ABSTRACT
In this paper, I argue that Barry and Øverland did not succeed in providing an answer to Singer’s challenge. I start by arguing against their claim, that the case on which Singer relies on in order to generate a highly demanding assistance requirement, has a special feature that limits its applicability to other situations. Second, I argue against Barry and Øverland’s attempt to undermine any highly demanding principle of assistance on the basis of the failure of others to share the burden of assistance. While the above does not show that Singer’s highly demanding assistance principles are vindicated, it does show, however, that more needs to be done, than what Barry and Øverland have offered, in order to meet Singer’s challenge.

Introduction
The first part of Barry and Øverland’s book Responding to Global Poverty is devoted to what they call ‘Assistance Based Responsibilities’ (Barry and Øverland 2016). These are the responsibilities that are based merely on the assister’s ability to help and the beneficiary’s degree of need. No other fact about the assister, the people in need of assistance, or the relationship between the two are relevant for determining the scope and extent of ‘Assistance Based Responsibilities’. These other facts or factors are morally relevant for determining a person’s overall duty to assist those in need, but not relevant for determining a person’s assistance based duties as such. Regarding the latter duties, Barry and Øverland argue for a moderately demanding principle of assistance, not only in relationship to extreme poverty, but more generally towards people in need.

In making the case for their proposed principle of assistance, Barry and Øverland reject other more demanding formulations of the assistance principle. They argue, in this regard, mainly against the assistance principle(s) proposed originally by Peter Singer in his article ‘Famine, Affluence, and Morality’, as well as, in his later book The Life You Can Save (Singer 1972, 2009). Barry and Øverland identify three different formulations of Singer’s principle of assistance (Christian and Øverland 2016, 15–21). They argue, however, that, on all reasonable interpretations, each of these principles
imply a highly demanding duty of assistance. More importantly, they argue that Singer has not provided a compelling case for such highly demanding principles. In replacement of Singer’s demanding principles of assistance, they proposed the following moderately demanding principle, which they aptly call ‘Moderate’:

Moderate: if we can prevent something (very) bad from happening at relatively moderate cost to ourselves, and others, then we ought to do it (Christian and Øverland 2016, 21).

In defending ‘Moderate’, Barry and Øverland argue first that none of Singer’s demanding formulations of the assistance principle is needed to explain our reaction to Singer’s central example of the ‘Shallow Pond’ (where one is in a position to rescue a nearby child from drowning at a minor cost to the rescuer). Barry and Øverland argue that a moderately (and even a minimally) demanding principle of assistance would suffice to explain our intuition about rescuing in ‘Shallow Pond’. This is so because what is at stake for the rescuer in the latter case is very little: wetting a suit, ruining a pair of shoes, or things of the kind. The authors also argue that their proposed principle (‘Moderate’) explains, better than Singer’s more demanding principles, our intuitions about a variety of rescue cases, especially those that are more demanding than Shallow Pond. In this regard, Barry and Øverland address Singer’s attempt to justify a highly demanding assistance principle by appealing to another example (Bob’s Bugatti), which Singer borrows from Peter Unger’s book Living High and Letting Die (Unger 1996, 136). In the latter example, Bob is faced with a choice between, either losing most of his life-savings, or letting a child be run over by an approaching train. Although Barry and Øverland accept the claim that Bob is morally required to make the sacrifice in this case, they argue that ‘Bob’s Bugatti’ cannot deliver the intended general conclusion regarding duties of assistance, since the case in question contains special features that render it inapplicable to wider range of rescue situations including those pertaining to extreme poverty. In addition responding to providing a different account of the ‘Bob’s Bugatti’ case, Barry and Øverland provide a separate argument for rejecting Singer’s highly demanding duties of assistance, on the ground that others are morally required to share the burdens of assistance through compensating the assistor for her loss.¹

Aside from whether one accepts Singer’s demanding principles or Barry and Øverland’s moderate one, I will argue below that the authors failed to mount a convincing case against Singer’s argument. In the following section, I argue that Barry and Øverland’s attempt to undermine the challenge posed by Bob’s Bugatti is unsuccessful. I will start by presenting their argument that the latter case contains special features that explain why Bob’s Bugatti generates such high levels of demands. I will then present a counter example to Barry and Øverland’s argument. The counter-example, if successful, will show that even in the absence of the alleged special features, on which Barry and Øverland rely in order to explain the power of Bob’s Bugatti, we would still endorse a highly demanding rescue requirement. In section III, I address Barry and Øverland’s appeal to the claim that we cannot demand from others to make great sacrifices in order to help people in need, unless we are willing to compensate them for their potential loss.

¹As Barry and Øverland point out, their argument from ‘shared burden’ overlaps with, but not identical to, the ‘fair share’ view defended by Murphy (2000).
Bob’s Bugatti

Barry and Øverland’s first point is pretty uncontroversial. Singer’s assistance principles are indeed much heavier guns than needed to deal with the Shallow Pond scenario. Singer himself would probably agree with Barry and Øverland on this point. This is after all what led Singer to appeal to other scenarios in order to secure his more demanding conclusion. Barry and Øverland’s second point is also unproblematic. There are many scenarios where we do not require high levels of sacrifice from potential rescuers. We can, as they point out, think of many cases where most people do not have the intuition that one is required to given up a leg or life-earnings in order to provide a lifesaving operation for a stranger.

One the other hand, Barry and Øverland acknowledge that our intuitions about scenarios like that of Bob’s Bugatti seem to support a highly demanding assistance principle. The latter case challenges our ordinary intuitions about the moral requirement to give up material wealth for the sake of saving innocent lives. Therefore, Barry and Øverland’s defense of a moderate principle of assistance depends on their response to the challenge posed by examples like Bob’s Bugatti.

Barry and Øverland’s give the following restatement of the above case:

‘Bob’s Bugatti: Bob, who has most of his retirement savings invested in a Bugatti, is confronted with the choice of redirecting a railway trolley by throwing a switch in order to save a child which will result in the destruction of his Bugatti because it has accidentally been placed on the side spur of the line, or he might leave the switch as it stands so that his Bugatti remains in mint condition, which will result in the child’s death’ (Christian and Øverland 2016, 23).

Barry and Øverland agree with the highly demanding, and widely shared, intuition that Bob is morally required to sacrifice his Bugatti in the above scenario. They argue, however, that it is the fact that Bob has taken excessive risk which explains why we demand such high sacrifice from him.

… [W]e believe that Bob must make a sacrifice that appears to be beyond what Moderate would demand … However, we believe that there are other factors that can explain our judgments in Bob’s Bugatti. While people do not in general have responsibilities to make large sacrifices, relative to what they have, to prevent bad things from happening to other people to whom they lack special or associative responsibilities, agents may be required to make such sacrifices under special circumstances. In particular, such sacrifices may be required of those who have exposed their assets to undue risk…. Note that in Unger’s original case, it is pretty ridiculous of Bob to have invested nearly all of his assets in a Bugatti, use the repository of his savings to engage in the risky business of driving and then leave it parked outside…. It may for that reason plausibly be argued that he has no right to protect his savings, thus exposed, at the cost of the child’s life. (Christian and Øverland 2016, 25)

If Barry and Øverland are right about their explanation of our highly demanding intuitions in Bob’s Bugatti, then we should expect these intuitions to be different in parallel scenarios, but where the potential assister has not taken undue risks. Consider, however, the following case:

Ali’s Car: in an attempt to escape the life-threatening situation in Aleppo, Ali (a relatively successful merchant) withdrew all his money from the bank, collected all his valuables, put
them all in his car and left the city heading towards the Turkish borders. The stuff Ali put in his car constitutes most of his life savings, which would allow him to retire in Turkey. On his way, and in order to seek shelter from a round of shelling targeting the road, Ali stopped the car by the side of a river in order to seek shelter. After the shelling stopped and while Ali was heading towards his car, he saw a lonely child in the river struggling against the current. At the same moment, Ali noticed that his car is also sliding towards the river, perhaps due to the shelling. Ali can either save the child or his car. If he opts for the former, the car would be irretrievably lost in the river. Ali would still be able to ride with other to safety, in this case. (This would leave him as badly off as Bob after sacrificing his car in Bob’s Bugatti.) If Ali opts for the car, however, then there will be no hope for child.

I presume that people’s intuitions about the above case would not differ from their intuitions about Bob’s Bugatti. In both cases, most people would say it is morally wrong not to opt for saving the child, even at such a high cost. In any case, it does not seem likely that people would react differently to Ali’s Car than to Bob’s Bugatti. And, if Barry and Øverland agree with Singer and Unger on their judgment about Bob’s Bugatti, then they should do the same with regard to Ali’s Car.

Ali’s Car, however, does not have that special feature which Barry and Øverland take to explain our intuitions about Bob’s Bugatti. In light of the circumstances, it would not be plausible to say that Ali has taken undue risk in his trip. Hence, Barry and Øverland, unlike in Bob’s Bugatti, cannot appeal to such feature in order to explain the high sacrifice required of Ali. Ali’s behavior was totally reasonable given the circumstances. Moreover, there does not seem to be any other special or exceptional features about this case that would explain why Ali is required to make the sacrifice in question. In short, if we do think that Ali is required to rescue the child and forgo his car with all the valuables in it – as I presume most of us do – then Barry and Øverland fail to provide an explanation of our highly demanding intuitions in Bob’s Bugatti. This in turn implies that Barry and Øverland have not succeeded in defending Moderate against the challenge raised by Singer and Unger.

**Sharing the burden**

Aside from their attempt to explain away our intuitions about Bob’s Bugatti by appealing to the alleged special feature of the latter case, Barry and Øverland provided a separate, and perhaps a more promising, line of argument against Singer’s highly demanding duty of assistance and, consequently, in defense of Moderate. They claim that, in cases where circumstances require a person to go beyond the demands of Moderate at any point, others must be ready to share the burden with her (and reduce her sacrifice at least to a moderate level). Unless others are willing to compensate her for such sacrifice, they are not in a position to blame her for failing to make that sacrifice herself. Barry and Øverland give the following example to illustrate their point:

**Bob and the Avalanche:** There is an unexpected avalanche that is certain to bury a child unless Bob acts. Bob is able to redirect the avalanche, but the only way he can do so will lead it to the new house in which he has invested most of his savings (Christian and Øverland 2016, 26).

About the above case, Barry and Øverland say:
Would Bob be morally required to redirect the avalanche? We do not think so if that means that Bob would be left to bear this very significant cost by himself. Whether Bob is morally required to redirect the avalanche seems to depend on whether he would be compensated by others later, since this will determine the level of sacrifice he will ultimately have made. If we think that Bob ought to go on with the rescue, we certainly ought to compensate him, at least if we’re relatively well-off.... Moreover, if we are not prepared to compensate Bob, we ought not to judge him harshly if he chooses not to redirect the avalanche (Christian and Øverland 2016, 26–7).

It is not clear, however, what the above argument shows. If it simply shows that those who are not willing to share my burden of assisting needy people cannot complain about my failure to take on the whole burden of such assistance, then the claim is pretty uncontroversial. However, it would not follow from accepting it that it is morally permissible for me not to take on the full burden of assistance in such cases. It is true that others would not be in a position to show moral indignation about my behavior, given that their behavior would be as bad or even worse than mine. But this does not show that my behavior is morally fine or permissible. Moreover, while others, whose behavior is worse than mine, cannot express indignation at my behavior, they can still claim that both their behavior and mine are flawed. A friend can, for example, recognize that it is bad for me to procrastinate on my work, while still also admitting that she is even worse than me in this regard.

Moreover, suppose we want to apply the claim, advanced by Barry and Øverland above, to the example of Ali’s Car. Barry and Øverland might go along with the intuition that Ali is morally required to save the child at that point, but insist that others are required to share the burden with Ali and compensate him for his loss. All that is fine. But suppose that Ali knows that others will not compensate him. This might be so for two different sorts of reasons. The first reason is that, while others recognize Ali’s sacrifice, they are still unwilling to share the burden. The second reason is that it might be extremely difficult to convince others that Ali did indeed sacrifice his savings in order to rescue the child. We can imagine, for example, that nobody can credibly testify to Ali’s sacrifice. Note that under the latter circumstances, others cannot be blamed for not compensating Ali for his loss. Would Barry and Øverland say that Ali is not required to save the child in both of these cases, or only when others are blamable for not compensating him? If Barry and Øverland’s answer is that Ali is not required to make the sacrifice in either case, then the moral blameworthiness of others would not be relevant for the assessment of Ali’s requirement. On the other hand, if their answer is that Ali is required to make the sacrifice only when others are not blamable for not contributing, then Ali would be required under such circumstances to make a sacrifice that is beyond what Moderate would demand.

Perhaps, Barry and Øverland would insist that Ali is not required to save the child, regardless of whether others are blamable for not compensating him. Such judgment, which allows Barry and Øverland to hold on to Moderate, would be based merely on the fact that no significant compensation for Ali’s sacrifice will be forthcoming. But if this so, then why not give the same response to Bob’s Bugatti. In other words, why not also hold that Bob is not required to save the child on the ground that no significant compensation for Bob’s sacrifice will be forthcoming. Of course, Barry and Øverland would respond by reminding us that Bob has taken
excessive risk by placing his very expensive car and uninsured car on the road, and
that this is why he should take on the burden of saving the child even if there is no
forthcoming compensation. But this would be a bit too harsh on Bob. It might be
plausible to say that Bob deserves less compensation than Ali. It would not be
reasonable, however, to leave Bob with the whole burden, while significantly com-
pensating Ali. It would be morally insensitive for someone to insist that Bob is
required to sacrifice all his life savings in order to rescue the child, while refusing to
give up, say, $10 share of the burden for the aim of compensating Bob for his loss. It
would have been fine for others to leave Bob uncompensated, had he been seriously
morally culpable for putting the child at such risk. It would have been reasonable, in
such case, to require Bob to take on the whole burden. But it would be too harsh to
require Bob to do so simply on the ground that he took excessive risk by driving his
uninsured Bugatti around. It would be more reasonable to discount Bob’s compen-
sation on that bases, but not to cut him off completely.

Barry and Øverland might opt for a different response. They could say that their
‘shared burden’ argument applies only when others are blamable for not contributing.
Thus, they might concede that the shared burden argument need not apply to Bob’s
Bugatti or Ali’s Car, when it is not possible to provide convincing evidence to potential
compensators about the conditions under in which Bob or Ali have lost their life-
savings. Barry and Øverland could still argued, however, that this is consistent with
their claim that Moderate applies to our duties to assist people living under extreme
poverty, which is the main concern of their work. This is so because there is no doubt
that people, who are not willing to share the burden of extreme poverty assistance, are
blamable for not doing so.

Suppose, however, that Bob was not driving a Bugatti on that day, but a new Toyota.
Let us also suppose that sacrificing such car would count as a moderate cost on Bob.
Thus, according to Barry and Øverland, Bob would be required to sacrifice his Toyota.
But, would not others also be required to share the burden of this moderate cost with
Bob, assuming that they became aware of the relevant circumstances, and, hence, would
be blamable for not compensating him for the loss? If that is the case, then, according
Barry and Øverland’s shared burden argument, others cannot criticize Bob for failing to
save the child in favor of keeping his Toyota, when they are not being willing to
compensate him. This in turn implies, according to Barry and Øverland’s argument,
that Bob would not be required to make that sacrifice, unless he expects others to
compensate him for the destruction of his Toyota. This implies that we are not required
to make even moderate sacrifices, unless others are morally required and expected to
compensate us.

In response, Barry and Øverland might argue that the unwillingness of others to
compensate kicks in only when the demands are high, but not when they are only
moderate ones. But, it is not clear what would be the ground for such claim. Why can
we not reiterate Barry and Øverland’s words here that ‘if we are not prepared to
compensate Bob, we ought not to judge him harshly if he chooses not to make the
sacrifice?’ Had the demands on Bob been only minimal, then perhaps compensation
might not matter much after all. But this is not so in the case of a new Toyota.
Therefore, there is every reason to think that the appeal to the burden sharing require-
ment applies to Moderate, as it applies to more demanding principles of assistance.
Conclusion

I argued above that Barry and Øverland did not succeed in providing a compelling response to Singer’s challenge. I argued first against their claim that the example, which Singer relies in order to generate a highly demanding assistance requirement, has a special feature that limits its applicability to other situations. Second, I argued against Barry and Øverland’s attempt to undermine any highly demanding principle of assistance on the basis of the failure of others to share the burden of assistance. All of this, of course, does not show that Singer’s highly demanding assistance principles are vindicated. It does show, however, that more needs to be done, than what Barry and Øverland have offered, in order to meet Singer’s challenge.

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