define the threshold extra-theoretically by appealing to some principle that justifies setting a threshold at this particular point, and that justifies a substantial difference in treatment of people below the threshold to people just above it. However, the notion that we must appeal to something objective in order to set a threshold is not entirely clear. A sufficientarian might plausibly make the case that the threshold could be defined simply in terms of the theory itself — wherever the sufficientarian needs to set the threshold in order to get the calculus right, that’s where the threshold is. The justification for putting it there rather than somewhere else could

simply be that it elicits the correct outputs in line with our intuitions better than other theories.

So in order for us to accept sufficientarianism in the absence of an objective, principled threshold we must demonstrate that sufficientarianism calculus (or some version of it) conforms to our intuitions about who to benefit, particularly in situations where other theories seem to give us the wrong outputs.

One thought experiment that has done a lot of work in getting philosophers to focus on setting some basic minimum is the "bites of chocolate" scenario. The scenario is set up so that we are forced to choose between providing a small benefit to a large number of well-off people, (for instance, by giving them all some really good chocolate) or a large benefit to a very small number of poorly-off people (for instance, by relieving their serious pain). (Crisp 2003, 752) The intuition is supposed to be that no matter how large the number of people there are in the first group (and hence how much greater the total net benefit is, even after we have accounted for weighted priority to the poorly off group), we still ought to choose to alleviate the pains of the poorly-off people over providing the well-off people with the chocolate. If we choose to allocate resources on the basis prescribed by the weighted priority view, if the number of people reaches some critical point n at which their total amount of weighted well-being eclipses the weighted well-being of the poorly off people, we ought to provide the first group with the chocolate. A sufficientarian would deem this outcome to be unacceptable, and hence

sufficientarians have attempted to provide a theory that always instructs us to benefit the people in severe pain, no matter how large n gets.

The intuition many have that we ought to always privilege the small number of people in severe pain may seem correct, though it is incredibly difficult to arrive at a distributive theory that elicits this outcome. As Arneson points out, this problem will occur with almost any consequentialist theory, regardless of whether or not it involves a sufficiency threshold. (Arneson 2005, 25) He points out that a version of the "chocolate to the rich" thought experiment can be posed to the advocate of sufficiency — all one has to do is stipulate in the chocolate example that all persons are on the same side of the sufficiency threshold, and the problem still holds. If we have to choose between providing a large enough number of people just barely below the threshold with a small benefit or to save one person from excruciating pain, there is still some point at which we would be obligated to give the chocolate to the many. The addition of a sufficiency threshold does nothing to prevent this outcome, it just restricts the scope of the problem to only include people under the threshold (a feature which does not seem to make the outcome much more palatable). One solution might be to make the sufficiency threshold low enough to render this an acceptable option — for instance, by setting it so low that everyone below the threshold is suffering so close to a similar amount that any benefit to anyone is acceptable. However, this seems to set the bar so low that we would consider people just above the threshold to be still very poorly off, and so the threshold would accomplish very little in the way of alleviating pain. Anderson urges us to bite the bullet, arguing that

this seemingly unpalatable result is simply going to be a feature of any consequentialist position: "The point is arithmetic: any huge finite number, however large, can be eclipsed by an even larger number that is formed by taking a very small but not infinitesimal number and adding that same number to itself a sufficient number of times. Bites of chocolate, if sufficiently numerous, can morally have more weight than a single premature death." (Arneson 2005, 25) Moreover, Alastair Norcross argues that this sort of reasoning is already present in moral practise, and not just in abstract thought experiments. (Norcross 1997) For instance, he points to examples like a government's decision to raise the speed limit on a particular road to help people get around faster, even though doing so will result in an increase in traffic-related fatalities. This is a practical situation in which society has deemed that arriving to work slightly earlier is more important than the few extra human lives it will cost, if the number of people arriving to work early is sufficiently great, and the number of extra fatalities is sufficiently few. Most people do not find this outcome morally unpalatable (as evidenced by the lack of massive protests anytime the government decides to raise the speed limit by 10 km/h). Hence, if we are to adopt sufficientarianism as a theory we should do so on independent grounds, and not because we believe it avoids the intuitive problems associated with "chocolate to the rich."

Another thought experiment that is supposed to motivate the existence of a sufficiency threshold is one that we examined in the first chapter, which involved deliberation over whether or not to apply prioritarian weighting when two persons are

already at a very high (but not equal) level of well-being. If we recall, Crisp's thought experiment involved deliberating over whether to provide good caviar to a very wealthy person over an even wealthier person (assuming this is what sufficientarianism instructs us to do), even if the even wealthier person would receive a greater net benefit from receiving the caviar. Crisp assumes the answer to be "no," and claims that our intuition on this matter demonstrates that there is a point at which we believe our distributive structure changes, and hence suggests the existence of a sufficiency threshold. Plausibly, the prioritarian might respond by denying this intuition. The prioritarian could claim that the example as it stands is misleading, as it equates the level of material wealth with well-being, instead of tracking something more substantial. If we were to switch the thought example so that it asked us to consider whether or not we would give priority to benefits to a person who was happy over someone who was super happy, the thought experiment seems to lose some of its intuitive force. Indeed, part of our intuition that we should not privilege the rich person over the super rich person might stem from the fact that we intuitively believe that once people are above a certain level of wealth, their happiness stays at a relatively consistent level regardless of how much more wealth they obtain. Also, given the nature of our current world and the existence of such widespread poverty and misery, it is easy to see why we might have some intuitive apathy over whether or not the rich person should get some priority over the super rich person, even if we theoretically agree with the prioritarian weighting.

If our intuitions in the "chocolate to the rich" example and the "rich vs. super-rich" example were supposed to be the main motivations for accepting sufficientarianism, then it seems as though we don't have any particularly good reasons for accepting sufficientarianism over some version of prioritarianism. On the other hand, we might have some good reasons for rejecting sufficientarianism on intuitive grounds. For instance, most versions of sufficientarianism involve giving lexical priority to those underneath a given threshold. If we recall, one of the main problems for sufficientarian views that give lexical priority to those under the threshold was that they must be able to provide an answer to Casal's question: "How could it be so important for individuals to reach such a threshold as to warrant enormous opportunity costs for others yet unimportant how far above the line they are when deciding how much to benefit them further? A threshold cannot be so low and so high at the same time." (Casal 2007, 316) Any version of sufficientarianism that gives lexical priority to those below the threshold will ignore those who are only slightly better off above the threshold, and this frequently seems like an unacceptable conclusion. Even versions of sufficientarianism that are not entirely indifferent to the extent of the benefits to someone just barely above the threshold and someone significantly above the threshold (such as threshold prioritarianism), still have a hard time explaining the stark difference in treatment between those on opposite sides of the threshold.

This question is difficult to answer without reference to an objective principle, but perhaps one might simply suggest that the line exists in this specific place rather than

that one because we have to draw the line *somewhere*, and hence all we can do is place the threshold in a place that seems to offer us outcomes that are more often — if not always — intuitively correct. Perhaps an advocate of sufficientarianism could claim that even though those just slightly above the threshold get a "bad deal," the alternative would be even worse for those who are extremely poorly off. However, given the fact that we can reject the conclusions of the two main thought experiments that were supposed to be leading us towards a sufficientarian position, it is difficult to see what sort of test case sufficientarians could offer that would support sufficiency over priority, especially when prioritarianism does not have the aforementioned difficulty.

2.3 Practical Thresholds

Our theoretical intuitions might lead us to reject sufficientarianism at this point, though there still might be a place for sufficientarianism. Regardless of whether or not we are able to define a sufficiency threshold in a non-arbitrary manner, there might be practical reasons to adopt a sufficiency threshold in specific situations. For instance, E.A. Page considers a different approach to setting a threshold. He suggests that "in order to determine whether the sufficiency threshold is philosophically meaningful, we should ask whether agents assume that it exists in their everyday interactions and practical reasoning." (Page 2007, 16) Though his statement is in response to worries that the threshold is vague, it works similarly to the charge that there is no way of defining the threshold in an objective manner.

Whether or not we assume a sufficiency threshold exists in our everyday interactions and practical reasoning is somewhat unclear. As evidence to the contrary, one might point out that governing bodies often take into account the entire range of the population when considering how to distribute resources amongst various sectors, rather than focusing specifically on those who are poorly off.¹⁵ For instance, funds might be directed into building new highways to provide the small benefit of getting to work faster for a great number of those who are well-off enough to have a job and a car, at the expense of providing funding to a handful of inner city schools or homeless shelters. This is exactly what prioritarianism would prescribe, if the number of people getting to work faster was sufficiently high and the benefit to each sufficiently large. Hence, societies often function practically on the basis of prioritarian concerns.

However, Page further goes on to claim that “...we [should] focus not on the difficulty of specifying a precise definition of sufficiency in the face of philosophical vagueness, but rather we ask what practical work a sufficiency threshold can do, for example, in the construction of policies to reduce poverty.” (Page 2007, 16) One crucial purpose of the sufficiency threshold is, after all, to assist in bringing welfare to those who are considered poorly off, and hence an appropriate threshold would simply be one that works to achieve a certain goal (for instance, Page cites the usefulness of the UN set definition of “extreme poverty” as an income of less than \$1.08/day as having been useful, giving nations a tangible target to work towards.) Along these lines, Liam Shields also

¹⁵We could imagine this to be the case even if doing so did not ensure a greater number of votes.

points out that "it is worth noting that if there are instrumental sufficiency principles which, given certain reasonable empirical assumptions about how societies work, are foreseeably fixed requirements of realizing the demands of a fundamental, sound, non-sufficientarian principle then these instrumental sufficiency principles would contribute to the prospects for sufficientarianism in distributive ethics." (Shields 2012, 105)

As Page and Shields suggest, we might want to adopt sufficiency thresholds because they serve a practical purpose relative to a specific goal, and the most practical use for thresholds might be in efforts that are directed towards efforts to alleviate global poverty. At a glance, focusing on sufficiency in practise when it comes to promoting well-being and benefitting the worst-off in society seems to have an intuitive pull — for instance, no serious charitable organization would even consider whether or not their money would cause a greater level of total well-being if they took the money allocated for vaccinations in sub-Saharan Africa and spent it instead on a new opera house for the wealthy elite. Though organizations might weigh the costs and benefits of various projects and efforts to people below a certain level of well-being, there is a definite point of well-being beyond which certain projects and groups of people are not considered at all, nor do we generally think they should be. Indeed, there is so much poverty and suffering in the world at such great levels that prioritarian calculations hardly seem necessary in order to determine that we ought to focus our efforts on helping the global poor, and further prioritarian reasoning might undermine its own original goals.

Consider for instance, a case in which it has already been determined by prioritarian reasoning that feeding the poor is more important than building a new football stadium. The logistics of weighing every person's well-being and determining who is entitled to exactly how much food would be impossible (particularly because well-being is more than merely a function of material wealth). Simply implementing a policy that every household that earns less than 30k per year is entitled to a certain amount of food stamps per month is a more efficient and effective way to carry out the task that was set forth by prioritarian rationale. The excessive empirical estimates required by prioritarianism is impractical, and distracts from the obvious task of alleviating suffering and poverty. Though the use of sufficiency thresholds is used widely in aid efforts, it is clear that there are some problems with some real-life attempts to use sufficientarianism as a guiding principle for allocating resources. For instance, in a recent paper, Lant Pritchett and Charles Kenny argue that the low-bar targets like the ones outlined in the UN's Millennium Goals "define development down," and fail to take into account the majority of the world's population who are still living in poverty, if not extreme poverty. They maintain that the eradication of things such as extreme poverty is important, but that "low bar goals cannot be the only measures of development post-2015. Reducing the most extreme of deprivation is just the beginning, not the end, of development. Surely no one should live on less than \$1.25, but the only global goal on poverty cannot be a floor of \$1.26." (Pritchett and Kenny 2013, 5) Their point here is that focusing solely on the Millennium Development Goal of ensuring people do not live on less than \$1.25 per day

essentially means ignoring the well-being of those who are surviving on only slightly more than that.

This practical critique of the UN Millennium Development Goals echoes worries that we encountered previously, when we first discussed various forms that sufficientarianism could take. If we recall, one of the arguments against versions of sufficientarianism that give lexical priority to those under the threshold was that it mandates that we give small benefits to people below a certain threshold, at the expense of giving larger benefits to those living just above it. Indeed, the objection becomes more tangible when we consider the above case of someone living on \$1.25 a day and \$1.26 a day — both are still very poor, but only one is considered below the extreme poverty line, and hence only the person living on \$1.25 a day will benefit from aid efforts. As Pritchett and Kenny point out, this sort of approach ignores the well-being of several billion people entirely, especially in developing nations like India and Brazil.

In light of these worries, Pritchett and Kenny propose that we add high bar development targets alongside global minimums. They have four practical reasons for proposing that we ought to have multi-level goals:

"It will increase the relevance of goals to middle income countries. It will improve their ethical basis by creating universal standards making clear that poverty or ill health that is unacceptable for the most disadvantaged in the US or UK is unacceptable everywhere. It will create a set of objectives around which a viable domestic political coalition can be built. Finally, it will improve their policy impact,

(re)focusing development efforts on systemic change in policies and capability to implement policy rather than temporary fixes and specific interventions." (Pritchett and Kenny 2013, 28)

Even though Pritchett and Kenny reject using a single low-bar threshold as the focus of our development efforts, their approach can still be considered sufficientarian. For example, Huseby's version of multi-level sufficientarianism involves two threshold levels — a minimal and a maximal level. On this account, absolute priority is to be given to those who are below the maximal level, and below that level, "strong" priority should be given to those who are below the minimal level, and "weak" priority given to those who are above the minimal level and below the maximum level. This version of sufficientarianism does avoid the worry that we would ignore a person slightly over the level of sufficiency in favour of the person slightly below it — though we would give a stronger priority to the person below the minimal threshold, we would not do so at the expense of ignoring the person slightly above it entirely.¹⁶ In practical terms, this sort of approach to development allows us to focus on alleviating the suffering associated with extreme poverty, as well as addressing the hardships facing those who are only slightly better off.

A more controversial discussion perhaps is not *whether* to use sufficiency thresholds when it comes to global justice, but rather *what* sort(s) of threshold(s) to use.

¹⁶Of course this raises the issue as to how much we ought to prioritize those below both thresholds over those who are only below one, but this is the sort of useful deliberation we should spend time considering, rather than if it would cause more benefit if we built another opera house for the rich instead of supplying food aid to poorer countries.

As mentioned above, the failure to agree on a single standard of measuring quality of life is not a problem unique to sufficientarianism, but extends to all theories of justice that rely on a definition of well-being. One approach might be to adopt a Nussbaumian approach to the sufficiency threshold, instead of focusing on measures that just focus on raising income levels. Since objective list items typically stem from mass consensus on what is generally required for a human being to feel as though they are well-off, perhaps an approach to defining the sufficiency threshold might be to adopt such a list. The list does not necessarily represent things that are objectively good for every person, but rather it could serve as a reasonable, implementable list of things that generally lead to positive mental states in the widest range of people, without sacrificing feasibility. In this sense, an objective list threshold like Nussbaum's becomes more of a guiding heuristic for eliciting well-being than representing things that are objectively good. Either way, when it comes to practical considerations, much of the conversation revolves around what sorts of things should be taken into account when considering what it means to be sufficiently well-off — that there is such a point seems to be a given.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of whether there is a specific, privileged position beyond which a person can be said to be sufficiently well-off, the use of sufficiency thresholds are widespread in the realm of global justice and serve as valuable tools to help meet certain goals. The impracticality of the excessively detailed and most likely impossible measurements of well-being required in order to implement prioritarian policies undermines whatever goals it aspired to in the first place. As such, the sufficiency threshold remains an important practical — if not fundamental — feature of the promotion of well-being and distributive justice.

The form of sufficientarianism we adopt as well as the distributive metric we base our threshold on will determine the nature and success of any implementation of sufficientarian principles in practice. More generally, adopting sufficientarianism would lead to the development of policies that are framed in terms of focusing on raising the least well-off in society above some critical level. The projects a society will choose to undertake on a sufficientarian conception of justice will always favour the poorest of society. This will mean choosing to build homeless shelters over parks, or funding food banks over re-paving roads. This is in opposition to what a prioritarian would choose to undertake, which would involve considering the weighted benefits of building a park over building a homeless shelter, and then deciding accordingly. If we characterize the

threshold as involving mostly financial considerations, this seems to support policies such as higher minimum wages, welfare programs or even providing a basic income for all citizens. Moreover, while an egalitarian might focus on policies designed to tackle income inequality, the sufficientarian is only concerned with raising everyone up to a certain level of basic income. In real terms, an egalitarian might be more focused on policies that involve heavy taxes for the rich in order to decrease the disparity in income, whereas the sufficientarian remains indifferent to whether or not the middle class and the ultra rich are taxed the same amount, as long as there is enough money to raise people up from under the poverty line.

Globally speaking, adopting sufficientarianism might mean focusing on low-bar targets for poverty reduction, rather than policies that focus on raising the standard of living of the more prosperous but still developing countries. However, this too depends on where we choose to set the threshold -- it is possible to set the targets higher (at the standard of living of an average person in Canada), or adopt more than one threshold, attaching various priority to each of them.

Also, choosing to adopt a sufficiency threshold based on human needs or capabilities leads to policies that focus on securing a range of human rights for everyone. Adopting these sorts of thresholds leads us away from focusing too heavily on how much one has, and towards his or her ability to convert those resources into real opportunities,

in order to live a fulfilling life. This could lead to more comprehensive policies that focus on more than just poverty reduction.

In short, sufficientarianism is a flexible theory that can be realized in a multitude of ways in order to make practical changes benefitting the worst off in society. In the first chapter, we examined some different methods various philosophers have suggested in order to set a sufficiency threshold in a principled manner. In light of our conclusion that no such threshold exists, it seems prudent to shift the conversation away from defining a sufficiency threshold in terms of what is objectively defensible, to defining it in a manner that best serves us in our pursuit of achieving well-being for those who are poorly-off. The absence of an objective threshold leaves the sufficientarian with an extra explanatory problem that the egalitarian and the prioritarian lack, and as such serves to weaken the view. Similarly, because sufficientarianism has no intuitive merits over the prioritarian alternative and no defense for the significant change in moral status when crossing the threshold is forthcoming, we ought to shift away from thinking of sufficientarianism as a fundamental moral theory and instead consider it as a useful tool we can use to promote distributive justice and the well-being of the worst off .

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, E. 1999. "What Is the Point of Equality?", *Ethics* 109, pp. 287-337.
- Arneson, R. 2000a. "Perfectionism and Politics." *Ethics* 111: 37-63.
- _____. 2000b. "Luck Egalitarianism and Prioritarianism." *Ethics* 110: 339-49.
- _____. 2005. "Distributive justice and Basic Capability Equality: 'Good Enough' is Not Good Enough." In A. Kaufman, ed. *Capabilities Equality: Basic Issues and Problems*. London: Routledge: 17-43.
- Benbaji, Y. 2005. "The Doctrine of Sufficiency: a Defence." *Utilitas* 17: 310-32.
- _____. 2006. "Sufficiency or Priority?" *European Journal of Philosophy* 14: 327-348.
- Brown, C. 2005. "Priority or Sufficiency... or Both?" *Economics and Philosophy* 24: 199-220.
- Casal, P. 2007. "Why Sufficiency is not enough." *Ethics* 117: 296-326.
- Crisp, R. 2003. "Equality, Priority, and Compassion." *Ethics* 113: 745-63.
- DeGrazia, D. 2007, "Human-Animal Chimeras: Human Dignity, Moral Status, and Species Prejudice", *Metaphilosophy*, 38(2-3): 309-329.
- Dorsey, D. 2008. "Toward a Theory of the Basic Minimum." *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 7: 423-45.
- Frankfurt, H. 1987. "Equality as a Moral Ideal." *Ethics* 98: 21-43.

- Gosepath, Stefan. 2011. "Equality", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/equality/>
- Huseby, R. 2010. "Sufficiency: Restated and Defended." *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 18: 178-197.
- Nussbaum, M. 2011. *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. Harvard University Press.
- _____. 1999. "Women and Equality: The Capabilities Approach." *International Labour Review*, Vol. 138, No. 3: 228
- _____. 2006, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Page, E. 2007. "Justice Between Generations: Investigating a Sufficientarian Approach." *Journal of Global Ethics*, 3: 3-20.
- Parfit, D. 1997. "Equality and Priority." *Ratio*, 10: 202-221
- Pritchett, L and Kenny, C. 2013. "Promoting Millennium Development Ideals: The Risks of Defining Development Down." CGD Working Paper 338. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development
- Robeyns, Ingrid, "The Capability Approach", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/capability-approach>.
- Sen, A., 1980, "Equality of What?" in McMurrin (ed.), *Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shields, L. 2012. "The Prospects for Sufficiencyarianism." *Utilitas*, 24: 101-117.

Shriver, Adam J. 2014. "The Asymmetrical Contributions of Pleasure and Pain to Animal Welfare." *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*, 23: 152-162.

doi:10.1017/S0963180113000686.

"Poverty Overview" World Bank, accessed June 28, 2015,

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview>.