

## Garrett Cullity on Aiding Distant Needy Strangers Note for Phil 13

Cullity is a critic of Peter Singer's views on this topic. Cullity is especially concerned to rebut what is in his words the "iterative" rather than "aggregative" approach to moral obligations of beneficence that is incorporated in Singer's position. Cullity in short wants to say sometimes "I gave at the office" is a legitimate ground for resisting demands to give further aid.

Singer's aggregative approach is displayed in what Cullity calls the "Severe Demand."

"The Severe Demand: I should contribute to aid agencies increments of time and money each of which is large enough to allow those agencies to save a life, until either  
(a) there are no longer any lives to be easily saved by those agencies, or  
(b) contributing another increment would itself harm me enough to excuse my failing to save any single life directly at that cost." (Cullity, p. 403)

I would say the basic idea in Cullity's response to Singer is the slogan, "what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander." The skeleton of Cullity's view is an argument more or less along the following lines:

1. Everyone ought to conform to the Severe Demand.
2. A person who conforms to the Severe Demand must lead an altruistically-focused life.<sup>1</sup> In such a life the person restricts her commitment to seek life-enhancing goods for herself to a maximal extent, up to the point at which any further restriction would involve a sacrifice on her part that would not be required by the Severe Demand because the excuse specified in condition b above is triggered by that level of sacrifice.
3. A person ought to aim to satisfy the Severe Demand and contribute to easy rescues in order to satisfy the potential rescuees' interests in leading lives rich in life-enhancing goods.
4. Potential rescuees' interests in the fulfillments contained in non-altruistically-focused lives provide good reason to satisfy the Severe Demand.
5. But potential rescuees' interests in the fulfillments contained in non-altruistically-focused lives are interests in gaining what it is wrong for them to have.
6. People's interests in gaining what it is wrong for them to have are not interests we ought to help them fulfill. Cullity: "If a gangster's gun jams, I ought not to help him fix it" (and help him fulfill his interest in murdering some people).
7. People's interests in gaining the fulfillments contained in non-altruistically-focused lives are not interests we ought to help them fulfill. (from premises 1, 2, 5, and 6)
8. People's interests in gaining the fulfillments contained in non-altruistically-focused lives are interests we ought to help them fulfill (from premises 1, 3, and 4)

7 contradicts 8. If the argument is valid, or can be fixed up to become valid, something must give. To avoid the contradiction, we should renounce the Severe Demand. So urges Cullity. He goes on to characterize in positive terms what we are morally required to do to aid distant needs strangers.

1. Cullity actually frames his argument in these terms: In order to aim to satisfy the Severe Demand one must lead an altruistically focused life. Is this difference consequential? He characterizes the idea of an altruistically-focused life in these words: "I have an altruistically-focused life if a guiding aim of mine is to restrict my own fulfillment as much as I bearably can, for the purpose of benefiting others."