

ISSUE 26

Are You Willing to Help Others?

According to some recent philosophers, altruism does not exist. They say every action we take is selfishly motivated. If we give something away, it is because we need thanks and recognition in exchange. Or we act in expectation that others in our group will aid us if we are in similar circumstances, so our philanthropy is merely disguised insurance. The real reason for risking our lives to protect our young is our instinctual preservation of our own genes, which is the only kind of physical immortality we have.

How do you help others?

- (1) Volunteer
- (2) Give money
- (3) Donate blood
- (4) Donate organs
- (5) Give to charity
- (6) Give to beggars
- (7) Organize charity events



Sample Answers

(A) Ever since high school, I have been an active volunteer no matter where I have lived. The amount of time I have *available* is very *flexible* these days, so sometimes I spend an hour a day and other times Saturday afternoons only. There are always many kinds of services that need to be provided, even if it is only answering a phone or driving someone or handling correspondence. Among the places I've helped are orphanages, suicide *hotlines*, homeless shelters, and food distribution centers. I've always felt that by donating my time I've gained far more than anyone else, including the people who directly get the benefits of the program.

(B) Organ donation is the easiest thing in the world to do, and potentially the most valuable. It only takes a minute to fill out the appropriate card, and you never need to *lift a finger* to help someone for the rest of your life. And then, some day in the hopefully distant future, someone else will be helped by your organs, but not until you don't need them any more. Just think, your thoughtfulness may enable someone else to see or to live a normal or longer life. You probably won't know who that person is, but you can certainly be sure that he or she will be *eternally* grateful to you.

Speak Your Mind

1. Do you give money to panhandlers? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever helped the poor or the handicapped?
If so, when and how? If not, why not?
3. How often do you donate blood?
4. They say everybody is *handicapped* somehow.
What does that mean? In what way are you handicapped?
5. Why should we help others, especially strangers?
What's in it for us?

Speak Your Mind

Speak Your Mind Helpers

1. Do you give money to panhandlers? Why or why not?

(A)

I always feel sorry for those poor folks on the subway who are blind or *crippled*. I can't help but imagine what it must be like and wonder how I could support myself if it were me instead of them. I'm always so grateful for my good health that I would feel *unbearably* guilty if I didn't help them out.

(B)

I never give any money. I don't know which ones are *faking*, and don't want to contribute to a society in which people think someone else owes them a living. There are charities and government programs to take care of their *legitimate* needs, so I know they don't require my personal assistance. In fact, I suspect that these beggars all make more money than I do!

2. Have you ever helped the poor or the handicapped? If so, when and how? If not, why not?

(A)

There are many ways of helping. In fact, giving money is perhaps the least valuable way. I've found that giving my time every week is not only a way of meeting their real needs, but is also a way of making me realize my effort is actually doing some good. To anyone who wants to make a difference in this world, I *heartily* recommend *volunteering*.

(B)

Once I saw a mother and her two young children on a street corner, sleeping on a cardboard box. I was *overwhelmed* with pity and wanted to take them to my house, where they could get something to eat and a good night's rest. But my wife refused, so I *didn't extend* them the offer. The next day they were gone. I've always wondered what happened to them.

-crippled : disabled -unbearably : extremely -fake : pretend (sth)

-legitimate : genuine -heartily : in a loud or enthusiastic way

-volunteer : work without getting paid -overwhelm : affect (sb's) emotions in a very powerful way

-extend : offer (sth) such as a welcome, thanks, or sympathy to (sb)

3. How often do you donate blood?

(A)

I used to donate blood five or six times a year. But ever since I heard rumors about blood donors getting AIDS, I stopped. Health officials keep insisting that there is nothing to worry about, but I don't want to *take* any unnecessary *chances*.

(B)

When I was in college I used to sell my blood. I never had much money, and this was one way I could have a little to spend. I guess I *overdid* it then, because now when I give blood the nurse always has a difficult time finding a suitable vein. So far, though, we've *always* found some way to make the process work, and I'm glad to help unfortunate accident victims.

4. They say everybody is handicapped somehow. What does that mean? In what way are you handicapped?

(A)

Nobody is *gifted* in all aspects of life, so we are all handicapped in comparison to someone else. In my case, I'm terribly shy. It's hard for me to talk to people I don't know, even when it's *urgent* that I do so. This has *hindered* my progress in school and made it hard for me to make new friends.

(B)

I don't think I'm handicapped at all. Other people may disagree, since I can't walk and I rely on a wheelchair. This may be very inconvenient at times, but it doesn't stop me from doing any of the important things in life. I went to college and got a good job, I got married, and I have kids. I have many good, kind friends. So I don't see in what way I am handicapped.

Speak Your Mind

Speak Your Mind Helpers

5. Why should we help others, especially strangers? What's in it for us?

M : I can't understand how any country can support *impoverishing* its most successful citizens in order to support its least successful ones.

F : What are you complaining about *specifically*?

M : Taxes. They're too high. I've spent my entire life preparing for success. I studied hard in school. I worked diligently on my job. Eventually, I saw an opportunity to get ahead, and I took the risk. I didn't have any guarantee that I'd make it, but I took the chance and focused on it *to the exclusion of* everything else.

F : Yes, I know. Very admirable of you.

M : But now that I've made it, I don't see why I have to pay such high taxes to make life easy for the ones who never wanted to follow the rules but now expect a *handout* in reward for their *shiftlessness*. It just doesn't make sense.

F : Well, on a practical level, I guess in a democracy the poor people have more votes than the rich.

M : Then there should be some sort of process. Maybe the law should be changed so that the really poor can't vote; why should anyone who doesn't have any money to be taxed have a right to decide to tax the ones who do?

F : Or maybe each rich person could get extra votes to *counterbalance* the poor?

M : That's a great idea!

- F** : But the problem is that, even under the current system that you complain about, the rich still manage to run the economy and the legal system to their own advantage. If they had their way, they wouldn't pay any taxes at all, and they would let the poorer people *foot* the bill all by themselves. Democracies aren't perfect, but at least they're fair.
- M** : But I still don't see why I should be responsible for paying for other people's bad attitudes.
- F** : In the first place, it isn't quite that simple, you know? A lot of poverty is due to accidents and bad health. Many hard-working people have lost their jobs because their bosses made bad decisions. It's not just because they're "lazy" that they have difficulty.
- M** : Then let's fix the system so that only the truly needy benefit. Maybe *impose* time *restrictions* on benefits, or invest in programs that provide job training. I'm not a heartless person, I just want the rules to be fair.
- F** : Good. I'm glad to hear that. In the second place, even the poor and handicapped have *genuine* value in society. We shouldn't have to make moral values on any individual, but we should expect that everyone has the right to at least a minimum of health care, decent food and housing, and human dignity. We can't have any self-respect if we aren't willing to share our wealth with the truly unfortunate.
- M** : You know, I'd be willing to keep the tax levels at the same rate *temporarily*, to build an effective system of aid. It would be wonderful to get rid of the real causes of poverty. But, mostly, we just use this public money to remove all *incentives* for people to work their way out of poverty. We think it's enough to give them a fish every day instead of teaching them how to catch fish on their own.

