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2 Is helping others an obligation?



3 Is helping others an obligation to us as citizens or as moral people? We may wonder. Am I really  
4 obligated to help that person, or do I just do it out of a sense of morality? As I'm standing by the  
5 roadside, about to cross the road, I see an elderly woman who seems to be hesitating at the curb. I  
6 decided to walk up to her and assist her in crossing the road. She smiles her brightest and walks  
7 away, thanking me. Now, as I'm on the other side of the road, I brood: What would have happened  
8 if I hadn't helped her, let her be by herself, or just crossed the road by myself? She would've  
9 hesitated while crossing the road or would have received help from another person. But what  
10 would that have made me? A twat? Aloof? Austere?

11 Well, from what I know as of now, an obligation we humans have is not to hurt people or harm  
12 them in any means. That's an obligation law has enforced upon us. But then, is everything that's  
13 "legal" moral? Does becoming an obedient citizen make me less of a moral person? So if law is the  
14 floor of behavior, is morality the ceiling? Does it detach me from my morals? If I were to just stick to  
15 laws and abide by them as a citizen, I could just ignore a person in woe, and that would still make  
16 me a just citizen, but at what cost? I'd rather be an unjust citizen than celebrate having done  
17 something pyrrhic, no?

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19 Now, after I've crossed the road, I stop at a café, order a drink, and reflect on the previous  
20 situation. Just as I was pondering, I spotted an orphan. His hair, dusted with gray, fell on his  
21 malnourished shoulders as he woke up from his slumber. As a waiter from the eatery across from  
22 the café disposed of the leftovers, the boy took them to the disposal bin, salvaged some scraps for  
23 himself, and gave the rest to a stray dog by the road. As this scene took place, I was only reminded  
24 of my previous question. That poverty-stricken child wasn't obliged to offer food to the pariah dog  
25 but still chose to.

26 This brings to mind George H. Smith's article "Do We have a Moral Obligation to Help Other  
27 People?" He states that helping someone in need or protecting them by any means isn't an  
28 obligation but a choice, and that choosing not to help someone doesn't necessarily make you a  
29 bad person. He continues that just because a deed or a gesture is good, it doesn't become a  
30 "duty."

31 Furthermore, the only way a deed or a gesture becomes an obligation is when you have strings  
32 such as promises, contracts, or agreements attached. Lastly, he states that if he ever helps  
33 someone, he would only do it out of benevolence and not because he is obliged to.

34 But then if we as a society strip away all obligations placed on us except those to which we have  
35 attached strings, would we lose the very thing that made us a community? A community isn't one  
36 that's built on contracts or agreements but on expectations. If I had helped the woman to feel good  
37 about myself, that'd be only out of pure gratification. However, if I had helped her because that's  
38 what is done where I live, that would be culture. Without unspoken gestures, mannerisms, and  
39 duties, we become nothing less than strangers, and that's what brings us farther from being a  
40 community.

41 As for obligations, they aren't always a weight that brings us down, but something that brings us  
42 together. If I didn't owe you a thing or if you didn't owe me a thing, we wouldn't care for each other.

43 A contract is a written statement, but a community is a commitment that we as citizens make.  
44 When we reduce our morals to what's legally enforced upon us, we turn our society into a place  
45 where acts of kindness need to have a reason or an obligation to them.

46 As I watched that boy share his scraps with the dog, it hit me that the boy didn't have to read  
47 George H. Smith to know that kindness doesn't require obligations. If we were to wait for an  
48 obligation to be put upon us to show kindness, we would have lost the very thing that made us  
49 humans.

50 If we were to follow Smith's logic end to end, we would end up with a society of "just citizens," each  
51 perfectly free and profoundly alone. If being a just citizen means sitting idly while a person  
52 struggles just because no obligation was imposed, then I'd rather be an unjust citizen. I'd rather be  
53 a twat in the eyes of the law than a stranger to my own race. I'd rather hit my head on the ceiling

54 than stare at the floor for my entire life. A society that forces people to be 'kind' isn't a moral  
55 society; it's a compliant one.

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