

A Distasteful Principle of Liberty

Consider the following situation:

1. I see someone in need of help.
2. This person's need of help did not arise through any action of my own.
3. I am in a position to help with little or no consequence to myself or others.
4. I choose to do nothing.

Most people, and many philosophers of ethics, would say my **failure to act was unethical**. They argue that my knowledge of the situation, combined with my ability to act, set up a condition in which I became, in some sense, morally or ethically obligated to make the right choice and subsequently engage in an act of helping said person.

I beg to differ.

My choice to be passive has produced neither harm nor benefit upon the person or their situation. Physically speaking, I may as well have been a rock, a tree, or a cat. But it appears that since I am a human being, and thereby allegedly possessing certain qualities and capabilities, that this somehow confers upon me a moral or ethical imperative to help.

Don't get me wrong. Helping others is good, positive, and beneficial. Not helping others does not *generate or produce harm*. Let me further clarify my ethics of the Liberty. **You may stop my hand from harming others, but you may not force my hand to help others.**

If you are into formal logic, consider the following premises on action and inaction as they relate to the production of harm or benefit

1. Only actions have effects. Actions can...
 - a. produce benefit or harm.
 - b. aid, handicap, or arrest processes or activities that cause benefit or harm.
 - c. increase or decrease risk of harm.
 - d. increase or decrease chances of benefit.
2. Inaction has no effects. Inaction fails to benefit. Inaction fails to harm. It is the null of 1) above.
3. If one's prior actions have or are currently producing harm, one is ethically obligated to act to arrest and/or compensate for said harm.

Despite our instinctive and visceral responses when we observe those who fail to help others in need, as long as they are not or have not **actively produced said harm**, we

cannot ethically visit coercion upon them to do so. Nor can we ethically harm them through forms of active social retaliation. We may also communicate and even demonstrate the wisdom of helping others, but that is our ethical limit.