Resolved: Individuals have a moral obligation to assist people in need.

Topic Analysis

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Resolved: Individuals have a moral obligation to assist people in need.

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Topic Introduction

The moral obligation to assist resolution presents a popular problem in applied ethics. While debating it, you will confront an abstract question by examining various moral theories to determine which position they would endorse. This means that debate will take place mainly on two levels. First, there will be a lot of clash on the level of the value and criterion. Utilitarianism and Kantian deontology will support very different conclusions about the duty of assistance, and for very different reasons. You should be able to give reasons for preferring your philosophy over the one your opponent uses. Second, you should formulate logical arguments for why accepting a particular philosophy (say, utilitarianism) will lead to thinking of assistance as a duty or not. You should also be able to challenge your opponent’s arguments connecting her philosophy to her position. The resolution is abstract and hypothetical. There are no clear connections to real world laws and policies or their outcomes. This means that the debate will be more about theories of morality and duty than empirical claims about the world or predictions about the outcomes of specific actions.

Actions that help others, rather than merely avoid doing them harm, are called beneficent. Beneficence entered philosophical discussion in response to the selfish picture of human nature (often called psychological egoism) painted in social contract theories like Thomas Hobbes’s State of Nature. David Hume proposed that humans naturally act benevolently toward one another, and that this benevolence is the foundation of cooperation between individuals and the subsequent development of social ideas of morality and justice.

Utilitarianism, as conceptualized by John Stewart Mill and others, has been described as imposing a duty to maximize beneficent actions. In a utilitarian framework (specifically act utilitarianism), each actor has a duty to maximize overall good, which involves both negative prohibitions against rights violations and positive obligations to act benevolently. The article “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” by Peter Singer, a contemporary utilitarian, outlines a standard argument for the duty of beneficence. Anyone who debates this resolution should read this extremely influential article, since so many criticisms and defenses of the duty to maximize utility have been made in response to it.

Deontological theories, such as Kant’s ethics, emphasize obligations as the central features of morality (the term “duty ethics” is often used to describe this type of theory). However, many of these positions, including Kant’s, focus mainly on what we may not do (negative duties), rather than on what we have a positive duty to do, since the duty not to harm others, for example, is more fundamental and less demanding than the duty to actively help
others. This is not to say that Kant is not interested in beneficence or that you cannot use his philosophy for this topic.

W.D. Ross developed an intuitionist theory of ethics based on semi-deontological duties. Beneficence is one of the seven prima facie obligations Ross outlines, and the correct moral action in a given situation is determined by considering which prima facie obligations apply to the situation, whether those obligations are in conflict, and which course of action fulfills the most prima facie duties to the greatest degree.

AFF ARGUMENTS AND CASE STRATEGIES

1. INTUITIONISM

Most people’s moral intuitions will side with the aff. Hardly anyone seriously believes that we morally ought not assist people in need, and most people would at least agree that we should. The difficulty for the aff is to convince the judge that individuals must assist—that assistance is a moral obligation, not simply a moral ideal.

Singer’s argument in “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” is perhaps based most closely on the intuition that we ought to assist. Singer presents the following hypothetical situation: Suppose you are walking past a shallow pond and see a small child drowning. Singer holds that most people would consider you to be a monster if you didn’t jump in to save the child, even though you would ruin your expensive new clothes by doing so. Since failing to give money that would prevent a person from starving to death is no different from a moral standpoint, Singer concludes that we are morally obligated to donate up to the point where doing so would cause more harm to us than we prevent by our donation.

This argument has lots of intuitive force, and Singer intends for it to persuade all kinds of people, not just utilitarians. Many authors have made objections to its premises, which appear to be pretty uncontroversial at first. Unfortunately, this means that a lot of the aff literature focuses on responding to such objections, which results in mainly defensive arguments. An aff using this type of position should be prepared to answer attacks like the Fair Share Objection and the Over-Demandingness Objection (both explained below), and will likely feature a few spikes against neg arguments in the AC.

W.D. Ross offers an intuitionist theory that draws on a broader base of moral intuitions, in which beneficence is only one of seven fundamental obligations. This is less easily dismissed as an oversimplification than Singer’s position, but it has more principles to explain and justify. Also, the neg may argue that Ross does not sufficiently explain how to prioritize the seven prima facie duties when they come into conflict, or that beneficence is a relatively unimportant duty that can be violated much of the time.

2. UTILITARIANISM

The most straightforward criterion to use on the aff is utilitarianism. Since a utilitarian tries to maximize aggregate utility, she does not consider her interests or sacrifices any differently than she does anyone else’s. Expect the neg to be ready with arguments against utilitarianism, especially that it oversimplifies the relationship between the needy and those who assist them, and that individuals have a right to spend their time and resources how they want. If
the aff wins utilitarianism, it only has to show that aggregate utility is, in fact, maximized when individuals assist people in need.

Resist the temptation to simply assume that this is the case. The more well warranted and creative your argument for maximizing utility is, the stronger your impacts will be, and the more difficult your opponent’s job to answer them will become. Also, bear in mind that John Stewart Mill’s *On Liberty* can be interpreted as a utilitarian argument against obligatory assistance. By the harm principle, government and society are only justified in restricting an individual’s liberty in order to keep her from harming others. However, a careful reading shows that Mill seems to think that inaction (failure to fulfill positive duties) can be as bad as a harmful action. This makes sense, since from a consequentialist point of view, the effects of causing a harm and allowing an easily foreseeable harm to occur are indistinguishable.

Your advocacy doesn’t need to be as radical as Singer’s. A more easily defensible position might argue that individuals are only morally obligated to assist people when doing so would actually make them better off in the long run, or when they directly encounter needy people, or when everyone else either can’t or won’t help. However, positions like these will require more definition and framework level debate.

3. FAIRNESS

The case in this brief uses fairness as a criterion, and impartiality or equality would function similarly. A key argument in this type of case is that altruism ought to be prioritized over self-interest. One way of supporting this claim is with the utilitarian focus on aggregate good discussed above. Another argument is based on role-reversal or empathy. If you were in dire need of assistance, would you wish there was a moral obligation to help?

4. RELATION TO MORALITY

Another aff approach is to consider how the obligation to assist people in need would relate to the moral system that it is part of. For instance, if beneficence is critical for escaping a State of Nature where most people are self-centered and establishing a concept of justice or morality as Hume argues, it may be such an important moral principle as to warrant being passed on as a duty. Alternatively, maintaining a moral obligation to assist may increase trust and companionship in the interactions between members of a society, since they both feel compelled to act benevolently and can expect others to. This may in turn make that society more safe, productive, or just. Refusing to assist may indicate that a person is immoral in the same way that committing a crime or lying to a friend does, and morally or legally reprimanding people for not assisting may help change or prevent pernicious behavior. Characterizing assistance as an obligation may alter the way a society thinks about duty, since the duty to assist would presumably be less rigid than the duty not to cause harm. This increased flexibility in conceptions of duty may make the society better equipped to provide satisfactory and workable, if not definitive, answers to other difficult ethical questions.

A lot of the evidence in this brief discusses the social implications of incorporating beneficence into a moral system. Some cards focus on the value of beneficence as a fundamental element of fellow-feeling between individuals. Others explain how it is in each individual’s interest that everyone in society act beneficently, or how society as a whole becomes more stable
or prosperous as a result of beneficence. Remember, though, that for every card arguing that beneficence is essential to morality, there is one arguing that obligatory beneficence cheapens the concept of moral duty or promotes irresponsibility by requiring people to bail each other out. Two great strengths of this case strategy are the potential for making creative arguments with varied warrants that society and morality are improved by affirming, and the relatively small and predictable set of neg responses (there are far fewer responses to this than, say, to the intuitionist argument).

NEG ARGUMENTS AND CASE STRATEGIES

What the neg lacks in strong intuitive arguments, it makes up for in room for creativity. There is wide variety in both case positions and responses to aff arguments. Since most aff cases will likely focus on the consequentialist benefits of assistance, an attractive neg strategy is to base the case on a philosophy that precludes consequentialist impacts, and to directly answer aff arguments with turns against the AC.

1. CRITIQUE OF DUTY

The neg may grant that beneficence is desirable, or even that people who do not assist are acting immorally, but argue that assistance is nonetheless not a question of obligation. First, negs may argue that morality does not impose duties on individuals. Virtue ethics describes morality in terms of people’s characters, rather than their duties. According to virtue ethics, benevolence is a virtue that causes individuals to act beneficently, and selfishness is the corresponding vice. Therefore, beneficence is good to be sure, but its goodness derives from its relation to a person’s character, not from the fulfillment of any moral obligation. A neg advocating virtue ethics might try to win a concession from the aff that morality is a matter of virtue in cross examination, and argue that duty does not fit into a virtue-based ethical system in the NC. Another moral system which is not based on duty is a form of consequentialism that considers actions morally good or bad in proportion to the amount of welfare or suffering that they cause, but that does not consider welfare maximization to be a duty. For instance, spending five dollars on a slingshot that you use to hurt someone is bad, spending the money on a sandwich for your friend, and donating it to a hospital is better, but there is no duty to donate the money. This may be a more realistic way of formulating the utilitarian ideal than the duty to maximize utility, since the number of actions available to any person are infinite, and knowing which one will absolutely maximize utility seems impossible.

Another approach is to argue that individuals are not morally culpable for their inaction and therefore should not be held to a moral obligation to assist, based on some form of determinism. More persuasive than a general denial of culpability from hard determinism is the argument that benevolence in particular is a character trait that limits an individual’s capacity for beneficent actions, and that individuals lack control, on some level, over how benevolent they are. In “Utilitarianism, Sociobiology, and the Limits of Benevolence,” Danny Soccia argues that psychological determinism (the claim that psychological states are largely influenced by genetics and social context) limits individuals’ capacity for benevolence, at least to an extent. If it is
impossible for an individual to act more beneficently, obligating her to do so will not only be a futile attempt to influence her actions, but it may also cause her to feel frustrated, guilty, or alienated from morality, leading to even worse outcomes. Making this argument is a great way to diversify neg impacts and impact to an aff’s consequentialist standard.

Finally, the neg may argue that assisting is supererogatory, meaning that it is morally desirable, even ideal, but it is beyond moral obligation. This argument will involve establishing the criteria for what constitutes a moral duty, and showing that assisting people in need falls outside of these criteria. A popular way to develop this argument is to claim that obligations must be based on contractual agreements (either explicit or implicit) or special relationships. The argument for contract-based obligations emphasizes the clarity with which contracts spell out exactly which benefits and obligations are assigned to each person, and the fairness inherent in an arrangement all parties can agree to. On this view, the fact that a person is in need is not sufficient to create an obligation to assist him.

2. LIBERTY-BASED APPROACH

Many of the same arguments used against social welfare programs that redistribute resources from the affluent to those in need can also be used against moral systems that require assistance. Robert Nozick makes the popular and influential libertarian argument that an individual’s absolute right to determine how to spend her time, effort, and resources must come before any other considerations, such as maximizing utility. This is related to the argument, made in the neg case in this brief, that agency is essential to morality and basic human worth. Libertarians’ support for free markets is also based on the idea of the invisible hand, originally presented by Adam Smith and later developed by thinkers such as Friedrich August Hayek and Leonard Read. The thrust of this argument is that all parties in society can benefit from individuals engaging freely in self-interested trade with one another. Free trade can lead to efficiency, development, and expansion of wealth, which can leave people in need better off than conscious efforts to assist them.

3. RESPONSIBILITY

Another argument that parallels those made in defense of libertarianism claims that people must accept their situations as consequences of their choices. People deserve the outcomes of their actions as long as no one else has coerced them or violated their rights. Furthermore, if individuals are required to intervene to help people in need, there may be less of an incentive to avoid risky behavior, causing more people to act irresponsibly. Similarly, the neg may argue that assistance often fails to address the root cause of people’s problems. For instance, economic aid can be said to treat the symptoms of poverty, while ignoring its cause. The impact of this argument is that outcomes are worse when assistance is morally obligatory, which fits into a consequentialist framework and shows that things may become worse for the people receiving assistance, despite our intuitions that the opposite is true.

4. OVER-DEMANDINGNESS OBJECTION

The over-demandingness objection to the duty of beneficence has become popular in philosophy journals. It states either that there are no theoretical or practical limits to the amount of assistance required, or that the limits are unreasonably high. Since there are far more people in
need than we can expect to help, especially considering the low amount of assistance that people currently give, the duty to assist appears to be never-ending. Under the standard interpretation of utilitarianism, individuals have a duty to give their energy and resources to people in need up to the point where giving any more would make them worse off than the people they are aiding. Since an immense number of people are in extremely dire situations, this would require individuals to give up essentially everything, leading to a form of ascetic altruism that seems far too demanding to most people. It would certainly prohibit spending any time or money on luxuries and nonessential pursuits that many would argue form an intrinsically valuable part of our personal lives and our culture. Further, many have argued that few people would even try to fulfill such a demanding duty, and a more realistic expectation for assistance would cause a greater amount of people to act. Some even claim that this unreasonable duty weakens the value and force of morality by invoking it in realms where it does not apply, much like declaring it illegal to wear green on Tuesdays would erode the legitimacy of law.

5. FAIR SHARE OBJECTION

The fact that most people do not fulfill the duty to assist people in need creates problems for determining how much those who do assist are required to do. It seems unfair that those who assist should have to pick up the slack left by everyone else. At the same time, the fact that one has done one’s fair share does not seem like a legitimate justification for ceasing to assist. In “A Puzzle About Beneficence,” Matthew Hanser presents this hypothetical situation: If ten people are drowning and ten people standing nearby could save them, but nine of the bystanders refuse to help, the tenth person does not seem justified in deciding to stop after saving one person, claiming that he has done his share. Some account of a person’s capacity for beneficence or the limit of her willingness to help seems like a more reasonable rationale for her decision to stop assisting than a claim about her fair share. The fair share objection is more thoroughly refuted in the literature than the over-demandingness objection, which probably holds more promise as an effective neg strategy.

6. IMPARTIALITY OBJECTION

A strong argument against impartial beneficence is that people and their situations are simply not always the same, and the duty to treat them equally ignores crucial factors that determine whether they deserve assistance (such as how responsible they are for their plight) and whether that assistance is actually likely to benefit them. Another criticism of impartiality is that if we are required to treat people impartially and act beneficently out of duty, our preferences, relationships, and the intrinsic worth we assign to beneficence can all be subordinated to a cold, disinterested sense of duty that deprives our actions of meaning and genuineness.
DEFINITIONS

Overview

As we mentioned above, this resolution is framed as an abstract question about ethical theory, rather than a real-world scenario tending toward big impact debate. Most debate over interpretations will probably focus on what it means to assist people in need, which raises several important questions. Who do we have an obligation to assist? How much assistance, and of what kind, must we give them? The aff will probably want to qualify this phrase somehow to make its advocacy manageable, but doing so without provoking too much protest from the neg may be difficult. In any case, you will probably benefit from giving the judge a clear, specific picture of what assisting people in need means so that he or she doesn’t vote based on an interpretation you didn’t expect.

Individual

Definition: a single human being, as distinguished from a group

Definition: A single human being, as opposed to Society, the Family, etc.

Discussion: This term specifies the “agent of action” in the resolution, and specifies that the debate deals with the moral obligations of individual people, rather than governments, societies, companies, or other groups. This means that arguments about the duties of social institutions, such as Social Contracts and John Rawls’s theory of distributive justice, probably won’t be of much use.

Moral

Definition: founded on the fundamental principles of right conduct rather than on legalities, enactment, or custom: moral obligations.

Obligation

Definition: something by which a person is bound or obliged to do certain things, and which arises out of a sense of duty or results from custom, law, etc.

Discussion: “Moral obligation” should probably be defined contextually and as a single term. Its meaning is largely intuitive, but you should pay special attention to two key distinctions. First, the obligations we are dealing with are based on moral principles (which deal with what is fundamentally right and wrong and are often based on formal systems of morality, such as utilitarianism), rather than laws, customs, etc. The definition of “moral” above highlights this
distinction well. Second, obligations are duties which individuals are morally bound or required to fulfill. Not all moral systems describe morally right behavior in terms of obligations (think of virtue ethics). It is important to think carefully about what constitutes an obligation according to the criterion or philosophy that you use, rather than assume that we have obligations to do good or prevent harm, however strong these arguments may seem intuitively.

**Assist**

**Definition:** to give usually supplementary support or aid to


**Discussion:** This definition is pretty straightforward, but an aff might want to stress that to assist is typically to play a supplementary or supporting role, rather than take complete responsibility for solving someone’s problems. This places less of a burden on the individuals doing the assisting, and it may help mitigate neg arguments that excessive aid leads to dependency.

**Need**

**Definition:** a : a lack of something requisite, desirable, or useful

b : a physiological or psychological requirement for the well-being of an organism


**Definition:** lack of the means of subsistence : poverty


**Discussion:** “In need” is a broad term, and dictionary definitions vary pretty widely. Some focus on specific needs (like physiological needs or the need for economic subsistence), some emphasize urgency or necessity, and some stick to the broadest description of needs. A potential neg strategy is to avoid wasting time debating a definition with varying interpretations and no clear reason for preferring one over another by accepting the most urgent interpretation of need, such as a case where the person in need will die without assistance. This allows the debate to focus on other, more well-defined issues, such as the nature of moral obligations between individuals.
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<http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/1972----.htm>

Singer is an influential and controversial utilitarian who is known for taking utilitarianism to its
logical extreme in practical applications. In this article, and in his books Practical Ethics (1979)
and The Life You Can Save (2009), he argues that affluent people should give aid to those in
extreme poverty. This argument based on the claim that one is morally obligated to prevent very
bad things if one can do so without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance. This
claim has lots of intuitive force, and it is directly applicable to the resolution.

Neg
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ON THE SUPPOSED OBLIGATION TO RELIEVE FAMINE, accessed 5/20/2011
<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=126323&jid=PHI&volu
meId=77&issuelId=04&aid=1263>

This article responds to Singer’s and outlines many of the standard arguments against him in a
relentless, conservative tone.

Nozick, Robert, Philosopher and professor at Harvard University, 1974
ANARCHY, STATE, AND UTOPIA

General
Beauchamp, Tom, Philosophy Professor at Georgetown University, 2008
“The Principle of Beneficence in Applied Ethics,” STANFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF

Eshleman, Andrew, Associate Professor of Philosophy at University of Arkansas, 2009
“Moral Responsibility,” STANFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY, accessed

These articles give good introductions to the philosophical literature on beneficence and moral
obligations, and both have excellent bibliographies, as do many of the articles cited in the
evidence below.
AFFIRMATIVE
1. CASE

VALUE: The value is morality. First, since the resolution is a question of moral permissibility, this is the most logical and applicable value. Second, moral systems are designed to reflect and promote our ideals, so morality encompasses any other value. Third, the ability to develop and abide by moral principles is a defining characteristic of humanity and the source of much of our inherent worth.

CRITERION: The criterion is fairness, defined as lack of bias or preference based on arbitrary or irrelevant factors. Even if the world is not fair in general, any legitimate moral system must be. First, a logical moral system will be internally consistent and free of any contradictions created by bias. Second, our morals represent the rules and duties we would ideally abide by, and there is no justifiable reason for treating people differently, since there is no morally relevant difference between them. Third, any unfair moral system will be disregarded by the groups it disadvantages, which will weaken its effectiveness and likely lead to conflict. Therefore, the sufficient affirmative burden is to show that failing to assist people in need shows a form of bias, since individuals are morally obligated to act fairly.

CONTENTION 1: SELF INTEREST IS A FORM OF BIAS.
Nevertheless, when all considerations of this sort have been taken into account, the conclusion remains: we ought to be preventing as much suffering as we can without sacrificing something else of comparable moral importance. This conclusion is one which we may be reluctant to face. I cannot see, though, why it should be regarded as a criticism of the position for which I have argued, rather than a criticism of our ordinary standards of behavior. Since most people are self-interested to some degree, very few of us are likely to do everything that we ought to do. It would, however, hardly be honest to take this as evidence that it is not the case that we ought to do it.

Moreover,
THE OBLIGATION TO ASSIST ISN'T WRONG, PEOPLE JUST AREN'T GENEROUS ENOUGH.
Danny Soccia, Professor of Philosophy at New Mexico State University, 1990


On the face of it, it is not obvious why the failure of people to fulfill the requirements of a moral principle should be regarded as a mark against the principle. Some moral theories, like Kant's, assume that certain motivations have intrinsic moral value. A genuinely moral person will act out of respect for the moral law and not from fear of God, a desire for personal gain, or "philanthropic" motives. Now, if people do not in fact act from the motivation that Kant favors, that is surely no objection to his theory. Kant could say that, if everyone acts in accordance with the moral law for egoistic reasons (like the grocer in his Groundwork), that only shows that everyone's actions lack moral worth, not that his moral theory is defective. The same reply can be made in behalf of theories that focus on behavior or states of affairs and assume that any motivation that will consistently produce the required behavior or valuable states of affairs is as good as any other motivation with that effect. According to act utilitarianism, strongly benevolent people will produce more good than people with other motivations will. If everyone were so deficient in benevolence that they seldom produced much happiness for others, that is no embarrassment to act utilitarianism. The utilitarian can say that that only shows how immoral everyone is.

We ought not weigh our sacrifices more heavily than the suffering they can prevent, even though most people do. There is no morally relevant difference between a burden that I undertake and a harm that I prevent to someone else by doing so. Therefore, people should only consider the aggregate good or bad produced by their actions. This brings us to

CONTENTION 2: INDIVIDUALS ARE MORALLY OBLIGATED TO PREVENT BAD OUTCOMES IF THE COST IS NOT COMPARABLY SIGNIFICANT.
Peter Singer, Philosopher and Professor at Princeton University, 1972


My next point is this: if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it. By "without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance" I mean without causing anything else comparably bad to happen, or doing something that is wrong in itself, or failing to promote some moral good, comparable in significance to the bad thing that we can prevent. This principle seems almost as uncontroversial as the last one. It requires us only to prevent what is bad, and to promote what is good, and it requires this of us only when we can do it without sacrificing anything that is, from the moral point of view, comparably important. I could even, as far as the application of my argument to the Bengal emergency is concerned, qualify the point so as to make it: if it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it. An application of this principle would be as follows: if I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out. This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing.
If we do not prevent a very bad outcome by assisting people in need when the sacrifice to us is less significant, we are biased by self-interest and therefore immoral. Note that this argument does not rely on a consequentialist or utilitarian worldview. Even in a deontological framework, our motivations ought to be based on an equal consideration of people in need and the importance of our assistance to them.

**CONTENTION 3: ASSISTING PEOPLE IN NEED MAXIMIZES GOOD OUTCOMES.**

A. PEOPLE IN NEED BENEFIT FROM ASSISTANCE.

ARGUMENTS THAT ACTING OUT OF SELF INTEREST BENEFITS PEOPLE IN NEED ARE BASED ON FLAWED ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT INVISIBLE HANDS.

Danny Soccia, Professor of Philosophy at New Mexico State University, 1990


The act utilitarian might reject (c), the claim that her theory demands great self-sacrifice, for the following reasons. Edmund Burke thought (and many twentieth-century conservatives continue to think) that busybody do-gooders bent on social reform tend to do more harm than do people who mind their own business. Thomas Malthus thought that charity for the poor, weak, and hungry does more harm than good in the long run because it only reinforces laziness and dependence on others, and more importantly, because it only produces more hungry mouths in the future. At the heart of such conservative thinking lies the faith that there are "invisible hands" at work in society-hands which guarantee that millions of uncoordinated egoistic acts will have better consequences than millions of semi-coordinated self-sacrificing acts would. Although such faith was common among utilitarians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is not so common today. Once it is recognized that there are at least as many prisoner's dilemmas in the social world as there are invisible hands, it becomes hard to sustain the faith that this objection to (c) requires.

B: INDIVIDUALS MAXIMIZE THEIR WELFARE BY ASSISTING OTHERS.
THOSE WHO FAIL TO ASSIST PEOPLE IN NEED ARE HARMING THEMSELVES. Rudolph Vanterpool, Philosophy Professor at California State University Dominguez Hills, 1988


The practical upshot of the mutuality of interest principle is that, ultimately, it does not pay to be a “Bad Samaritan.” Even the “Bad Samaritan” can imagine being in need someday, in which case he or she would want (and might even expect) anyone in the vicinity to act as a “Good Samaritan.” This potential role reversal rationale effectively says to misers, bigots, prodigals, and indolents that in civilized society “bad faith” dealings such as cheating and freeloading don’t pay off in the long run. The selection process operates against freeloaders and the like, by at some point causing them to be shunned as trading partners to be counted on. Failure to pursue goals of reciprocal altruism, in a prudential manner, might furthermore be deemed symbolic of a life which is an inward mockery of itself. Camus at one place paints the picture of a person who refuses to aid another in distress as tantamount to an outward expression of a covert betrayal of others, a response which in actuality is only an aspect of inner self-betrayal.

Singer and Soccia in Contention 1 show that individuals typically do not assist people in need when doing so is not obligatory. Therefore, the harm to those individuals caused by the self-betrayal of failing to assist can only be prevented in the affirmative world. Further, any benefit that results from individuals assisting others in need is maximized by affirming, since at least some people will be motivated to assist by the moral obligation to do so.

C. A DUTY TO ASSIST PEOPLE IN NEED BENEFITS SOCIETY.
IT IS IN THE COLLECTIVE SOCIETAL INTEREST TO BASE JUSTICE ON GOOD SAMARITANISM.

Rudolph Vanterpool, Philosophy Professor at California State University Dominguez Hills, 1988

What I see emerging here is a contention on the part of Hume that it is in our collective societal interest to devise systems of justice which would ensure some semblance of Good Samaritanism. To this end, the proposes, “’tis only from the selfishness and confin’d generosity of men, along with the scanty provision nature has made for his wants, that justice derives its origin… ‘Twas therefore a concern for our own, and the publick interest, which made us establish the laws of justice” (T 495-96). Such an overall plan or social scheme is felt to be highly conducive, indeed absolutely requisite, both to the support of society and the well-being of every individual. Let us refer to the motivation behind this felt-sense of social justice as the ‘mutuality of interest’ principle. In effect, Hume is arguing that certain impressions (i.e., lively sensations of felt-human needs) give rise to a sense of justice. Of course, the Humean sense of justice is not in itself natural to the human mind. It is a cultivated sense of justice in civilized society, arising from artifice and human convention. On this analysis, rational self-interested persons soon discover that a mechanism to rationally safeguard and promote commonly felt interests is mutually profitable. Prudential considerations teach us that it is infinitely advantageous to the whole society to induce conduct that will more equitably distribute benefits and burdens across the social spectrum. Every member of society would be sensible to this interest, and everyone would express it to his fellows. Social justice, as such, establishes itself by a sense of interest, supposed to be commonly shared, where every single act respecting distributions of benefits and burdens is performed in expectation that others are to perform likewise.

This contention has shown that people in need, the people who assist them, and society as a whole all benefit most when assistance is morally obligatory. This has two impacts. First, it shows that all groups involved are best off, which maximizes aggregate welfare and minimizes bad outcomes, when assistance is obligatory. Contention 2 shows that this promotes fairness. Second, this impacts directly to fairness since no one is better off at the expense of someone else’s welfare.
INDIVIDUALS HAVE MORAL OBLIGATIONS TO MINIMIZE BAD OUTCOMES

1. INDIVIDUALS ARE MORALLY OBLIGATED TO PREVENT BAD OUTCOMES IF THE COST IS NOT COMPARABLY SIGNIFICANT.

Peter Singer, Philosopher and Professor at Princeton University, 1972
FAMINE, AFFLUENCE, AND MORALITY, accessed 5/18/2011
<http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/1972----.htm>

My next point is this: if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it. By "without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance" I mean without causing anything else comparably bad to happen, or doing something that is wrong in itself, or failing to promote some moral good, comparable in significance to the bad thing that we can prevent. This principle seems almost as uncontroversial as the last one. It requires us only to prevent what is bad, and to promote what is good, and it requires this of us only when we can do it without sacrificing anything that is, from the moral point of view, comparably important. I could even, as far as the application of my argument to the Bengal emergency is concerned, qualify the point so as to make it: if it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it. An application of this principle would be as follows: if I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out. This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing.

2. FAILURE TO PREVENT EVIL IS THE SAME AS CAUSING EVIL.

John Stewart Mill, Philosopher, 1863

If any one does an act hurtful to others, there is a prima facie case for punishing him, by law, or, where legal penalties are not safely applicable, by general disapprobation. There are also many positive acts for the benefit of others, which he may rightfully be compelled to perform; such as, to give evidence in a court of justice; to bear his fair share in the common defence, or in any other joint work necessary to the interest of the society of which he enjoys the protection; and to perform certain acts of individual beneficence, such as saving a fellow-creature's life, or interposing to protect the defenceless against ill-usage, things which whenever it is obviously a man's duty to do, he may rightfully be made responsible to society for not doing. A person may cause evil to others not only by his actions but by his inaction, and in either case he is justly accountable to them for the injury.
3. INDIVIDUALS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR CHOICES WHENEVER THOSE CHOICES AFFECT OTHERS’ INTERESTS.

John Stewart Mill, Philosopher, 1860


Though society is not founded on a contract, and though no good purpose is answered by inventing a contract in order to deduce social obligations from it, every one who receives the protection of society owes a return for the benefit, and the fact of living in society renders it indispensable that each should be bound to observe a certain line of conduct towards the rest. This conduct consists, first, in not injuring the interests of one another; or rather certain interests, which, either by express legal provision or by tacit understanding, ought to be considered as rights; and secondly, in each person's bearing his share (to be fixed on some equitable principle) of the labors and sacrifices incurred for defending the society or its members from injury and molestation. These conditions society is justified in enforcing, at all costs to those who endeavor to withhold fulfilment. Nor is this all that society may do. The acts of an individual may be hurtful to others, or wanting in due consideration for their welfare, without going the length of violating any of their constituted rights. The offender may then be justly punished by opinion, though not by law. As soon as any part of a person's conduct affects prejudicially the interests of others, society has jurisdiction over it, and the question whether the general welfare will or will not be promoted by interfering with it, becomes open to discussion.
IMPARTIALITY GOOD

1. INDIVIDUALS SHOULD BE IMPARTIAL BETWEEN THEIR INTERESTS AND THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS.
John Stewart Mill, Philosopher, 1863
I must again repeat, what the assailants of utilitarianism seldom have the justice to acknowledge, that the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator. In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbour as yourself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality. As the means of making the nearest approach to this ideal, utility would enjoin, first, that laws and social arrangements should place the happiness, or (as speaking practically it may be called) the interest, of every individual, as nearly as possible in harmony with the interest of the whole; and secondly, that education and opinion, which have so vast a power over human character, should so use that power as to establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole; especially between his own happiness and the practice of such modes of conduct, negative and positive, as regard for the universal happiness prescribes; so that not only he may be unable to conceive the possibility of happiness to himself, consistently with conduct opposed to the general good, but also that a direct impulse to promote the general good may be in every individual one of the habitual motives of action, and the sentiments connected therewith may fill a large and prominent place in every human being's sentient existence.
1. THE DUTY TO ASSIST FOLLOWS INEVITABLY FROM A CONSEQUENTIALIST PERSPECTIVE.
Liam B. Murphy, Professor of law and philosophy at NYU, 1993
The simplest principle of beneficence requires each person to perform the action, of those
available to her, that will make the outcome best. When it stands alone, unencumbered by
deontological constraints or special obligations, this Simple Principle of Beneficence, or Simple
Principle, is equivalent to consequentialism.

2. BENEFICENCE IS THE SUPREME PRINCIPLE OF UTILITARIAN ETHICS.
Tom Beauchamp, Philosophy Professor at Georgetown University, 2008
“The Principle of Beneficence in Applied Ethics,” STANFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
PHILOSOPHY, accessed 7/12/2011 < http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/principle-beneficence/>.In Utilitarianism, John Stuart Mill argues that moral philosophers have left a train of
unconvincing and incompatible theories that can be coherently unified by a single standard of
beneficence that allows us to decide objectively what is right and wrong. The principle of utility,
or the “greatest happiness” principle, he declares the basic foundation of morals: Actions are
right in proportion to their promotion of happiness, and wrong as they produce the reverse. This
is a straightforward, and potentially very demanding, principle of beneficence: That action or
practice is right (when compared with any alternative action or practice) if it leads to the greatest
possible balance of beneficial consequences or to the least possible balance of bad consequences.
Mill also holds that the concepts of duty, obligation, and right are subordinated to, and
determined by, that which maximizes benefits and minimizes harmful outcomes. The principle of
utility is presented by Mill as an absolute or preeminent principle—thus making beneficence the
one and only supreme principle of ethics. It justifies all subordinate rules and is not simply one
among a number of prima facie principles.
PROXIMITY DOES NOT DETERMINE OBLIGATIONS

1. WE ARE LESS LIKELY TO ASSIST PEOPLE FAR AWAY FROM US, BUT WE STILL OUGHT TO.
Peter Singer, Philosopher and Professor at Princeton University, 1972
FAMINE, AFFLUENCE, AND MORALITY, accessed 5/18/2011
<http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/1972----.htm>
It makes no moral difference whether the person I can help is a neighbor's child ten yards from me or a Bengali whose name I shall never know, ten thousand miles away. Secondly, the principle makes no distinction between cases in which I am the only person who could possibly do anything and cases in which I am just one among millions in the same position. I do not think I need to say much in defense of the refusal to take proximity and distance into account. The fact that a person is physically near to us, so that we have personal contact with him, may make it more likely that we shall assist him, but this does not show that we ought to help him rather than another who happens to be further away. If we accept any principle of impartiality, universalizability, equality, or whatever, we cannot discriminate against someone merely because he is far away from us (or we are far away from him).

2. THE MORAL POINT OF VIEW REQUIRES US TO LOOK BEYOND THE INTERESTS OF OUR OWN SOCIETY.
Peter Singer, Philosopher and Professor at Princeton University, 1972
FAMINE, AFFLUENCE, AND MORALITY, accessed 5/18/2011
<http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/1972----.htm>
In a well-known article, J. O. Urmson suggests that the imperatives of duty, which tell us what we must do, as distinct from what it would be good to do but not wrong not to do, function so as to prohibit behavior that is intolerable if men are to live together in society. This may explain the origin and continued existence of the present division between acts of duty and acts of charity. Moral attitudes are shaped by the needs of society, and no doubt society needs people who will observe the rules that make social existence tolerable. From the point of view of a particular society, it is essential to prevent violations of norms against killing, stealing, and so on. It is quite inessential, however, to help people outside one's own society. If this is an explanation of our common distinction between duty and supererogation, however, it is not a justification of it. The moral point of view requires us to look beyond the interests of our own society. Previously, as I have already mentioned, this may hardly have been feasible, but it is quite feasible now. From the moral point of view, the prevention of the starvation of millions of people outside our society must be considered at least as pressing as the upholding of property norms within our society.
3. TECHNOLOGY AND AN INTERCONNECTED GLOBAL COMMUNITY MAKE EFFORTS TO ASSIST VERY EFFECTIVE.

Peter Singer, Philosopher and Professor at Princeton University, 1972
FAMINE, AFFLUENCE, AND MORALITY, accessed 5/18/2011
<http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/1972----.htm>

Admittedly, it is possible that we are in a better position to judge what needs to be done to help a person near to us than one far away, and perhaps also to provide the assistance we judge to be necessary. If this were the case, it would be a reason for helping those near to us first. This may once have been a justification for being more concerned with the poor in one's town than with famine victims in India. Unfortunately for those who like to keep their moral responsibilities limited, instant communication and swift transportation have changed the situation. From the moral point of view, the development of the world into a "global village" has made an important, though still unrecognized, difference to our moral situation. Expert observers and supervisors, sent out by famine relief organizations or permanently stationed in famine-prone areas, can direct our aid to a refugee in Bengal almost as effectively as we could get it to someone in our own block. There would seem, therefore, to be no possible justification for discriminating on geographical grounds.
EGOISM BAD

1. SELF INTEREST DOES NOT DETERMINE WHAT WE OUGHT TO DO.
Nevertheless, when all considerations of this sort have been taken into account, the conclusion remains: we ought to be preventing as much suffering as we can without sacrificing something else of comparable moral importance. This conclusion is one which we may be reluctant to face. I cannot see, though, why it should be regarded as a criticism of the position for which I have argued, rather than a criticism of our ordinary standards of behavior. Since most people are self-interested to some degree, very few of us are likely to do everything that we ought to do. It would, however, hardly be honest to take this as evidence that it is not the case that we ought to do it.

2. ARGUMENTS THAT ACTING OUT OF SELF INTEREST BENEFITS PEOPLE IN NEED ARE BASED ON FLAWED ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT INVISIBLE HANDS.
The act utilitarian might reject (c), the claim that her theory demands great self-sacrifice, for the following reasons. Edmund Burke thought (and many twentieth-century conservatives continue to think) that busybody do-gooders bent on social reform tend to do more harm than do people who mind their own business. Thomas Malthus thought that charity for the poor, weak, and hungry does more harm than good in the long run because it only reinforces laziness and dependence on others, and more importantly, because it only produces more hungry mouths in the future. At the heart of such conservative thinking lies the faith that there are "invisible hands" at work in society-hands which guarantee that millions of uncoordinated egoistic acts will have better consequences than millions of semi-coordinated self-sacrificing acts would. Although such faith was common among utilitarians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is not so common today. Once it is recognized that there are at least as many prisoner's dilemmas in the social world as there are invisible hands, it becomes hard to sustain the faith that this objection to (c) requires.
3. RECIPROCAL BENEVOLENCE IS EVOLUTIONARILY STABLE; EGOISM IS NOT.
Danny Soccia, Professor of Philosophy at New Mexico State University, 1990
It is also a mistake to suppose that natural selection could only produce creatures genetically disposed to be ruthlessly egoistic in their dealings with nonrelatives; evolution can produce "reciprocal altruism." Someone with reciprocity motivations will be helpful and feel grateful to people who have helped her, even if taking advantage of their kindness ("playing them for suckers") is in her self-interest. This differentiates reciprocity from pure egoism." On the other hand, she will try to harm (or at least refuse to help) and feel vindictiveness toward those who have harmed her (or failed to reciprocate her help), even if helping (or not harming) would maximize total happiness. This differentiates reciprocity from pure benevolence. (Yet like strong benevolence, reciprocity might well lead to very large sacrifices of personal welfare: it would lead a soldier whose life has repeatedly been saved by the bravery of his comrades to risk his own life for theirs.) The biological explanation why we have reciprocity rather than strong benevolence motivations is that the former but not the latter is an "evolutionarily stable strategy." A community of genetically programmed saints could be invaded by mutant or immigrant egoists, who then flourish by taking advantage of the saints. A reciprocator, on the other hand, having been played for a sucker once by an exploitative egoist, will not allow himself to be exploited by that egoist again. Once reciprocators (with the ability to distinguish reciprocators from egoists) become numerous enough, the gene for reciprocity cannot be displaced by a gene for pure egoism. Indeed, once there are enough reciprocators in a group, it is pure, undisguised egoism that is doomed to extinction.
AT: FAIR SHARE

1. OBJECTIONS TO ASSISTANCE BASED ON FAIRNESS ARE UNSOUND.
Matthew Hanser, Philosophy Professor at University of California Santa Barbara, 1998
Suppose, then, that ten swimmers are in danger of drowning in a swimming pool, and that ten
potential rescuers stand nearby. Nine of the potential rescuers make it clear that they have no
intention of rescuing anyone; only X, the remaining rescuer, is willing to save the swimmers.
According to the Make a Difference Principle, X must save all ten swimmers himself. By
contrast, according to the Fair Share Principle X need save only one. Most would agree that
given the circumstances, X is morally required to save all ten swimmers himself. It would be
scandalous of him to walk away after saving just one, saying ‘I’ve done my share; let the others
save the rest!’ At least in certain circumstances, then, agents can be morally required to do more
than their fair share of aiding. It follows that both the Fairness Objection to the Make a
Difference Principle is unsound and that the Fair Share Principle should be rejected.

2. INDIVIDUALS ARE OBLIGATED TO ASSIST PEOPLE IN NEED EVEN IF
THERE ARE OTHERS WHO COULD DO IT.
Peter Singer, Philosopher and Professor at Princeton University, 1972
FAMINE, AFFLUENCE, AND MORALITY, accessed 5/18/2011
<http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/1972----.htm>
There may be a greater need to defend the second implication of my principle - that the fact that
there are millions of other people in the same position, in respect to the Bengali refugees, as I
am, does not make the situation significantly different from a situation in which I am the only
person who can prevent something very bad from occurring. Again, of course, I admit that there
is a psychological difference between the cases; one feels less guilty about doing nothing if one
can point to others, similarly placed, who have also done nothing. Yet this can make no real
difference to our moral obligations. Should I consider that I am less obliged to pull the drowning
child out of the pond if on looking around I see other people, no further away than I am, who
have also noticed the child but are doing nothing? One has only to ask this question to see the
absurdity of the view that numbers lessen obligation. It is a view that is an ideal excuse for
inactivity; unfortunately most of the major evils - poverty, overpopulation, pollution - are
problems in which everyone is almost equally involved.
3. A FAIR DISTRIBUTION OF DUTIES DOESN’T MAKE SENSE UNLESS MORALITY IS A COLLECTIVE PROJECT.
Liam B. Murphy, Professor of law and philosophy at NYU, 1993
We must now say more about the central intuitive idea behind the Compliance Condition: that one should not be required to do more than one's fair share of the demands of beneficence. It may be wondered, first, whether there are such things as fair shares of the demands of a moral principle. The idea of "doing my fair share" emerges out of a concern with the distribution of the demands of moral theories. Elsewhere I discuss various possible views about what fairness requires of a moral theory in its distribution of demands among agents. To begin with, we must, obviously enough, presuppose a conception of morality that makes sense of the idea that demands can be distributed among people; we must see morality or a moral theory as presenting people with a collective project. If, for example, I saw my morality as emerging from my own radical choices, I would not even be able to ask whether my morality made greater demands on me than on someone else—it would only make demands on me. And on such a conception there could be no interest in whether others have more or less demanded of them by their moralities than I do by mine.
MORALITY

1. SYMPATHY IS A FUNDAMENTAL PRECONDITION OF MORALITY.
   Rudolph Vanterpool, Philosophy Professor at California State University Dominguez Hills, 1988
   HUME ON THE “DUTY” OF BENEVOLENCE, pp. 94-95, accessed 7/12/2011 <
   The feeling which lies at the root of moral approbation Hume calls sympathy. Sympathy is a
   fellow-feeling with the happiness as well as with the misery of others; it “is a very powerful
   principle in human nature” producing our sentiment of morals. This feeling is so much a part of
   our nature that it furnishes a satisfactory explanation for the approval we commonly give to
   meritorious personal qualities. However, even though sympathy is an original natural propensity
   it is also true that it is easier to show limited sympathy—e.g., sympathy towards close relatives
   and friends—than it is to show extensive sympathy (e.g., fellow-feeling for complete strangers).
   Hume’s main point, of course, is that sympathy, however vivid, faint, or indifferent its
   manifestation, is a precondition of morality. Such sympathy, far from being merely reducible to
   infectious emotional communication (or passive transference of feelings) is, instead, a form of
   active imagination projection of oneself into the other person’s situation.

2. BENEVOLENCE IS ROOTED IN ALTRUISM AND COMMON
   BELONGINGNESS.
   Rudolph Vanterpool, Philosophy Professor at California State University Dominguez Hills, 1988
   HUME ON THE “DUTY” OF BENEVOLENCE, p. 93, accessed 7/12/2011 <
   The propensity to act benevolently is quite closely linked to human altruistic concerns—even if it
   is the case that we are not universal altruists, generally speaking. Benevolence, we may say, is a
   virtue to the extent that it is a response to some identifiable need upon noticing the adverse
   circumstance of a fellow-member of the human race with whom we sense a common
   belongingness.

3. SACRIFICE IS THE HIGHEST HUMAN VIRTUE.
   John Stewart Mill, Philosopher, 1863
   Though it is only in a very imperfect state of the world's arrangements that any one can best serve the
   happiness of others by the absolute sacrifice of his own, yet so long as the world is in that imperfect state,
   I fully acknowledge that the readiness to make such a sacrifice is the highest virtue which can be found in
   man. I will add, that in this condition the world, paradoxical as the assertion may be, the conscious ability
   to do without happiness gives the best prospect of realising, such happiness as is attainable. For nothing
   except that consciousness can raise a person above the chances of life, by making him feel that, let fate
   and fortune do their worst, they have not power to subdue him: which, once felt, frees him from excess of
   anxiety concerning the evils of life, and enables him, like many a Stoic in the worst times of the Roman
   Empire, to cultivate in tranquillity the sources of satisfaction accessible to him, without concerning
   himself about the uncertainty of their duration, any more than about their inevitable end.

4. DUTY IS THE MORALLY BEST MOTIVE.
Further, the sense of duty is the morally best motive. Many will question this, and feel a preference for acts springing from love, from a direct interest in the well-being of a particular person or persons, over those dictated by the "cold," hard," and "rigid" sense of duty. But let us reflect. Suppose that someone is inclined to do act A from a sense of duty and another, incompatible, act B from love for a particular person. Ex hypothesi. he thinks he will not be doing his duty in doing B. Can we possibly say that he will be acting better if he does what he thinks not his duty than if he does what he thinks is his duty? Evidently not. What those who hold this view mean by "sense of duty" is the inclination to obey a traditional, conventional code rather than the warm impulses of the heart. But what is properly meant by the sense of duty is the thought that one ought to act in a certain way, not the thought that one has been brought up to or is expected to act in a certain way. And it seems clear that when a genuine sense of duty is in conflict with any other motive we must recognize its precedence. If you seriously think you ought to do A, you are bound to think you will be acting morally worse in doing anything else instead.
1. IT IS IN THE COLLECTIVE SOCIETAL INTEREST TO BASEJUSTICE ON GOOD SAMARITANISM.

Rudolph Vanterpool, Philosophy Professor at California State University Dominguez Hills, 1988


What I see emerging here is a contention on the part of Hume that it is in our collective societal interest to devise systems of justice which would ensure some semblance of Good Samaritanism. To this end, he proposes, “‘tis only from the selfishness and confin’d generosity of men, along with the scanty provision nature has made for his wants, that justice derives its origin… ‘Twas therefore a concern for our own, and the publick interest, which made us establish the laws of justice” (T 495-96). Such an overall plan or social scheme is felt to be highly conducive, indeed absolutely requisite, both to the support of society and the well-being of every individual. Let us refer to the motivation behind this felt-sense of social justice as the ‘mutuality of interest’ principle. In effect, Hume is arguing that certain impressions (i.e., lively sensations of felt-human needs) give rise to a sense of justice. Of course, the Humean sense of justice is not in itself natural to the human mind. It is a cultivated sense of justice in civilized society, arising from artifice and human convention. On this analysis, rational self-interested persons soon discover that a mechanism to rationally safeguard and promote commonly felt interests is mutually profitable. Prudential considerations teach us that it is infinitely advantageous to the whole society to induce conduct that will more equitably distribute benefits and burdens across the social spectrum. Every member of society would be sensible to this interest, and everyone would express it to his fellows. Social justice, as such, establishes itself by a sense of interest, supposed to be commonly shared, where every single act respecting distributions of benefits and burdens is performed in expectation that others are to perform likewise.
AT: DUTY TO ASSIST IS TOO DEMANDING

1. THE OBLIGATION TO ASSIST ISN’T WRONG, PEOPLE JUST AREN’T GENEROUS ENOUGH.
Danny Soccia, Professor of Philosophy at New Mexico State University, 1990
On the face of it, it is not obvious why the failure of people to fulfill the requirements of a moral principle should be regarded as a mark against the principle. Some moral theories, like Kant's, assume that certain motivations have intrinsic moral value. A genuinely moral person will act out of respect for the moral law and not from fear of God, a desire for personal gain, or “philanthropic” motives. Now, if people do not in fact act from the motivation that Kant favors, that is surely no objection to his theory. Kant could say that, if everyone acts in accordance with the moral law for egoistic reasons (like the grocer in his Groundwork), that only shows that everyone's actions lack moral worth, not that his moral theory is defective. The same reply can be made in behalf of theories that focus on behavior or states of affairs and assume that any motivation that will consistently produce the required behavior or valuable states of affairs is as good as any other motivation with that effect. According to act utilitarianism, strongly benevolent people will produce more good than people with other motivations will. If everyone were so deficient in benevolence that they seldom produced much happiness for others, that is no embarrassment to act utilitarianism. The utilitarian can say that that only shows how immoral everyone is.

2. BENEVOLENCE IS A DUTY, BUT NOT AN OVERDEMANDING ONE.
John Stewart Mill, Philosopher, 1863
The objectors to utilitarianism cannot always be charged with representing it in a discreditable light. On the contrary, those among them who entertain anything like a just idea of its disinterested character, sometimes find fault with its standard as being too high for humanity. They say it is exacting too much to require that people shall always act from the inducement of promoting the general interests of society. But this is to mistake the very meaning of a standard of morals, and confound the rule of action with the motive of it. It is the business of ethics to tell us what are our duties, or by what test we may know them; but no system of ethics requires that the sole motive of all we do shall be a feeling of duty; on the contrary, ninety-nine hundredths of all our actions are done from other motives, and rightly so done, if the rule of duty does not condemn them. It is the more unjust to utilitarianism that this particular misapprehension should be made a ground of objection to it, inasmuch as utilitarian moralists have gone beyond almost all others in affirming that the motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action, though much with the worth of the agent. He who saves a fellow creature from drowning does what is morally right, whether his motive be duty, or the hope of being paid for his trouble; he who betrays the friend that trusts him, is guilty of a crime, even if his object be to serve another friend to whom he is under greater obligations.
SELFISHNESS HARMS THE ACTOR

1. THOSE WHO FAIL TO ASSIST PEOPLE IN NEED ARE HARMING THEMSELVES.

Rudolph Vanterpool, Philosophy Professor at California State University Dominguez Hills, 1988
The practical upshot of the mutuality of interest principle is that, ultimately, it does not pay to be
a “Bad Samaritan.” Even the “Bad Samaritan” can imagine being in need someday, in which
case he or she would want (and might even expect) anyone in the vicinity to act as a “Good
Samaritan.” This potential role reversal rationale effectively says to misers, bigots, prodigals, and
indolents that in civilized society “bad faith” dealings such as cheating and freeloaders don’t pay
off in the long run. The selection process operates against freeloaders and the like, by at some
point causing them to be shunned as trading partners to be counted on. Failure to pursue goals of
reciprocal altruism, in a prudential manner, might furthermore be deemed symbolic of a life
which is an inward mockery of itself. Camus at one place paints the picture of a person who
refuses to aid another in distress as tantamount to an outward expression of a covert betrayal of
others, a response which in actuality is only an aspect of inner self-betrayal.
AMOUNT OF SACRIFICE DOES NOT DETERMINE OBLIGATION

1. COST TO THE AGENT DOES NOT DETERMINE WHETHER SHE IS OBLIGATED TO HELP.
Liam B. Murphy, Professor of law and philosophy at NYU, 1993
In contexts similar to ours, Peter Singer and Shelly Kagan have both discussed an example of a
person being able to rescue, at negligible cost, a child drowning in a lake. Kagan uses this
example to illustrate his view that commonsense morality will require me to promote the good
where the cost to me is slight, but typically not where the cost to me is high, as it can be in the
case of famine relief. But the example can be easily modified into an atypical case. Suppose that
I am walking through a park on my way to the airport. If I do not get there on time, I will miss
my flight and, given the cheap ticket I have, will lose both my holiday and my money. I see a
child drowning in the lake. I will lose an hour if I wade out there and bring her back; this means I
will miss my flight. It seems that I have no choice but to curse my bad luck and wade in. If I am
required to do this but not to contribute the same amount of time and money to famine relief
(suppose that I have already contributed a modest amount this year), then it cannot be the cost to
me that explains this difference. This actually remains true if we vary the case to lower the cost
to the agent: I stand to lose the cost of my new suit and shoes if I jump in the mud to rescue the
child, but perhaps I am not required to give an equivalent extra amount to famine relief. Again,
the cost to me could not explain the difference in requirements.
NEG
1. CASE

VALUE: The value is morality. First, since the resolution is a question of moral permissibility, this is the most logical and applicable value. Second, moral systems are designed to reflect and promote our ideals, so morality encompasses any other value. Third, the ability to develop and abide by moral principles is a defining characteristic of humanity and the source of much of our inherent worth.

CRITERION: The criterion is human agency, defined as each person’s ability to determine and take responsibility for his or her actions and their outcomes. Agency is a necessary component of morality for four reasons. First, morality concerns right and wrong acts, and these concepts do not make sense if individuals are not considered responsible for their actions. Second, people can only choose to act morally when their agency is protected. Third, acknowledging people’s agency gives them a sense of purpose. Many people would reject a moral system that denied this sense of purpose, which would weaken its effectiveness and likely lead to conflict. Fourth, disregarding a person’s agency denies that his or her life has intrinsic worth. Once a person’s has been stripped of his or her agency, any form of mistreatment, violence, or neglect can be justified. This is the essence of Kant’s argument that the fundamental human right to be treated as an end and not a means follows from a rational individual’s autonomy.

CONTENTION 1: THOSE IN NEED MUST TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR CHOICES.

IT IS A FUNDAMENTAL MORAL PRINCIPLE THAT PEOPLE SHOULD BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR ACTIONS.
John Kekes, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University at Albany, 2002
Here is, then, another ethical principle that reasonable and ethically committed people will accept: people should be held responsible for the easily foreseeable consequences of their voluntary actions. Let us call this the Responsibility-Principle. It is a simple principle, so there is no need for a great deal of explanation of it. If I decide to do something when nothing forces me, if I understand both the decision and the surrounding circumstances, and if a normally intelligent person could be expected to see that the action is likely to bring about certain specific results, then it is justified to praise or blame, reward or punish, approve or condemn me for the action. The Responsibility-Principle is obviously a basic ethical principle for without it we could not hold people morally or legally accountable. Without the principle the systems of ethics and law, as we presently understand them, would have to be fundamentally revised.
People in need may not always be completely responsible for their situations, but the individuals that the aff would require to assist them certainly are not. Intervening to assist people in need reduces their agency by eliminating the consequences of their actions. Further, if people come to expect assistance, they may develop dependence on that aid, which erases their agency and independence.

**CONTENTION 2: REQUIRING INDIVIDUALS TO ASSIST DESTROYS THEIR AGENCY.**

A. IMPOSING A MORAL DUTY TO ASSIST DOES NOT RESPECT INDIVIDUALS AS SEPARATE PERSONS.

Robert Nozick, Philosopher and professor at Harvard University, 1974
ANARCHY, STATE, AND UTOPIA, accessed 5/20/2011

Individually, we each sometimes choose to undergo some pain or sacrifice for a greater benefit or to avoid a greater harm: we go to the dentist to avoid worse suffering later; we do some unpleasant work for its results; some persons diet to improve their health or looks; some save money to support themselves when they are older. In each case, some cost is borne for the sake of the greater overall good, Why not, similarly, hold that some persons have to bear some costs that benefit other persons more, for the sake of the overall social good? But there is no social entity with a good that undergoes some sacrifice for its own good. There are only individual people, different individual people, with their own individual lives. Using one of these people for the benefit of others, uses him and benefits the others. Nothing more. What happens is that something is done to him for the sake of others. Talk of an overall social good covers this up. (Intentionally?) To use a person in this way does not sufficiently respect and take account of the fact that he is a separate person, that his is the only life he has. He does not get some overbalancing good from his sacrifice, and no one is entitled to force this upon him-least of all a state or government that claims his allegiance (as other individuals do not) and that therefore scrupulously must be neutral between its citizens.

B. AFFIRMING PREVENTS GENUINE PROJECTS AND RELATIONSHIPS.

Decisions to assist is based on impartial duty, rather than free choice, are hollow and insincere. This feeling of insincerity destroys our genuine projects and relationships, which are a key source of agency and meaning in our lives.

Liam B. Murphy, Professor of law and philosophy at NYU, 1993

The general idea behind the "alienation objection" is that impartial morality makes various demands on our motivations that are incompatible with the motivations necessary for fully valuable personal projects and relationships. One influential claim is that if we can only have projects and relationships when morality "gives" them to us (by saying that they are morally permissible, or that they would bring about the best outcome), then we will not be able to see our
projects and relationships as having intrinsic value, and as a result will not be able to have genuine projects and relationships at all.

C. DEMANDING THAT PEOPLE BE MORE BENEVOLENT THAN THEY ARE IS A WASTE OF TIME AND ACTUALLY ALIENATES THEM FROM MORALITY. Danny Soccia, Professor of Philosophy at New Mexico State University, 1990


A "single-level" act utilitarianism says that often utility maximization should be one's conscious goal and that moral deliberation should consist in trying to ascertain the best means to this goal. But even this version of utilitarianism only requires one to choose the course of action that produces the most utility from those which are available to her. If psychological determinism is true, one's benevolence energies weak, and there is nothing one can do to increase them, that shrinks the number of actions that are available to one. Suppose that some people possess the magical power to cure diseases and stop earthquakes by snapping their fingers. They can produce a lot more utility than we can. Although act utilitarianism tells them to snap their fingers, it does not tell us to, nor does it tell us that we should try to acquire their magical powers if that would be a waste of time. Now the same point holds for saints and us. They can produce a lot more utility than we can. But if we possess limited sympathies and there is nothing we can do to change that fact about ourselves, then it would be a waste of time for us to try to do the super-benevolent things that they do or to try to acquire their motivations. (Indeed, not just time might be wasted. If we thought that we ought to make saint-like sacrifices but then did not make them, that would lead to guilt feelings. If the guilt were chronic and strong, we might become alienated from morality altogether—much as unenforceable prohibition laws may have encouraged contempt for other laws.)

There are three impacts to this argument. First, affirming will not increase the amount that individuals assist people in need since there is nothing people who are naturally less benevolent can do to change their motivations. Second, the loss of agency an individual faces when she has no choice about her duty or her natural motivations can lead to guilt. Third, making such unreasonable moral demands can alienate people from morality altogether. This is a reason to negate no matter how you evaluate the value/criterion debate because the impact is a direct decrease in moral behavior, which is bad no matter how you define morality. This alienation from morality in general affects all moral choices, not just those concerning assisting people in need.
2. EXTENSIONS

IMPARTIALITY BAD

1. COMPLETE IMPARTIALITY IS UNREASONABLE.
John Kekes, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University at Albany, 2002
ON THE SUPPOSED OBLIGATION TO RELIEVE FAMINE, accessed 5/20/2011 <
http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=126323&jid=PHI&volumeId=
77&issueId=04&aid=126322>.
That ethics need not be committed to the universal point of view is shown by the long tradition
of Aristotelian eudaimonism, which has been an influential ethical theory for over 2000 years
and by value pluralism that is perhaps the most significant contemporary contribution to ethics.
Eudaimonists and pluralists argue that there are many reasonable conceptions of a good life,
many reasonable ways of ranking many reasonable values, and they deny that there is a universal
point of view from which the one true blueprint for reasonable lives, rankings, and values could
be derived. That the universal point of view does not commit one to impartiality is made evident
by the fact that particular obligations to one’s family, friends, political and religious ideals, and
country often take justifiable precedence over impartial obligations that may be owed to
everyone. That impartiality does not require the equal consideration of the interests of all those
who are affected by one’s action is obvious if it is remembered that treating the interests of good
and evil people with equal consideration cannot be a requirement of ethics; that it is often hard to
know what people’s interests are; that treating interests with equal consideration presupposes that
interests are commensurable, which they are not; and that treating people with equal
consideration would often involve a morally highly objectionable form of paternalism.

2. THE DECISION TO ASSIST MUST DEPEND ON CONTEXT.
John Kekes, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University at Albany, 2002
ON THE SUPPOSED OBLIGATION TO RELIEVE FAMINE, accessed 5/20/2011 <
http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=126323&jid=PHI&volumeId=
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The implication is that before it is reasonable to acknowledge the obligation whose violation,
according to Singer, makes us killers, we should ask: are we obliged to prevent very bad things
regardless of whether they are deserved? regardless of consequences? Regardless of whether
people have brought it upon themselves? regardless of people’s refusal of help? regardless of the
likelihood of success? These questions should not be asked in order to justify doing nothing, but
in order to determine whether our obligations would not be better met by concentrating on
helping people in our own context where the answers could more easily be found rather than on
distant contexts in which our unfamiliarity makes it unlikely that we can find reasonable
answers.
3. CONTEXT IS CRUCIAL IN DECIDING WHETHER INDIVIDUALS OUGHT TO ASSIST PEOPLE IN NEED.

John Kekes, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University at Albany, 2002
ON THE SUPPOSED OBLIGATION TO RELIEVE FAMINE, accessed 5/20/2011
<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=126323&jid=PHI&volumeId=77&issueId=04&aid=126322>.

The Prevention-Principle is: ‘if it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance, we ought to do it.’ And he claims that ‘This principle seems uncontroversial.’ (PE, 229). But this claim is patently false, as the following considerations show. First, it obviously makes a great difference who is threatened by the very bad thing. If the very bad thing is defeat in war and it threatens unjust aggressors, or if it is imprisonment for life of justly convicted murderers, then the obligation to prevent it is hardly uncontroversial. Second, it is no less obvious that it is folly to prevent a very bad thing from happening without asking about the consequences of doing so. These consequences concern not those who could prevent it, but those who are prevented from suffering it. The consequences could be even worse than the very bad thing that is prevented. Death is presumably very bad, but if the consequence of preventing it is to live in great pain attached to a life support system, then an increasingly large number of people (including Singer) would not recognize the obligation to prevent it. Third, it is equally obvious that it affects the supposed obligation why the very bad thing is threatening some people. What if they brought it upon themselves by imprudent risks (such as taken by recreational drug users), or by lack of foresight that reasonable people can be expected to have (such as ignoring the notice to evacuate from the way of a flood or a rapidly spreading fire). Is the obligation to prevent the very bad thing that threatens obvious then? Fourth, it is similarly questionable whether the obligation holds if the people threatened by the very bad thing are proud, independent, and refuse help. Fifth, should it not be asked also how good are the chances of preventing the very bad thing from happening? Is it not more reasonable to prevent merely bad things from happening if the chances of success are good, rather than expend efforts and resources by risking the strong likelihood of failure to prevent very bad things?

4. BENEVOLENCE VARIES WIDELY WITH RESPECT TO SEVERAL VARIABLES.

Danny Soccia, Professor of Philosophy at New Mexico State University, 1990

The strength of a person's benevolence is a function of several different variables. One is the size of the sacrifice that one is willing to make and the intensity of one's affective responses: other things being equal, a willingness to make a larger sacrifice and a tendency to be greatly distressed by another's suffering makes one more benevolent. Another variable is whether one needs to see the sufferer with one's own eyes to be motivated to help, or a third-hand account of her plight will do. A third variable is the number one is motivated to help: other things being equal, someone motivated to help only friends and relatives, only members of her own ethnic group, or only members of her own species, is less benevolent than someone willing to help members of a larger class.
MORALITY

1. OBLIGATIONS TO RELIEVE FAMINE ARE BASED ON RAMPANT MORALISM WHICH CHEAPENS MORALITY BY APPLYING IT INAPPROPRIATELY.
John Kekes, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University at Albany, 2002
ON THE SUPPOSED OBLIGATION TO RELIEVE FAMINE, accessed 5/20/2011 <
http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=126323&jid=PHI&volumeId=
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The supposed obligation to relieve famine is based on a rationally indefensible rampant moralism. Moralism is to morality what scientism is to science. Both aberrations involve the illegitimate inflation of reasonable claims either by exaggerating their importance or by extending them to inappropriate contexts. As monetary inflation weakens the currency, so moralistic and scientistic inflation weaken morality and science. Those who value morality and science will oppose moralism and scientism.

2. TREATING AID AS A MORAL DUTY HAS RADICAL IMPLICATIONS THAT UNDERMINE TRADITIONAL CONCEPTS OF MORALITY.
John Kekes, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University at Albany, 2002
ON THE SUPPOSED OBLIGATION TO RELIEVE FAMINE, accessed 5/20/2011 <
http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=126323&jid=PHI&volumeId=
77&issueId=04&aid=126322>.
Singer also makes clear that the obligation to alleviate absolute poverty is very strong. It is not the obligation of charity, which is usually thought to be right to do, but not wrong not to do. The obligation is not just right to do, but also wrong not to do. It is a clear positive duty, and the failure to discharge it is equivalent to killing those whom we could have saved. He says: ‘we ought to give money away, rather than spend it on clothes which we do not need to keep us warm. To do so is not charitable or generous. Nor is it the kind of act which philosophers and theologians have called ‘supererogatory’—an act which it would be good to do but not wrong not to do. On the contrary, we ought to give money away, and it is wrong not to do so.’ Singer realizes that the general acceptance of what he says would lead to ‘the revision of our conceptual moral scheme’ and that it would have ‘radical implications,’ but given the suffering from absolute poverty, nothing less is called for. This makes obvious that what Singer is saying is that if people do not think about their moral obligations the way he does, then they should change the way they think. It will perhaps be seen that it is not inappropriate to describe what Singer is doing as rampant moralism.
1. BASING DUTY ON BENEVOLENCE UNDERMINES JUSTICE.
David Hume, Philosopher, 1740
If public benevolence, therefore, or a regard to the interests of mankind, cannot be the original motive to justice, much less can private benevolence, or a regard to the interests of the party concerned, be this motive. For what if he be my enemy, and has given me just cause to hate him? What if he be a vicious man, and deserves the hatred of all mankind? What if he be a miser, and can make no use of what I would deprive him of? What if he be a profligate debauchee, and would rather receive harm than benefit from large possessions? What if I be in necessity, and have urgent motives to acquire something to my family? In all these cases, the original motive to justice would fail; and consequently the justice itself, and along with it all property, tight, and obligation.
PROPERTY

1. OBLIGATORY ASSISTANCE CONTRADICTS ESSENTIAL PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS.
David Hume, Philosopher, 1740
Men generally fix their affections more on what they are possessed of, than on what they never enjoyed: For this reason, it would be greater cruelty to dispossess a man of any thing, than not to give it him. But who will assert, that this is the only foundation of justice? Besides, we must consider, that the chief reason, why men attach themselves so much to their possessions is, that they consider them as their property, and as secured to them inviolably by the laws of society. But this is a secondary consideration, and dependent on the preceding notions of justice and property.
ASSISTANCE UNDERMINES ACCOUNTABILITY

1. IT IS A FUNDAMENTAL MORAL PRINCIPLE THAT PEOPLE SHOULD BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR ACTIONS.

John Kekes, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University at Albany, 2002
ON THE SUPPOSED OBLIGATION TO RELIEVE FAMINE, accessed 5/20/2011 <
http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=126323&jid=PHI&volumeId=
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Here is, then, another ethical principle that reasonable and ethically committed people will accept: people should be held responsible for the easily foreseeable consequences of their voluntary actions. Let us call this the Responsibility-Principle. It is a simple principle, so there is no need for a great deal of explanation of it. If I decide to do something when nothing forces me, if I understand both the decision and the surrounding circumstances, and if a normally intelligent person could be expected to see that the action is likely to bring about certain specific results, then it is justified to praise or blame, reward or punish, approve or condemn me for the action.

The Responsibility-Principle is obviously a basic ethical principle for without it we could not hold people morally or legally accountable. Without the principle the systems of ethics and law, as we presently understand them, would have to be fundamentally revised.

2. PEOPLE IN NEED ARE OFTEN RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR SITUATIONS.

John Kekes, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University at Albany, 2002
ON THE SUPPOSED OBLIGATION TO RELIEVE FAMINE, accessed 5/20/2011 <
http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=126323&jid=PHI&volumeId=
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Overpopulation is the cumulative result of the combination of individual actions and certain conditions. No individual is responsible for overpopulation. But individuals are responsible for the size of their families. It is an easily foreseeable consequence of their actions that if they increase the size of their families, they will have to divide their resources among more people. If they live in poverty, absolute or other, this will worsen their condition. No reasonable person can fail to see this. If people nevertheless increase the size of their families and end up in or perpetuate their absolute poverty, then they are responsible for their own and their children’s easily foreseeable suffering. Increasing the size of their families is clearly a voluntary action because they could refrain from sexual intercourse, they could enjoy sex without it leading to conception, they could practice such traditional methods of contraception as are available in their context, and they could abort unwanted fetuses. If overpopulation is the major cause of absolute poverty, then it is the imprudent voluntary actions of people living in absolute poverty that is a major contributing factor to their own and their children’s suffering.
1. ASSISTANCE OFTEN WORSENS POVERTY.

John Kekes, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University at Albany, 2002
ON THE SUPPOSED OBLIGATION TO RELIEVE FAMINE, accessed 5/20/2011 <
http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=126323&jid=PHI&volumeld=
77&issueld=04&aid=126322>.

Acknowledging widespread misery is one thing, however, and accepting the obligation to do
something about it—an obligation that would be wrong not to meet—is quite another. The hard
fact is that the aid that may be given will only be window-dressing that produces, at best, short-
term relief and perpetuates the conditions that produce absolute poverty. For the children who
are helped will grow into adults who will have children. The temporary improvement of their
condition will make the population living in absolute poverty grow faster than it would without
aid. And that will make poverty worse in the long run, not better.

2. ASSISTANCE OVERLOOKS THE ROOT CAUSES OF POVERTY.

John Kekes, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University at Albany, 2002
ON THE SUPPOSED OBLIGATION TO RELIEVE FAMINE, accessed 5/20/2011 <
http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=126323&jid=PHI&volumeld=
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Nor will the acceptance of the obligation be seen as reasonable if it is born in mind that it will
strengthen the rule of the stupid or immoral leaders who are more or less responsible for absolute
poverty. It is not easy to behold the pictures of emaciated children that television reports are so
eager to inflict on their viewers. The fact remains, nevertheless, that the aid will produce even
more emaciated children, unless their leaders are replaced by honest and practical reformers and
unless the people who would be the parents of yet unborn miserable children exercise sufficient
self-control to avoid having offspring with doomed lives. Given this fact, we must conclude with
Singer that ‘we have no obligation to make sacrifices that, to the best of our knowledge, have no
prospect of reducing poverty in the long run.’
AUTONOMY

1. IMPOSING A MORAL DUTY TO ASSIST DOES NOT RESPECT INDIVIDUALS AS SEPARATE PERSONS.
Robert Nozick, Philosopher and professor at Harvard University, 1974
ANARCHY, STATE, AND UTOPIA, accessed 5/20/2011
Individually, we each sometimes choose to undergo some pain or sacrifice for a greater benefit or to avoid a greater harm: we go to the dentist to avoid worse suffering later; we do some unpleasant work for its results; some persons diet to improve their health or looks; some save money to support themselves when they are older. In each case, some cost is borne for the sake of the greater overall good. Why not, similarly, hold that some persons have to bear some costs that benefit other persons more, for the sake of the overall social good? But there is no social entity with a good that undergoes some sacrifice for its own good. There are only individual people, different individual people, with their own individual lives. Using one of these people for the benefit of others, uses him and benefits the others. Nothing more. What happens is that something is done to him for the sake of others. Talk of an overall social good covers this up. (Intentionally?) To use a person in this way does not sufficiently respect and take account of the fact that he is a separate person, that his is the only life he has. He does not get some overbalancing good from his sacrifice, and no one is entitled to force this upon him—least of all a state or government that claims his allegiance (as other individuals do not) and that therefore scrupulously must be neutral between its citizens.

2. INDIVIDUALS’ PEROGATIVES PERMIT THEM TO PRIORITIZE THEIR INTERESTS OVER ASSISTING OTHERS.
Liam B. Murphy, Professor of law and philosophy at NYU, 1993
If I am subject to the Simple Principle but also have a prerogative, I am always permitted to promote the best outcome, but I am not always required to do so; for I have the prerogative, when assessing what I am required to do, to give my own interests proportionately greater weight than I give to the interests of others. I can multiply the value of my own interests by some factor when assessing what I am required to do. Obviously, the greater the multiplying factor, the less will be demanded of me.
3. MILL REJECTS DUTIES OF BENEFICENCE AS PATERNALISTIC.
Tom Beauchamp, Philosophy Professor at Georgetown University, 2008
A much-discussed issue about beneficence descends historically from Mill's On Liberty, a work in which Mill inquired into the nature and limits of justifiable social control over the individual. A central line of argument in this book is that the measure of a person's liberty—or autonomy—is the measure of the person's independence from influences that control the person's preferences and behavior. As Mill was aware, various principles assumed to be moral principles have been advanced in order to justify the limitation of individual human liberties. Joel Feinberg, who was philosophically close to Mill's views, has called them “liberty-limiting principles.” Mill defended the view that only one principle validly limits liberty. Feinberg called it the harm principle: A person's liberty (or autonomy) is justifiably restricted to prevent harm to others caused by that person. Mill and Feinberg agreed that the principle of paternalism, which renders acceptable certain attempts to benefit another person when the other does not prefer to receive the benefit, is not a defensible moral principle.
OBLIGATIONS TO ASSIST ARE TOO DEMANDING

1. IMPOSING A DUTY ON PEOPLE TO BE MORE BENEVOLENT THAN THEY ARE IS A WASTE OF TIME AND ACTUALLY ALIENATES THEM FROM MORALITY.
Danny Soccia, Professor of Philosophy at New Mexico State University, 1990
A "single-level" act utilitarianism says that often utility maximization should be one's conscious goal and that moral deliberation should consist in trying to ascertain the best means to this goal. But even this version of utilitarianism only requires one to choose the course of action that produces the most utility from those which are available to her. If psychological determinism is true, one's benevolence energies weak, and there is nothing one can do to increase them, that shrinks the number of actions that are available to one. Suppose that some people possess the magical power to cure diseases and stop earthquakes by snapping their fingers. They can produce a lot more utility than we can. Although act utilitarianism tells them to snap their fingers, it does not tell us to, nor does it tell us that we should try to acquire their magical powers if that would be a waste of time. Now the same point holds for saints and us. They can produce a lot more utility than we can. But if we possess limited sympathies and there is nothing we can do to change that fact about ourselves, then it would be a waste of time for us to try to do the super-benevolent things that they do or to try to acquire their motivations. (Indeed, not just time might be wasted. If we thought that we ought to make saint-like sacrifices but then did not make them, that would lead to guilt feelings. If the guilt were chronic and strong, we might become alienated from morality altogether—much as unenforceable prohibition laws may have encouraged contempt for other laws.) Instead, the act utilitarian can tell us, we should perform that act from the set of acts that people with limited sympathies can perform which will produce the most utility.

2. MORALITY THAT DEMANDS IMPARTIAL ASSISTANCE PRECLUDES GENUINE PROJECTS AND RELATIONSHIPS.
Liam B. Murphy, Professor of law and philosophy at NYU, 1993
The general idea behind the "alienation objection" is that impartial morality makes various demands on our motivations that are incompatible with the motivations necessary for fully valuable personal projects and relationships. One influential claim is that if we can only have projects and relationships when morality "gives" them to us (by saying that they are morally permissible, or that they would bring about the best outcome), then we will not be able to see our projects and relationships as having intrinsic value, and as a result will not be able to have genuine projects and relationships at all.

3. THE PRINCIPLE OF BENEFICENCE DOES NOT SET AN UPPER LIMIT TO THE SACRIFICES ITRequires.
Liam B. Murphy, Professor of law and philosophy at NYU, 1993
Now the "over-demandingness objection," as I will call it, asserts that there is a limit to how
great a sacrifice morality, or at least a principle of beneficence, can legitimately demand of
agents. However high this limit is set, it is of course theoretically possible that the demands of
the Simple Principle will exceed it— for the Simple Principle admits no such limit. But it is also
clear that any limit on required sacrifice that is likely to be suggested will typically be exceeded
in practice. In the face of world poverty, to take the most obvious aspect of the problem, the
Simple Principle would, for most people in the First World, require of each that she give up most
of her energies and resources for the sake of others. Of course the reduction in each agent's
wellbeing is a bad outcome, but the loss to her from giving up most of her time and money to
development aid or famine relief would easily be outweighed by the good achieved. Though it is
not clear exactly what the best way to alleviate world poverty is, there can be no doubt that for
most individuals trying to act according to the Simple Principle today, the loss imposed on them
would be very great.

4. WE CANNOT REQUIRE INDIVIDUALS TO ACT BENEVOLENTLY ON
MOTIVATIONS THAT THEY DO NOT HAVE.
Danny Soccia, Professor of Philosophy at New Mexico State University, 1990
UTILITARIANISM, SOCIOBIOLOGY, AND THE LIMITS OF BENEVOLENCE, pp. 331-
The second objection to act utilitarianism can be viewed as resting on the following
argument: (a) Act utilitarianism says that one ought to be a utility maximizer—someone who performs the act that produces a larger net balance of happiness over unhappiness than is produced by any other act that is available to her. (b) One has a moral
duty to perform some act or be the sort of person disposed to perform certain acts only if
one can do so ("ought implies can"). (c) If one has a duty to maximize utility, then there
will be times when one has a duty to make large sacrifices (time, wealth, even one's life) for the
benefit of complete strangers. (d) One can perform any action whatsoever only if one has
motivational energy of the appropriate kind and strength; possession of the motivational
energy is causally necessary for performance of the action ("psychological determinism"). (e)
Only extremely strong, wide-ranging benevolence could provide one with the motivational
energy necessary to make the large personal sacrifices referred to in (c). (f) Such
benevolence is rare among normal human beings (ones whose personality traits have not been
shaped by a eugenics program or genetic engineering), and sociobiology correctly explains
why this is so. (g) There is nothing one can do significantly to increase the strength of one's
benevolence energies. (h) Therefore, it is not true (at least of the vast majority of people)
that one ought to be a utility maximizer.

5. THE DUTY TO ASSIST WOULD PROHIBIT SPENDING RESOURCES ON
ANYTHING NONESSENTIAL, TAKING EVERYONE TO THE BRINK OF
IMPOVERISHMENT AND SERIOUSLY DISRUPTING THEIR PROJECTS.
Tom Beauchamp, Philosophy Professor at Georgetown University, 2008
This claim implies that morality sometimes requires us to make enormous sacrifices. It would appear that the demand is placed not only on individuals with disposable incomes, but on all reasonably well-off persons, foundations, governments, corporations, etc. For all of these parties, there is a duty to refrain from spending resources on nonessential items, and to provide the available resources or savings to lend assistance to those in urgent need. Frills, fashion, luxuries, and the like are never to determine expenditures, and one is to give to the needy up to the point that one (or one's dependent) would be impoverished. Singer did not regard such conduct as a significant moral sacrifice, only the discharge of an obligation of beneficence. Singer's proposals have struck many as far too demanding, as impracticable, and as a significant departure from the demands of ordinary morality. This assessment generated a number of criticisms, as well as defenses, demanding principles of beneficence such as the one proposed by Singer. Critics continue today to argue that a principle of beneficence that requires persons, governments, and corporations to seriously disrupt their projects and plans in order to benefit the poor and underprivileged exceed the limits of ordinary moral obligations and have no plausible grounding in moral theory. They argue that the line between the obligatory and the supererogatory has been erased by such a principle; in effect, the claim is that an aspirational moral ideal has replaced real moral obligation.

6. THERE IS NO LIMIT TO THE SACRIFICES REQUIRED BY A DUTY TO ASSIST.
Tom Beauchamp, Philosophy Professor at Georgetown University, 2008
Controversy continues today about how to cast the commitments of a principle of beneficence, including how to formulate limits that reduce required costs and impacts on the agent's life plans and that make meeting one's obligations of beneficence a realistic possibility. Various writers have noted that even after persons have donated generous portions of their income, they could still donate more; and, according to any strong principle of beneficence, they should donate more. There seem to be no theoretical or practical limits of donation and sacrifice.
ASSISTANCE IS SUPEREROGATORY

1. ASSISTANCE MAY BE MORALLY IDEAL, BUT IT IS NOT OBLIGATORY.
Rudolph Vanterpool, Philosophy Professor at California State University Dominguez Hills, 1988
Similarly, Hart is of the view that right alongside explicit moral obligations, shared collectively
by members in a society, there exist certain moral ideals. The realization of ideals is pursed, not
in the sense of performing duties, but as part of our human interest in engaging in acts which
tend to promote human happiness and which bring out the best of moral character as well. Such a
doctrine of supererogation puts special emphasis on praiseworthiness. Where the principle
applies, no moral duty is breached for failure to act in pertinent circumstances since the rationale
is that no one has a “moral obligation to do everything that one’s social conscience may tell one
to do.” Any such act is a type “which only exceptionally sensitive regard for others would
prescribe.”

2. SUPEREROGATORY ACTS ARE OPTIONAL—THE AFF MUST PROVE THAT
ASSISTANCE IS OBLIGATORY.
Rudolph Vanterpool, Philosophy Professor at California State University Dominguez Hills, 1988
HUME ON THE “DUTY” OF BENEVOLENCE, p. 93, accessed 7/12/2011 <
This proviso allows us to deem some acts as merely supererogatory in nature—that is, acts
beyond the call of duty. Supererogatory acts are characteristically optional. On the optionality
principle, one who even knowingly fails to advance the good of a fellow-human being in need, at
least potentially leaves the option open for someone else to be a benefactor.

3. BENEFICENCE IS AN IDEAL, NOT A DUTY.
Tom Beauchamp, Philosophy Professor at Georgetown University, 2008
“The Principle of Beneficence in Applied Ethics,” STANFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
Some moral philosophers have claimed that we have no obligations of beneficence at all—only
obligations deriving from specific roles and assignments of duty that are not a part of ordinary
morality. These philosophers hold that beneficent action is virtuous and a commendable moral
ideal, but not an obligation, and thus that persons are not morally deficient if they fail to act
beneficently. An instructive example is found in the moral theory of Bernard Gert, who
maintains that there are no moral rules of beneficence, only moral ideals. In this theory, the only
obligations in the moral life, apart from duties encountered in professional roles and other
specific stations of duty, are captured by moral rules that prohibit causing harm or evil. In Gert’s
theory, the general goal of morality is to minimize evil or harm, not to promote good. Rational
persons can act impartially at all times in regard to all persons with the aim of not causing evil,
he argues, but rational persons cannot impartially promote the good for all persons at all times.
4. GENEROSITY IS A QUESTION OF NEEDS, NOT RIGHTS AND
ENTITLEMENTS, WHICH ARE THE BASIS OF DUTY.
Rudolph Vanterpool, Philosophy Professor at California State University Dominguez Hills, 1988
It is fruitful to conceive of considerations of welfare as springing from perception of “needs,”
rather than from claims about moral “rights” or inalienable “entitlements.” If such is a plausible
picture of things, then there is no requirement to make existence of moral duty the rationale
underlying all acts of generosity.

5. BENEFICENCE IS A QUESTION OF MOTIVATION, NOT DUTY.
Tom Beauchamp, Philosophy Professor at Georgetown University, 2008
“The Principle of Beneficence in Applied Ethics,” STANFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
PHILOSOPHY, accessed 7/12/2011 < http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/principle-beneficence/>. Singer is concerned with which social conditions will motivate people to give, rather than with attempting to determine obligations of beneficence with precision. Singer responds to critics such as Murphy by conceding that perhaps the limit of what we should publicly advocate as a level of giving is indeed no more than a person's fair share of what is needed to relieve poverty and the like. Unless we draw the line here, we might not be able to motivate people to give at all. A fair share would be a considerably lower threshold of one's obligations than the obligation Singer originally envisaged, but far more realistic. The emphasis on motivation to give is a more subtle and convincing approach to the nature and limits of beneficence.
DUTY COMES FROM SPECIAL RELATIONSHIPS.

1. WE MUST SET REASONABLE BOUNDARIES ON THE DUTY TO ASSIST.
Rudolph Vanterpool, Philosophy Professor at California State University Dominguez Hills, 1988
HUME ON THE “DUTY” OF BENEVOLENCE, p. 98, accessed 7/12/2011 <
There is a felt need to set reasonable boundaries to our caring motives, an interest buttressed by
practical considerations under the totality of circumstances. At law, for example, there has long
been the recognition that no duty is owed to relieve a person in distress unless there is some
special relationship between the parties creating an affirmative duty to act under the
circumstances. On this view, parents owe an affirmative duty to see the well-being of their
children, and marital partners owe reciprocal duties of care (support) to each other.

2. BENEVOLENCE TO STRANGERS IS SUPEREROGATORY.
Rudolph Vanterpool, Philosophy Professor at California State University Dominguez Hills, 1988
HUME ON THE “DUTY” OF BENEVOLENCE, p. 98, accessed 7/12/2011 <
It is easy to detect a remarkable likeness between acts of generosity on behalf of relatives and
friends and the aforementioned affirmative duty of care founded on special relationship.
However, once this narrow circle of family and intimate acquaintances is broadened to
encompass strangers, the force of a “morality of duty” fades more nearly into what might be
termed a “morality of supererogation.” A narrow, yet not completely implausible, interpretation
of Hume’s doctrine of limited generosity, would be to regard all duties based upon special
relationship as morally required, whereas the more exceptional acts of extended generosity
would, more properly speaking, be termed supra-obligatory.

3. OUR IDEAS OF DUTY MUST BE BASED ON THE NATURAL TENDENCY TO
FAVOR ONE’S RELATIVES.
Rudolph Vanterpool, Philosophy Professor at California State University Dominguez Hills, 1988
HUME ON THE “DUTY” OF BENEVOLENCE, p. 97, accessed 7/12/2011 <
“A man naturally loves his children better than his nephews, his nephews better than his cousins,
his cousins better than strangers, where every thing else is equal. Hence arise our common
measures of duty, in preferring the one to the other. Our sense of duty always follows the
common and natural course of our passions.” It is plain from what Hume is saying that,
normally, the capacity for benevolence is to be assessed in “realistic” terms, focusing on what
average prudent persons can possibly be expected to do. From such realistic evaluation, he
believes, it is possible to derive common or standard measures (that is, criteria) of duty.
4. PEOPLE NATURALLY LIMIT THEIR INTERESTS TO THOSE CLOSEST TO THEM.
David Hume, Philosopher, 1740
When experience has once given us a competent knowledge of human affairs, and has taught us the proportion they bear to human passion, we perceive, that the generosity of men is very limited, and that it seldom extends beyond their friends and family, or, at most, beyond their native country. Being thus acquainted with the nature of man, we expect not any impossibilities from him; but confine our view to that narrow circle, in which any person moves, in order to form a judgment of his moral character.
CAUSING HARM IS WORSE THAN FAILING TO ASSIST

1. FAILING TO ASSIST IS NOT THE SAME AS CAUSING HARM—IT LEAVES OPTIONS OPEN FOR THE REALIZATION OF A GOOD.
Rudolph Vanterpool, Philosophy Professor at California State University Dominguez Hills, 1988
A second, and perhaps more promising, line of support for supererogatory ideals might be
traceable to the now celebrated distinction drawn between “causing harm” and “preventing
good.” The gist of the distinction is that to fail to act to bring about a good may involve an
omission to achieve a positive benefit on behalf of another. However, such inaction by itself does
do not necessarily close off all options for the realization of the good. Even if one fails to act to
advance the good of a fellow-human being, at least the option is left open for someone else to
come along and benefit the person in need. By contrast, should a person act intentionally to cause
harm to another—say, by willful action causing death or serious bodily harm or action
manifesting a reckless disregard for the quality of human life—then such a person effectively
closes off all options to the whole world to render a positive good to an individual’s damaged
welfare.

2. FAILURE TO PREVENT HARM DOES NOT CAUSE THAT HARM.
Rudolph Vanterpool, Philosophy Professor at California State University Dominguez Hills, 1988
HUME ON THE “DUTY” OF BENEVOLENCE, p. 102, accessed 7/12/2011 <
Clearly, it is one thing to point to an omission to help; it is still another thing to allege that the
omission has produced the harm. To warrant asserting strict causal claims of the foregoing kind,
it must be kept in mind that actual causation (equivalent here to being in a position to help and
not helping the stranger) and proximate causation (equivalent to having a recognized, expected
duty to intervene yet not intervening) are not one and the same. Technically at least, assuming
considerations of pursuit of ideals, the obligation to help is morally mandated whenever some
relationship between the parties binds them in less than causal ways; to fail to promote well-
being in such instances would come closer to a correct allegation that the failure as such caused
the ultimate harm. That is, the latter omission is more properly construed as proximately causing
the harm, in a way that it could not make sense to say that just any failure to help is blamably
harm-producing.
BENEFICENCE IS UNCOMMON

1. FEASIBLE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS RARELY CREATE STRONG BENEVOLENCE IN INDIVIDUALS.
   Danny Soccia, Professor of Philosophy at New Mexico State University, 1990
   The sociobiologist's claim is not that strong benevolence will exist in only a few members of a group of humans, regardless of the environmental influences to which the whole group is or has been subject. That is too strong. Height is something commonly thought to be largely determined by genes, yet even this, everyone admits, is influenced by nutrition. The claim is presumably that, in the range of social environments in which people are likely to grow up or which could feasibly be arranged, strong benevolence will be rare. The sociobiologist probably wants to claim something like "unless they were sternly punished as young children when they exhibited strong egoism and rewarded with effusive praise and candy when they exhibited strong benevolence, most members of a group will have weak benevolence."

2. MOST PEOPLE ARE UNLIKELY TO PROVIDE THEIR SHARE OF ASSISTANCE.
   Liam B. Murphy, Professor of law and philosophy at NYU, 1993
   The third point to make about my statement of the over-demandingness objection is that it presents the situation of individual agents. This is for a good reason, because it is not the case that if everybody now did whatever they could to make the outcome best, then each person would be required to give up most of her resources and energies. It is usually only in situations of partial compliance with the Simple Principle-where not everyone is acting optimally-that the principle is so extremely demanding on each complying agent; it is usually much less demanding in situations of full compliance. Nevertheless, our current situation contains very minimal compliance with the Simple Principle, and it is plausible to assume that this situation will persist.
WE CAN’T BLAME INDIVIDUALS WHO FAIL TO ASSIST

1. FAILURE TO ASSIST CAN RESULT FROM UNAVOIDABLE WEAKNESS OF WILL.
Danny Soccia, Professor of Philosophy at New Mexico State University, 1990
UTILITARIANISM, SOCIOBIOLOGY, AND THE LIMITS OF BENEVOLENCE, p. 340,
Psychological determinism, as I understand the view, says, first, that one's sincere
acceptance of a value judgment has causes and is not under the direct or immediate control
of one's will; second, that one's felt inclinations and behavioral dispositions also have
causes; their existence and strength are not under one's immediate control; third, that highly
valuing a state of affairs is not the same thing as being strongly motivated to bring it about;
one can have the former without the latter, in which case one will suffer "weakness of will";
and, fourth, weakness of will in such a case is unavoidable, because motivation of the
requisite kind and strength is causally necessary for any action required by one's value
judgments.