

Duty in Danger: Obligations and their Limits

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Duty

- action in accordance with justifying reasons that rely on some type of moral or legal requirement, an obligation
 - Deontological – moral agents, aims, categorical imperative
 - Duty of station
 - Teleological – Duties (actions) are a means to an end

Three Classes of Moral Actions

1. actions subject to moral norms i.e. moral requirement.
2. actions that surpass this requirement i.e. heroism, supermeritorious. despite their great value, it would not be morally incorrect to disobey them.
3. moral indifference, where actions lack moral relevance.

Origins of Physician's Duties*

- Professio – self imposed duties, commitment
- Misericordia – full of mercy, compassion
- Humanitas – love of humanity
- Sacramentum – solemn obligation to heal

*Hippocrates, Scribonius Largus, AMA Codes

Scope of Physicians' Duties

- To cure the curable
- To treat the treatable
- To prevent the preventable
- To comfort

Limits to Duties

- Lack of capacity
- Lack of efficacy
- Competing duty
- Task outside of scope

- *Sometimes the first duty of intelligent men is the restatement of the obvious.*
- - George Orwell

- *You cannot hope to build a better world without improving the individuals. To that end each of us must work for his own improvement, and at the same time share a general responsibility for all humanity, our particular duty being to aid those to whom we think we can be most useful.*
- - Marie Curie

- Responsibility is to keep the ability to respond
— *Robert Duncan, American poet (1919-1988)*
- Our duty is to be useful, not according to our desires, but according to our powers."
— *Henri F. Amiel, Swiss writer (1821-1881)*
- The question for each man to settle is not what he would do if he had the means, time, influence and educational advantages, but what he will do with the things he has.
— *Hamilton Wright Mabee*