Incentives and Beneficence

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Whether an action is beneficent may depend on its effect on incentives for future behavior of the beneficiary. This strategic consideration makes our moral account of beneficence far more complex than most discussions suggest. Its effect on utilitarian and Kantian moral theories is discussed. In general, strategic incentive considerations recommend institutional rather than individual resolution of many problems, so that moral theory must in part be political and institutional.

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A difficult question many of us face in frequent encounters on the streets of large cities is whether to give money to someone with an outstretched hand. There are at least two possible reasons for thinking, despite one's benevolence (or will to do good), that it would be better not to give money. One is that this is a problem for the state and not for individuals to handle. The other is that perhaps not even the state should do much about the problem. I discuss both these issues but focus more on the second because, obviously, our view of it will inform our view of the first issue. The second issue is forcefully stated by John Stuart Mill: "In all cases of helping, there are two sets of consequences to be considered; the consequences of the assistance itself, and the consequences of relying on the assistance. The former are generally beneficial, but the latter, for the most part, injurious; so much so, in many cases, as greatly to outweigh the value of the benefit. And this is never more likely to happen than in the very cases where the need of help is the most intense" (Mill, 1871/1965, p. 960, book 5, chap. 11, sect. 13).

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This is not an uncommon view. The problem at its core has been recognized by many over the centuries. This problem, that poor relief might give incentive to rely on the relief rather than to work to provide for oneself, was a central issue in the long debate over the Elizabethan poor laws in England, as laid out by Joseph Townsend (1786/1971), who, despite his apparently uncharitable views, characterized himself as a "well-wisher to mankind," and by many others who might similarly have characterized themselves. It is still today a central part of the debate over welfare programs and a variant of it informs the concern with so-called "moral hazard" in various contexts in which some second or third party must bear some or all of the costs of the actions of some first party, who may therefore have little incentive to achieve certain outcomes. There have even been limited experiments to test the force of the disincentives to work among those benefited by unemployment compensation and there are some relevant data from more general welfare programs (see, e.g., Duncan et al., 1988).

Well before Mill's time, Samuel Johnson forcefully captured the rationale of Mill's problem: "You cannot spend money in luxury without doing good to the poor. Nay, you may do more good to them by spending it in luxury than by giving it: for by spending it in luxury, you make them exert industry, whereas by giving it, you keep them idle" (Boswell, 1791/1976, pp. 947-948). The essential problem in beneficence here is a causal problem: Will my act of beneficence now reduce eventual self-reliance? Johnson's rationale is not merely what is characterized as the "trickle down" theory that consumptions by the wealthy create jobs for the poor. Its more important element by far is the incentive to industry that Johnson seems to suppose will go further toward reducing poverty than will charitable giving. Johnson's statement of this problem differs from Mill's in an important way that may not be apparent at first reading. He makes it an injunction to action—or inaction—whereas Mill focuses only on the consequences of what might be a larger pattern of actions.

The urgent difficulty with the problem of the incentive effects that concern Mill and Johnson is that we may be confident of their direction from a priori considerations but that we know little or nothing about their magnitude. We are confident that, in general, subsidizing individuals or organizations reduces their incentive to be productive. (There may be particular exceptions. For example, Picasso might have worked on his art as devotedly in gratuitously subsidized splendor as in poverty. He might even have been more productive with the subsidy.) I have no new data on magnitudes to present here and I cannot assess the range of truth in Johnson's claim but only suppose that for some relevant range it is true. I therefore wish to discuss the strategic import of such incentive effects for traditional philosophical ways of addressing the morality of beneficence and charity. I address the implications of the incentive problem for two general classes of moral theory: utilitarianism and Kantianism. Furthermore, I address the incentive problem in two contexts: ad hoc individual actions toward others in apparent need and systematic policies by the state for the correction of maldistributions of various kinds. I begin by trying to make the strategic structure of the problem we face clear. Then I turn to the utilitarian accounts of beneficence and its generalization in distributive justice and the Kantian account of the maxim of one-on-one beneficence and its plausible implication for large-scale analogs. After discussing the strategic role of incentive effects in various moral accounts of beneficence, I then turn to the first problem raised above: What one should do when one supposes the state should handle the problem one faces.

It is characteristic of all of these issues that the full recognition of the causal, strategic effects of apparently beneficent actions and institutions severely complicates our judgment of the actions and institutions. Strategic incentive considerations recommend institutional rather than individual resolution of many problems, so that moral theory must in part be political and institutional. Moreover, the moral import of the view that burdens Mill, Johnson, and many others depends on empirical facts of actual or likely human behavior and not only on a priori moral views. For that reason, much of what we can say about the issue is inherently speculative or open to further research.

There are many related issues that I will not address in what follows. An important one is that the incentive effects of charitable giving should, in principle, cut both ways. State welfare policies may, as libertarians and others argue, reduce incentives for individual charity, maybe because opportunities dwindle (Obler, 1981, pp. 30, 36; Taylor, 1976; Schiff, 1990). Richard Titmuss (1971) argued that the causal connection is the reverse of this, that state beneficence encourages private beneficence. This is essentially a causal, not an a priori moral issue. However, if one supposes that the virtue of giving has intrinsic value, one may hesitate to have state charity drive out personal charity, as may have happened this century in the United Kingdom, where per capita giving is now well below that in the United States (Obler, 1981, pp. 17, 27).

THE STRATEGIC STRUCTURE OF BENEFICENCE

To keep the nature of various problems at issue clear, let us consider the game theoretic structure of interactions that might call for beneficence. What generally unites such interactions is that they have a payoff structure
that is pure conflict in the following sense. One party must suffer a loss in order for another to enjoy a gain. Hence, they have the structure of Game 1, in which one party, Row, can choose whether to act beneficently and the other player, Column, will benefit or not as Row chooses. The payoffs are represented as strictly ordinal with Row receiving the first payoff in each payoff pair and Column receiving the second. In the absence of any consideration for the well-being of Column, Row's interests are better served by the payoff of 1 than by that of 2. The game is pure conflict because Column benefits if and only if Row suffers a cost in comparison to the status quo before Row encounters Column's need.²

To make sense of Game 1, note that the ordering of outcomes need not represent the players' preferences, only their interests. I may actively prefer to be beneficent and therefore prefer to help rather than not to help. Having more resources is generally in my interest, having fewer is contrary to my interest. But to effect my preferences, I must typically use some of my resources.

We may generalize from Game 1 to much larger scale interactions between social groups, one of which can act beneficently on behalf of the other. At this level it makes sense to call the interaction pure conflict only if we see it as an interaction between the two groups rather than as an interaction between all of the individuals in the groups with each other individual. This follows because in general an interaction can be pure conflict only when there are no more than two parties involved in it. If there are three parties, for example, and they are choosing over two outcomes, one of the parties must share the preference ordering of one of the other parties or be indifferent. Hence, these two parties would not be in conflict. We can contrive to put three or more players into pure conflict by restricting their opportunities for cooperating, as is ideally done in poker. But in fuller social contexts, pure conflict of interest will typically be between two parties.

²One reader has objected that Game 1 does not represent pure conflict, because only one of the players in the game has a choice of strategies. That peculiar feature helps to define this as a problem of potential beneficence. Still, the game is as much pure conflict as it would be with an additional column of payoffs giving Column a choice of strategies. Pure conflict is defined by the condition stated in the text.

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If we are to say that Row has a duty of beneficence toward Column in Game 1, we must be able to say that, somehow measured, Row's loss from acting on behalf of Column is less than Column's benefit from that action. This must be true of any theory of beneficence, whether Kantian, utilitarian, or otherwise. If it were not true, we would have a hard time giving any justification for a principle of beneficence. This is not to say that the benefit that must be measured is necessarily of one kind rather than another. In particular, it need not be utility or welfare, although in a utilitarian theory it would be. In a Kantian theory, one might invoke a maxim of beneficence only when the benefit to be delivered is something that maintains the capacity for rational action. In such a theory, anything that maintains such capacity is in a meaningful sense worth more than certain kinds of resources that might be used to secure the capacity, so that Row would surrender resources of money or time to secure Column's agency, and we could sensibly say that the cost to Row was less than the benefit to Column. (Against this claim, Herman, 1984, p. 602, asserts that, in a Kantian maxim of mutual aid, "The needs of the other do not outweigh the losses in giving help." Her claim is conspicuously false on her own account. She presumably wishes to argue that it is not the fact that these needs outweigh one's losses in giving help that requires one to give help. But it must still be true that the needs do outweigh the losses—in a sense that Herman herself articulates—if one is to be required to give help even under her maxim.)

For a utilitarian to say that Row ought to act beneficently toward Column requires more than the limited ordinal preference information available in the matrix for Game 1. It requires a claim that Row loses less than Column benefits from Row's beneficence; that is to say, it requires interpersonally comparable welfare information. This is the most important consideration in utilitarian prescriptions for beneficence, that the beneficence be welfare-enhancing overall, that losses to some be covered by greater gains to others. A utilitarian prescription for more general distributive justice must be grounded in similar claims. Indeed, distributive justice is simply the large group equivalent of beneficence. Transfers from one group benefit another group. A particular redistribution is justified if the benefactor group loses less in the transfer than the benefited group gains. Again, we require interpersonal comparisons of welfare in order to make a utilitarian prescription for redistribution (cf. Hardin, 1988, pp. 126-137).

General problems of distributive justice by government and of one-on-one beneficence do not exhaust the range of possible acts of beneficence. We may occasionally face small group problems and we may face problems of organizing our group to act beneficently, for example, vis-à-vis the starving peoples of the Sahel, Bangladesh, or war-torn Ethiopia. Moreover, even when we might suppose that government should act or even
when it has acted, we may still face individual problems of acting one-on-one in cases that should best be seen as large group redistributive problems. For example, when the outstretched hand in the street beckons, I may sensibly suppose it would be best to have all beggars cared for systematically by the state rather than haphazardly by individual donors.

How does our incentive problem enter this account? Recall Mill’s concern with the consequences of subsequently relying on such assistance as Row might offer in Game 1—that is our central problem in the full strategic structure of beneficence. We are often not in a single-shot game in which present payoffs are all that matter. Rather, we may be in a systematic relationship in which present actions stimulate future expectations and behavior. It is not the simple payoffs in a particular momentary interaction, such as that of Game 1, that matter to us but rather the likely sequence of games that will follow from each kind of response in Game 1. If we act beneficently in each interaction of the form of Game 1, we may find ourselves facing that interaction again and again; if we do not act beneficently, we may find that those whom we might have helped at first no longer need help because they have become largely self-sufficient, perhaps after initial hardships. Or, more generally, we might suppose that if we set up our institutions in such a way as not to guarantee a safe landing for the careless, there will be fewer instances of carelessness and therefore less reason to be concerned to protect people against their carelessness.

**UTILITARIAN BENEFICENCE**

Utilitarianism is often characterized as the ethics of generalized benevolence, or, more accurately, generalized beneficence (e.g., see Harman, 1977, p. 177). If this is all there is to it, it sounds like charity writ large: Those who have should give, those who have not should receive. Is this the whole story? The short answer, of course, is no. There is more to utilitarianism than equalizing welfare, as anyone familiar with the standard criticism of utilitarianism that it ignores distributive concerns must suspect. The long answer is more complex. Utilitarianism entails generalized beneficence, but only for certain ranges of problems that involve distributions of welfare when these can be sensibly compared. For the further range of problems that involve cooperative and coordinative interactions, beneficence is not at issue, although welfare enhancement still is. Hence, utilitarianism, not surprisingly, is generalized welfare enhancement, not generalized beneficence, which is only a part of the much larger whole. Indeed, in many societies, such as Scandinavia, beneficence may be a very small part of the whole, at least domestically.

That utilitarianism is more than merely beneficence, even if we include distributive justice in this more general category, is suggested by the long concern with variants of rule utilitarianism, in which the emphasis most of the time seems to be on mutual benefits obtained from “cooperation” or “coordination.” Per se, these categories need not concern us here, although they are very important parts of a serious utilitarianism. The problem of cooperation enters indirectly below in the discussion of charity or beneficence as “mutual aid.” It also enters into the problem of organizing acts of redistribution. In such acts, the parties in Game 1 are typically themselves collectivities or large groups. The party that faces the choice of acting benefically is a group that might fail to act collectively for reasons of failure of cooperation rather than from a more direct failure of benevolence.

Much of the force of utilitarianism comes in its prescription of institutional arrangements for enhancing welfare. Indeed, utilitarianism is inherently both a moral and a political theory (Hardin, 1988, pp. 11-14). Very little of what we traditionally think of as charity is organized under these institutional arrangements and, indeed, the advance of these institutions tends to displace charity as an individual concern by achieving systematic redistributions that make individual acts of charity of certain kinds no longer urgent, perhaps even no longer clearly utilitarian. Charity is part of a larger class of beneficences that includes distributive justice and idiosyncratic local actions on behalf of another in special difficulty. Much of the point of certain socially organized arrangements, such as posting lifeguards at beaches and dispersing police protection through the community, is to prevent the need for many of the latter idiosyncratic actions. And the effect of welfare programs is to displace the need for charitable giving to assist those with limited resources. When we have institutionalized all of these arrangements and made them quite effective, however, there may still be a substantial remainder of apparent calls for beneficence that would be utilitarian. This remainder includes cases that fall outside our institutional arrangements, such as hunger abroad or a drowning elsewhere than on a monitored beach; and it may sensibly be thought to include cases, such as support for the arts, that are not well handled by egalitarian government. It also includes a special class of cases that arise from the inherent logic of the institutional arrangements. (See section "Between Individual Beneficence and State Welfare."

**BENEFICENCE AS MUTUAL AID**

An argument often made in Kantian terms is that one should be beneficent because one rationally wants others to be beneficent toward one-
self in relevant circumstances. By a supposed application of Kant's categorical imperative, we may conclude that no one could rationally will that human nature be such as never to render beneficent acts. This is an argument that is reminiscent of some of the problems inherent in the debates over act and rule utilitarianism and of problems of precommitment to do what one would not want to do when the time actually comes. These problems are sufficiently subtle as to vitiate many discussions of them and one should proceed with skeptical care in trying to resolve them.

Suppose we avowed a maxim of nonbeneficence on the ground of Mill's argument above that the incentive effects of nonbeneficence outweigh its immediate effects. Kant says "although it is possible that a universal law of nature could subsist in harmony with this maxim, yet it is impossible to will that such a principle hold everywhere as a law of nature. For a will that decided in this way would be in conflict with itself, since many a situation might arise in which the man needed love and sympathy from others, and in which, by such a law of nature sprung from his own will, he would rob himself of all hope of the help he wants for himself" (Kant, 1785/1964, pp. 91, 423, in the Prussian Academy standard edition). There may be objections to supposing that Kant is here proposing a maxim of beneficence. Indeed, his use of such words as "needed," "wants," and "help" may well render the whole passage so ambiguous as to recommend against any strong inference from it. For a moment, however, let us suppose we can make sense of the maxim he is supporting here as a maxim of some variant of beneficence restricted to certain contexts such as those in which someone's well-being is at serious risk if no one beneficently intervenes to give aid. This is how Herman (1984) interprets the principle.

Herman argues against a principle of nonbeneficence in particularly urgent circumstances. Her argument supposes that the issue for someone who holds such a principle is to avoid the costs to herself of having to act beneficently under a maxim of beneficence. She sees this problem of the prudential, that is to say, strictly self-interested, concern as the position of the 19th century utilitarian philosopher Henry Sidgwick (1907, p. 389n) who argues that a strong man might prudentially prefer not to be burdened with the likely net costs to himself of having to be beneficent. This is not the problem that bothers Mill, Townsend, and many others. They are genuinely concerned with the plausibly detrimental effects of their beneficence on others. These effects are a strategic problem of affecting incentives. Unfortunately, Herman generally speaks of one's desire for "help" rather than for "beneficence" from others. I depend on the help of others daily in manifold ways; I very seldom enjoy beneficence from anyone other than from those who have contributed to the support of my university. The help I get from others generally is based on strong mutual relationships with them.

If "beneficence" is substituted for the noun "help" in Herman's discussion, that discussion loses much of the apparent force it has. Indeed, some of its claims become jarring. Only a hermit would be opposed to help from others while many eminently sociable people might suppose a principle of extensive beneficence would be pernicious in its effects.)

A difficult problem of the procedure of arguing from the categorical imperative is particularly clear in this context. The problem is that the procedure seems inappropriate for the actual world in which we live. If our world were peopled by relevantly rational beings, all similar in the strength of their wills and in their desires and needs, the procedure would sometimes lead to credible results. When it is to produce maxims that should apply to actual people as we know them in their remarkable variety in our world, however, it may lead us badly astray. The kind of rational being Kant imagines may be unaffected by incentive problems or weakness of will or complex diversity of desires and so forth. The maxims that should apply to action in a world of such beings might often have pernicious effects in our world of less philosophically admirable beings. But if we try to capture the requisite diversity in maxims for use in our world, we may have maxims that are exceedingly clumsy and complicated.

One of the most important distinctions we should draw in trying to make sense of a maxim of beneficence, or various maxims of beneficence, is that between ad hoc situations of momentary dire need and general situations of ongoing need. We may consider acts of one-on-one beneficence—for example, to save someone from drowning—separately from policies of general relief of poverty. To some extent this fits the distinction, in the discussion of utilitarian beneficence above, between issues of ad hoc beneficence and distributive justice. These issues might justify quite distinctive principles or maxims. In particular, a reasonable stoic might readily accept a maxim of beneficence in the former and reject it in the latter. It should be necessary here to consider only the latter because the argument from incentives on which the stoic's rejection would be based is stronger for it than for the genuinely accidental ad hoc cases such as possible drowning. If we cannot reject the maxim of beneficence for systematic problems that are permeated with incentive problems, then we presumably cannot reject that for the ad hoc problems either.

Why might the stoic on her own behalf rationally will that there be no maxim of beneficence to benefit those who fall into poverty? The answer is a generalization of the answer to why one might wish to discipline oneself in specific ways, for example to exercise daily, to practice what Schelling (1980) calls "self command," to deny oneself exposure to certain temptations whose systematic consequences would be harmful. Strength of character and well-being come to some large extent from independence.
Allowing oneself too readily to be helped in bad moments that are largely one's own making would be an act of akrasia—lack of will—and would indulge oneself to fall into further bad moments. Any claim that one would of course want help in such a moment would carry no weight because the purpose of denying oneself the help is to encourage oneself to stay out of such moments. Indeed, because of the problem of akrasia and its potentially debilitating effects on personal autonomy, one might will or arrange in advance that help of certain kinds not be readily available.

This position is a plausible reading of much of Greek moral philosophy and it also fits the Kantian concern with autonomy and respect for persons. As Herman (1984) says, "an imperfect rational being must acknowledge the obligatoriness of developing his powers and talents: they are necessary conditions of the possible expression of his rationality." Moreover, she says, this duty is a duty of respect for persons (p. 597). One of the traits that makes us imperfect rational beings in Herman's sense is that we are somewhat subject to akrasia and that the discipline of external incentives helps us to overcome akrasia in many contexts. If we are rational, therefore, we should arrange or will to subject ourselves to the relevant incentives. Herman, of course, also argues that the duty of beneficence is a duty of respect for persons. In contexts in which akrasia is a sufficiently important and pervasive part of our natures, the former duty will outweigh the latter in our rational concern. In those areas in which our own control over our lives and our fortunes is great enough, then, we may readily suppose that a maxim of nonbeneficence is more rational than one of beneficence.3

3There are traces of this view in Catholic doctrine. For example, in their recent pastoral letter on nuclear arms, the American Catholic bishops remark: "Respecting our freedom, Christ does not solve our problems but sustains us as we take responsibility for his work of creation and try to shape it in the ways of the kingdom" (National Conference of Catholic Bishops on War and Peace, 1983, p. 276, par. 339).

beneficence that would be the "rational" choice of each and every one of us. Unfortunately, the vague and stylized criterion of "respect for persons," currently popular among philosophers, does not yield a clear principle for what maxim to choose. As noted at the outset, we cannot decide this question a priori: We must consider the empirical facts of actual human beings, of actual human natures.

It may be useful to block a particular reading of the argument here, a reading that makes it seem merely prudential in a nonstrategic way. Herman (1984) addresses related problems in her discussion of Sidgwick's argument that a "strong man" might reasonably suppose that he would be better served by a maxim of nonbeneficence (p. 581). Sidgwick (1907) supposes that such a person could calculate that the costs of meeting demands for beneficence from him would outweigh the benefits of beneficence he could demand for himself under the maxim. Hence, he would be better off without the maxim, "benevolence being likely to bring more trouble than profit" (p. 389n). Sidgwick is here insufficiently attentive to the strategic implications of whatever regime is adopted. Knowledge of what the regime is or experience of its implications will commonly alter behavior and even character by providing specific, often very strong incentives. The force of the stoic position and of Mill's argument in the opening paragraph above depends on a grasp of the strategic significance of such incentives. The point of willing a maxim of nonbeneficence in certain contexts is to restrict one's options in a way that encourages one to develop one's strengths. Willing such a maxim is a far more drastic move than merely to effect a net benefit from eschewing and foregoing beneficences that would otherwise have been required.

Finally, we should address another aspect of the difference between ad hoc problems and ongoing, institutionalized problems. A maxim of beneficence or mutual aid such as that discussed by Herman seems clearly directed at the one individual who may render aid. In many generally institutional contexts this can be severely misleading. For example, a doctor may be able to render life-saving aid to someone. By the maxim, she should apparently do so and, indeed, it is sometimes said by certain philosophers that doctors have a natural duty to render aid in such moments. There is, however, a strong reason for objecting to this way of putting the issue. This is that, if we are to be able to deal with urgent medical needs that arise systematically, we may have to deal with them systematically. The fact that such problems arise in large numbers means that they cannot readily be resolved well by beneficent actions of those who by happenstance are available to help. Instead, we create institutions to give the relevant medical aid. Once we see the problem this way, we should recognize with Rawls that we must first design the institution for handling our medical—or
organized and if its organization is sufficiently well justified, the doctor's duty is what that system stipulates. Any doctor will have duties toward some people and none toward others in similar need. Perhaps all doctors will have potential duties toward those they come across in peculiar emergency situations, such as in roadway accidents, where their duties may be governed by Good Samaritan laws. But their duties toward most people cannot be so general and we may have a very hard time seeing how their duties could sensibly be derived from a simple application of the categorical imperative. In this problem there is an analog of the striking difference between Mill's statement of the problem of incentives in receiving aid and Johnson's statement of what one should do about giving aid. We must inherently be concerned at the institutional level with overall consequences—for welfare, autonomy, or whatever—and concern at this level will drive our definition of individual duties at the level of individual action. Otherwise, we will have to live with an ineffective anarchy in the availability of much needed aid. The duties of most doctors in advanced societies today cannot be well captured in the maxims of Hippocrates or similar codes addressed strictly to individuals rather than to office holders. Most doctors in such societies today are people who, as doctors, occupy what Jones (1984) calls a "public role." In an apt aside, Jones comments that Jesus largely "ignored public morality; it was simply not worth thinking about" (p. 606). This remark may be fully justified by the religious concern of Jesus. But it may also be justified by the more limited possibilities of publicly organized beneficence in his time than in our own.

A similar account may apply to most of the problems to which beneficence or a maxim of mutual aid may once have been addressed. When these problems are of a very large scale and when organizational capacity and technology permit, they may best be handled systematically, which is to say, institutionally and not individually. What our individual duties are will then be determined to a large extent by the nature of the institutional resolution. From almost any moral theory we should want many of these problems to be handled by the state. This is true not because we wish to be relieved of the burden of the duty of beneficence or mutual aid but because we want the problems to be handled well, which is the point of these duties in the first place. In sum, maxims and duties are generally framed for individual actions. We will generally also want institutional arrangements to take care of many systematic problems.

Among the most important of the general institutions we want to have will be arrangements to accomplish certain redistributions if beneficence calls for them. Kant does not present a theory of distributive justice and one may wonder what kind of theory he would have proposed. Rawls (1971, 1980) proposes his theory of justice as essentially a Kantian derivative in

Let us break this problem into two parts: the justification of a particular institutional structure and then the justification of individual duties under that structure. Medical care is a particularly apt case for analysis because we might all agree that what we want is a good general system that is readily capable of responding to needs of anyone at relevant moments. We can reach this conclusion from utilitarian considerations or from a quasi-Kantian concern with respect for persons as ends in themselves. Moreover, we might suppose that the general structure of the institution would come out roughly the same no matter which of these moral theories drives our design of it. That structure would be such as to provide us emergency aid as well as regular medical care for momentary or continuing conditions that might put us at great risk. At some point, we inescapably face consideration of costs and benefits of such a system for contemporary societies because what we could provide could only be virtually all our resources for everything. For example, we could secure the well-being of those at risk of grievous injury in fires and collapsing buildings in major cities subject to earthquakes only by building extensive standby facilities for the rare occasion of their need. And we could perhaps overcome some of the threat of cancer and other diseases by putting far more resources into testing and research. No matter what various philosophers wish to say about the moral ugliness or unacceptability of making tradeoffs, we have to do so and, given the constraints we face, we must rationally wish to do so. If the notion of "respect for persons" has meaning and implications for choices and policies, it must include such considerations.

At some level, then, we will choose to have institutions that draw limits on what will be done for those in apparent medical need or at plausible medical risk. Moreover, those limits will be contingent in certain ways on what else is going on at relevant moments. As demands rise, we will choose to offer less care per demander, as we would, for example, if there were tens of thousands of grievous casualties in a sudden earthquake in Tokyo or San Francisco. We will not define the "obligations" of our institution strictly in terms of an individual's needs but also in terms of what other demands there are. This perhaps painful fact is one of relatively recent vintage because it is only recently that medical care could be said to be more likely beneficial than harmful. It is becoming a far more weighty consideration as medical technology and its cost advance.

What then is the duty of beneficence of a doctor when faced with a person in dire medical need? If our medical system is sufficiently well or-
that it is based on respect for persons. The distributive element of this theory is his difference principle, which says that our institutions should maximize the position of the worst-off class and then that of the next worst-off and so forth. In the process we might sacrifice some of the total production and therefore consumption we might achieve but we attain greater equality in our distribution. Rawls, unlike Kant and many traditional moral theorists, is clearly alert to the problem of incentives for action and how these may be influenced by our institutions, which must therefore take strategic considerations into account in their design. In particular, his difference principle takes note of the fact that we may not be able to achieve equality of distribution of resources without so adversely affecting incentives as to make all worse off than they could be under an unequal distribution.

BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL BENEFICENCE AND STATE WELFARE

In any consequentialist moral theory, the central question of beneficence is what result one can cause by one’s action. In certain ad hoc situations in which one could act alone to bring about a good result that would otherwise not happen, the injunction to action may be very clear, as it might be if one came upon a child floundering in a pond. For general redistributive issues, one typically cannot sensibly believe oneself to have significant causal efficacy in bringing about the relevant good result. One may vote for or otherwise support the adoption of good policies or one may contribute to various agencies for redistribution. Alas, these two extremes may not cover the range of choices one may face. There is a large never-never land between problems that are essentially one-on-one and ad hoc and problems that are best systematically handled by the state. Choices in this never-never land are difficult not because their moral issue is difficult but because their causal logic is hard. They pose a partial analog of the logic of collective action.

Consider an example. On bitter nights, the New York City police round up so-called street people to take them to shelters. Many of these people commonly avoid such help and protest it when they get it—as reported by Channel 2 news, New York City, on 22 January 1987, the evening of a major winter storm to be followed by temperatures below 10°F (−12°C).

It is often supposed that such people have somehow fallen through the government “welfare net.” It seems more plausible to suppose that some of them avoid getting caught up in that net. Reputedly many of these people are mentally disturbed and evidently many are alcoholic. We might suppose that the welfare system should treat some of these people paternalistically, forcing them to accept aid even when they object. Or we might suppose they should be allowed to determine the form of their lives even if this form is in their view self-destructive. In any case, so long as these people are not caught up in the welfare net but are on the street, many of them depend on begging for their daily livelihoods or pleasures.

What should one do when approached by someone in this apparent class? Suppose one actually believed that it would be best for these people to come under relevant welfare programs so that they would get not merely daily sustenance but also reasonable health care that might help to address their condition. One could refuse to help one of them on the street on the principle that, if we all refuse such help, these people will soon take resort to state programs and will therefore be better off. It is plausibly the fact that they can rely on our handouts that keeps them out of these programs. But my handout is unlikely to make any difference in the larger scheme of things for whether anyone leaves the street to seek better welfare. My handout merely makes one person somewhat better off that day than she would likely otherwise have been. It is hard to believe Johnson’s assertion that my spending my money in luxury would be better for that person and others like her than my giving it to her would be. Yet it may still be true in principle that, as Mill says, the consequences of her relying on such assistance are generally injurious. Johnson’s assertion is subject to an analog of the perverse logic of collective action: My action makes negligible difference to the hope of changing the general condition of these street people, but it could make a real difference for a while to one of them. Hence, I and others after me may greet outstretched hands with beneficence and thereby help to guarantee that the hands will still be outstretched next year and thereafter. Our charity might be morally wrong only if it is illegal and punished.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

I briefly raise several issues whose understanding may be affected by the discussion here and also raise an issue that makes for real difficulties in assessing the effect of the concern with incentives that has driven and undercut much of moral and political theory over the centuries. First consider an issue that makes for serious difficulties in our moral understanding
of welfare policies. We must look not merely to the incentive effects of our actions on a particular person over time but also to the larger effects of our actions on others. If we design a welfare policy that affects independent persons who do not themselves interact through the policy, it should perhaps be a very different policy from many we actually have adopted. Indeed, the chief concern of many actual policies is children whose actions and lives cannot be seen as fully autonomous or rational as yet. The incentive effects of enforcing extensive independence on children are not likely to be very appealing. But policies that address the welfare needs of certain children will almost inherently affect incentives to their parents or others in their households to be productive in their own interest. If these policies affect associated adults in perverse ways they may then indirectly affect the children through the examples these adults set and through the kind of discipline they learn from the adults.

These supposed intergenerational effects are old debate to anyone who has dealt with or studied welfare policy over the years. Concern here is not so much with these well debated—even if not well understood—problems, but with their import for theories of beneficence, charity, and maxims of mutual aid. Unfortunately for simple moral theories, such problems mean that we must look to the overall effect of a policy grounded in beneficence to decide whether it is a good policy. As we have already noted that focusing exclusively on the actions of individuals toward those in need of assistance leads to perverse results, so too focusing exclusively on the effects of policies on direct individual beneficiaries may lead to perverse results. What we require are theories about systematic beneficences. It is relatively easy to imagine the structure of such theories, if not necessarily the specific content, if they are utilitarian in some sense. It seems much harder to construct them out of traditional Kantian and other theories, as the relative recentness of Raws' (1971) effort to construct a partially Kantian theory of distributive justice suggests.

Independently of this last consideration, one other traditional moral theory may have difficulty handling beneficence at all. Recall Johnson's comment that one does more good to the poor by spending money in luxury than by giving it to them, as quoted earlier. He goes on to say, "I own, indeed, there may be more virtue in giving it immediately in charity, than in spending it in luxury; though there may be a pride in that too" (Boswell, 1791/1976, p. 948). Hincmar of Rheims argued even more perversely that "God could have made all men rich, but he wanted poor men in this world so that the rich might have an opportunity to redeem their sins" (Keen, 1987, p. 42). One might be appalled at Hincmar's god. But one must also wonder at Johnson's "virtue." This is a typical problem in so-called virtue theories of morality. If such a theory allows substantial correction for con-

sequences, it loses its distinctive quality. If it does not, it loses much of its moral appeal with its oddly egoistic focus, as though something like a moral analog of personal salvation were the issue at stake. If the virtue of beneficence requires one to do what is less beneficial rather than what is more beneficial, then surely there is "a pride in that"—or at least some concern with one's own that seems to override concern with the well-being of the other to whom one is acting beneficently.

In this respect—that they must be muddled by serious and even overriding attention to consequences—virtue theories are perhaps similar to theories of duty for individuals, as Kantian theory is often conceived to be. Overwhelming consequentialist considerations may recommend institutional rather than individual resolution of many problems. But then we cannot perspicuously state maxims of individual action that reflect merely virtue or direct concern with aid. Rather, our stipulation of individual duties will turn contingently on what institutions we create. This is a problem that arises in many of the most important areas of contemporary moral and political theory, such as distributive justice, welfare policy, collective responsibility, and political or democratic egalitarianism, and in important policy areas, such as famine control (Mellor and Gavian, 1987, esp. pp. 543-544). All of these issues require that moral theory be political and institutional.

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