

John Taurek

Central Claims

- Consider: trade-off cases which either one can prevent harm to a group of 5 people, or prevent the same harm to one person
 - should we consider the number of people involved in a trade-off case as something in itself significant when determining permissibility?
 - ↳ Judith Thomson argues her distribution exemption; yes it's permissible in some cases → BUT that doesn't imply that the opposite is impermissible
 - ↳ Taurek claims when all things are equal, there is no moral requirement to save 5 over saving the 1 → it is morally permissible to only save the one

Trade-off case #1

- you have a life saving drug that one needs all of; 5 others need only 1/5 of the supply to live
 - what are you morally obligated to do?
 - Taurek rejects to save the greatest number, but agrees to at least give the drug to someone
 - suppose the five people are old/stupid → when things are not equal, the respective deaths might be worse for other reasons

Case #2: same scenario, but you know the one person who requires the whole dose and he is your friend

- Taurek states that it is permissible to save your friend, and so numbers count must be false

Taurek's assessment

- Thesis in contention: other things being equal, one ought to choose to save greater # of people
 - premise 1: if numbers count is true, you cannot choose to save your friend (impermissible to do so)
 - but if things are not equal - even if numbers count is true - it is permissible to save david (→ doesn't apply)
 - Taurek responds by denying any special obligation to the friend → Taurek says it's not his best friend, and just because he happens to have a greater concern for his well-being compared to the others, it does not make him obligated to save them

Case #3: you have the life saving drug, but it is David's → same situation, but then David asks for the drug back

- is David morally required to give his drug to the 5 or keep it to save himself

→ Turek argues David would keep the drug b/c no one would give their life to strangers; David saving himself would violate no rights of the 5

• if David is permitted to use his own drug, why couldn't you give it to him when you owned it?

Turek's assessment part 2

Premise 1: If numbers count is true, then you cannot choose to save David rather than the 5 when you own drug

Premise 2: But it is morally permissible for David to save himself when he owns the drug

Premise 3: If it is permissible for David to save himself when he owns the drug, then it must be permissible for you to save David when you own the drug

Premise 4: So it is permissible for me to save David too (P2, P3 modus ponens)

Conclusion: numbers count is false (P1, P4 modus tollens)

→ it seems to presuppose an impartial moral point of view (worse for whom?)

• idea of "worse than..." itself requires a further relational clause

↳ P2: it is worse for David in case #3 → applying that to case #2; what is worse for you? To see David die would be worse, therefore it is permissible to save David

Numbers Shouldn't Count

if numbers don't count, what do you do in a trade off case where you don't know anyone, or have any personal preference? Do you save the 5?

→ Turek says no; he offers to flip a coin for each person to decide if they get the drug to express equal respect + concern