**Who is Wronged?**

**Philippa Foot on Double Effect: One Point**

She says:

> We are about to give to a patient who needs it to save his life, a massive dose of a certain drug in short supply. There arrive, however, five other patients each of whom could be saved by one fifth of that dose. We say with regret that we cannot spare our whole supply of the drug for a single patient, just as we should say that we could not spare the whole resources of a ward for one dangerously ill individual when ambulances arrive bringing in the victims of a multiple crash. We feel bound to let one man die rather than many if that is our only choice.

I feel a curious disagreement about this. There seems to me nothing wrong with giving the single patient the massive dose and letting the others die, or with refusing to deprive the single patient of care necessary to keep him alive because the hands needed for that care could help in saving the many victims of an accident. The latter case is vaguely sketched, and one pictures resources being lavishly used beyond necessity on one. But let it be made exact; let there be a machine which it takes three people to operate — it just will not work unless there are three on the job; and these three could be summoned away to help more than one person. It seems to me justifiable to say one can’t spare those three people because of the job they are doing, if their work seems roughly as likely to save that one person as to save several to whose aid they could be called. Not that it seems (absolutely) necessary to keep them on the job they are doing; but rather, to leave the one to die or to keep them working his machine, seems OK. Yet Mrs Foot regards it as obvious that one must save the greater number.

Why is this, and how could the disagreement be resolved? Suppose I am the doctor, and I don’t use the drug at all. Whom do I wrong? None of them can say: ‘you owed it to me’. For there might be nine, and if one can say that, all can; but if I used it, I let one at least go without and he can’t say I owed it to him. Yet all can reproach me if I gave it to none. It was there, ready to supply human need, and human need was not supplied. So any one of them can say: you ought to have used it to help us who needed it; and so all are wronged. But if it was used for someone, as much as he needed it to keep him alive, no one has any ground for accusing me of having wronged himself. Why, just because he was one of the five who could have been saved, is he wronged in not being saved, if someone is supplied with it who needed it? What is his
claim, except the claim that what was needed go to him rather than be wasted? But it was not wasted. So he was not wronged. So who was wronged? And if no one was wronged, what injury did I do?

Similarly if there are a lot of people stranded on a rock, and one person on another, and someone goes with a boat to rescue the single one, what cause, so far, have any of the others for complaint? They are not injured unless help that was owing to them was withheld. There was the boat that could have helped them; but it was not left idle; no, it went to save that other one. What is the accusation that each of them can make? What wrong can he claim has been done him? None whatever; unless the preference signalizes some ignoble contempt.

I do not mean that ‘because they are more’ isn’t a good reason for helping these and not that one, or these rather than those. It is a perfectly intelligible reason. But it doesn’t follow from that that a man acts badly if he doesn’t make it his reason. He acts badly if human need for what is in his power to give doesn’t work in him as a reason. He acts badly if he chooses to rescue rich people rather than poor ones, having ill regard for the poor ones because they are poor. But he doesn’t act badly if he uses his resources to save X, or X, Y and Z, for no bad reason, and is not affected by the consideration that he could save a larger number of people. For, once more: who can say he is wronged? And if no one is wronged, how does the rescuer commit any wrong?

In this connexion, the following observation is of some importance, as the contrary may be taken for granted by some: when I do action A for reasons R, it is not necessary or even usual for me to have any special reason for doing-action-A-rather-than-action-B, which may also be possible.