> Is it true that the standard set by our argument is so high as to be counter-productive? There is not much evidence to go by, but discussions of the argument with students and others have led me to think it might be. Yet the conventionally accepted standard – a few coins in a collection tin when one is waved under your nose – is obviously far too low. What level should we advocate? Any figure will be arbitrary, but there may be something to be said for a round percentage of one's income like, say, 10 per cent – more than a token donation, yet not so high as to be beyond all but saints . . . No figure should be advocated as a rigid minimum or maximum; but it seems safe to advocate that those earning average or above average incomes in affluent societies, unless they have an unusually large number of dependents or other special needs, ought to give a tenth of their income to reducing absolute poverty. By any reasonable ethical standards, this is the minimum we ought to do, and we do wrong if we do less. (PE 246)

I disagree with McGinn's view that 'decent rational people feel quite unsure [about what they owe the poor]; it is not that they know very well and decline to carry out their moral duty'. Admittedly, the attitudes of people to this question may vary from country to country. Nevertheless, my sense, after many years of discussions with all kinds of people, mostly in Australia but also in the United States, England and other European countries, is that many people *do* think that they owe a lot more to the poor than they are actually giving, and have some residual guilt about not giving more. Some of them relieve this guilt, or excuse their failure to give, by convincing themselves that the money given to overseas aid agencies never gets to those who need it. (They do not make the enquiries that might threaten this convenient belief.)

I disagree, too, with the conclusion McGinn draws from his imaginary world in which a Charity Channel, plugged into our brain and therefore compulsory viewing, floods us with information about people in urgent need of our aid, which we have the means to provide effectively. McGinn says that he finds this a dystopian prospect. No doubt he is thinking of himself as a potential donor rather than as a person in urgent need of aid. From that perspective, the thought of being bombarded with images of people suffering is indeed dystopian. But if I imagine myself as a victim of a natural disaster, and think of my life and the lives of my family as being saved by the existence of the Charity Channel, I have a very different view. McGinn thinks that human compassion is not infinitely elastic, and we would become hardened to all the suffering that was forced on to our attention. Perhaps we would: that is a question of human psychology about which we can only speculate. If the Charity Channel did not lead to a substantial increase in the amount of aid that is received by people who need it, it would indeed be dystopian. But if human compassion – while no doubt not *infinitely* elastic – can be stretched to a significant extent by

the provision of accurate information and effective means of giving assistance, then to view the world of the Charity Channel as worse than the present world seems to reflect the biased perspective of someone secure in the comforts of affluence.

In the end, after extensively criticising what he takes to be a utilitarian principle, McGinn has nothing to offer in its place except 'just an *ad hoc* rule of thumb that seems to strike the best balance between competing concerns and fits my real feelings about my obligations' (p. 159). I find this unsatisfactory because I don't think we should be constructing our moral theory in order to fit our 'real feelings', whatever they might be. But that raises issues of method in moral philosophy, to which I shall come in the following response to Frances Kamm.

Kamm

Kamm deals with many different issues. To take them in order.

The motivation for living an ethical life

Kamm begins her critique with some comments on my views about the motivation to be moral, directed against what I say on this issue in the final chapter of *Practical Ethics*. (As readers will know from Crisp's essay, a fuller account can be found in *How Are We to Live?*) Some errors in Kamm's account of my views need to be corrected. First, she says that I seem to think that it is more in people's interest to live a meaningful life than to live a happy life. She comes to this conclusion as a result of misunderstanding my observation in *Practical Ethics* that few of us could deliberately choose a way of life that we regard as meaningless, and that most of us would not choose to live a psychopathic life, no matter how enjoyable it might be.[29] Probably many of those who could not deliberately choose a way of life they regarded as meaningless could not see themselves as being happy under those conditions. And if few of us would choose to live a psychopathic life, no matter how happy it might be, that tells us something about the values most people have. But I make no general claim about whether a meaningful life or a happy life is more in people's interest. Since a person's interests are, in my view, related to her preferences, that would vary from person to person.

Next, Kamm says that I posit self-interest as the highest-level rationale for an individual's being moral. But what I say is: 'If, agreeing with Sidgwick rather than Hume, we hold that it is rational to act in our long-term interests irrespective of what we happen to want at the present moment, we could show that it is rational to act morally by showing that