

November-December 2011 Negative Case

By Hunter Baehren, Sylvania Southview High School

Introduction:

I stand in firm negation of today's resolution....

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

Definition:

1. I accept my opponent's definitions, but reserve the right to clarify them later in the round.

2. I would like to counter-define the definition of _____, the new definition being _____.

My opponent's definitions is abusive because _____ while my own more clearly limits this abusive reference.

"Individuals" are defined as single human beings, as distinguished from a group.

"Moral obligation" is defined as...an obligation arising out of considerations of right and wrong, an obligation clarified as the constraining power of a promise, contract, law, or sense of duty

"Assist" is defined as...to give support or aid to; help: *Please assist him in moving the furniture.*

(*Random House Unabridged Dictionary*)

1. "People in need" is defined as individuals in requirement of concepts that enable survival, clarified by psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The framers of the resolution specifically mention people in need, implying some individuals are in need and others are not.

The brightline standard for need, therefore, is what Maslow refers to as D needs, or those of deficiency. These consist of psychological needs, safety needs, love and belonging, and self-

esteem. [Without these needs, personal survival is greatly threatened. B-needs, such as self-actualization, are fueled by desires and personal reflection. The brightline standard exists between the two types.]

Analysis by: Dr. C. George Boeree, BA from Penn State, and my MS and PhD from Oklahoma State, all in Psychology. Former professor at Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania <http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/maslow.html>

Framework:

In today's round, I submit the value of human dignity, defined as the intrinsic worthiness of a human being. The resolution asks us to consider whether dignified individuals have an obligation to assist other dignified individuals. Therefore, human dignity is the paramount value in today's round, because individuals both receiving and committing assistance deserve acknowledgement as valuable human beings. I measure such worthiness with a value criterion of upholding liberty, defined as the right of choosing, thinking, and acting for oneself. John Stuart Mill argues in *On Liberty* that liberty itself ought be only limited to the point of interfering with others' liberty. A

moral obligation to assist others restricts liberty, harming an individual's dignity in rightfully carrying out and receiving assistance.

Contention 1:

By negating the resolution, the dignity of the assisting agents is respected through upholding liberty. Philosopher and Dartmouth professor Bernard Gert developed during his career the theory of non-maleficence, supporting that liberty is best upheld when an individual acts in moral ideals rather than obligation. He maintains that doing good is itself morally right, but is not necessarily a moral duty. According to Gert, liberty is only limited by the causation of harm. For instance, an individual has the duty to not hit a person walking on the street, but does not have the obligation to pull over and assist them. Because non-maleficence upholds liberty, human dignity is respected.

Contention II:

Receivers of assistance make choices that must be respected in order to uphold human dignity.

Sub-point A:

The choice to be at a level of need is respected. Like those who choose to assist, the assisted persons in question have a duty to themselves to account for their own level of need through personal liberty. In the 1960s, psychologist Abraham Maslow constructed his own analysis on human needs, beginning with needs such as food and water and eventually ending with self-actualization or personal fulfillment. Every individuals, however, work for themselves whether to move toward or away from self-actualization through their own liberty. For example, if a person desires self-esteem, he/she has the individual choice toward achieving such a goal. Therefore, liberty is best respected and human dignity is preserved.

Sub-point B:

Additionally, the action of helping others in need prompts the question if individuals really desire to be helped. Mill continues by formulating the principle of paternalism, stating “[one’s] own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant [for action in society]. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so...because [of] the opinion of others.” Essentially, an obligation to assist acts toward benefit without the consideration of the autonomy of the receiver. Empirically, this is often true. In 1961, 88% of doctors at one Chicago hospital routinely did not inform a patient of their terminal illness in consideration for the patient’s well-being. A study in 1998 among Israel hospitals revealed that

approximately 94% of patients wished to know if they maintained such a disease. Like doctors, individuals maintain the power to help others in need, and their opinion of such help may not respect the autonomy of the receiver of such an action. By opposing the obligation in question, the liberty of individuals is respected and thus dignity is achieved.

Sub-point C:

It would be foolish to assume that all individuals in society have the capability to provide for their own needs. But rather than turning to other individuals for assistance, society already has a government built for this very purpose rooted in legal obligations, not moral. John Locke cites in his *Two Treatises of Government*, every individual chooses to surrender certain rights to a sovereign power in exchange for rights protection. It is therefore the government's duty to provide for needs that are unattainable or definitively threatened without its assistance. For example, Germany provides basic provisions and a minimum pay of 255 dollars to those that cannot work, such as children, and those below the poverty line. Affirmation of the resolution, however, takes an obligation given to the government and individual liberty, and places such into the hands of individuals, disregarding liberty and fundamental human value. I now move on to my opponent's case.