

BUT DOES IT HURT?

PETER MURPHY
UNIVERSITY OF INDIANAPOLIS
murphyp@uindy.edu

ABSTRACT

As effective altruists often point out affluent people can do great good for others without having to make significant self-sacrifices. What is the correct moral assessment of patterns of giving that bring about great good and yet carry little in the way of self-sacrifice? Here I will clarify this question, state why it is important, and argue for an answer to it. After sketching the intuitive category of *the morally best acts*, I argue that self-sacrifice is not a condition that an act must meet to be among the morally best acts. I argue that self-sacrifice is instead a condition that agents must meet to be deserving of *the highest praise*.

Effective altruists often report that their giving has little, or no, net negative impact on their own well-being. In fact, it can be downright fun and quite enjoyable to be an effective altruist these days: the community is full of interesting and supportive people, and one can feel that one is at the vanguard of a movement. Moreover, some effective altruists enjoy being thrifty anyway, some like the challenge of living on less, some would feel guilt if they spent all of their money on other things anyway, etc. Added to this is important social scientific evidence that giving money to pro-social causes *positively* impacts one's well being.¹ All of this seems like very good news. It is good for effective altruists. And it means that a major barrier to giving is illusory, a point which can be used to convince people to become effective altruists.

¹ For a review, see Andreas Mogensen, "Giving Without Sacrifice? The Relationship Elizabeth Dunn, Lara Aknin, and Michael Norton, "Spending Money on Others Promotes Happiness," *Science* 319 (2008): 1687-1688.

But is there any downside to this? I will look at one attempt to show that there is. This attempt is based on the claim that acts which are ethical to the highest degree have to carry significant self-sacrifice. Colloquially put: the morally best acts have to hurt. This excludes from the class of the morally best acts, acts that leave the agent better off, and acts that leave the agent neither worse off nor better off. If this is right and it is true that many people end up no worse off for becoming effective altruists, then the actions of effective altruists, even if they are morally good, are not among the morally best acts.

My goal in the first part of the paper is to say more about the category of the morally best acts, and to locate self-sacrifice as a candidate condition on morally best acts. In the second section, I will say a few things about why the issues that I hope to resolve are important. In the third section, I will argue against one attempt to show that there is a self-sacrifice condition on morally best acts. Then, in the fourth section, I will offer two reasons for the view that self-sacrifice is not a condition on morally best acts. The lesson I draw is that we should set ourselves to thinking better of acts that do not involve significant self-sacrifice, including acts that positively benefit those who perform them.

1. THE MORALLY BEST ACTS

Consider these three cases:

Sacrifice Sally

Sally has recently increased the amount of money that she donates to effective altruism causes by \$10,000 per year. This has come at considerable cost to Sally. Her annual take-home pay is \$60,000. She used to live on \$30,000 of that, while giving the remaining \$30,000 to effective altruism causes. But last year, she started living on \$20,000, and increased her giving to \$40,000. Sally did this by selling her car, walking and riding her bike around the city, and moving into a less expensive and much smaller apartment. Sally does not regret making these changes, but she misses the convenience of owning a car and her old apartment, which was much nicer than her new one. As a result of these changes, her overall well-being has significantly decreased.

Neutral Nora

Nora has recently increased the amount of money that she donates to effective altruism causes by \$10,000 per year. She was able to do this at no cost to herself. After her uncle bequeathed a guaranteed investment certificate to Nora, one that pays out \$10,000 per year, Nora completed the paper work to direct all of the payouts to effective altruism causes. This change has had no significant impact, positive or negative, on Nora's overall well-being.

Benefit Brenda

Brenda has recently increased the amount of money that she donates to effective altruism causes, also by \$10,000 per year. Interestingly, she was able to do this and benefit herself. After her aunt bequeathed a small apartment building to Brenda, Brenda moved into a unit in the building, and took over as the landlord. Saving on rent and redirecting the rental income that she earns has allowed her to donate the extra \$10,000 per year. Her new apartment is much nicer than her old apartment; and she has thoroughly enjoyed getting to know all of the nice tenants that live in the building – some are now among Brenda’s best friends. Overall being the landlord of the building has substantially increased Brenda’s well being.²

While Sally, Nora, and Brenda all acted in morally permissible ways, did one act in a way that is morally better than the way the others acted? Before exploring possible answers, let me clarify two issues.

One is about the acts that we are assessing. They are complexes of simpler actions. For example, Sally’s act that is being assessed encompasses all of the following acts: Sally’s selling her car, Sally’s moving into a smaller apartment, all of Sally’s other repeated sacrifices like walking to work in bad weather, Sally’s monthly donations to effective causes, etc. It is the entire complex of these actions that I will focus on. And similarly for Nora and Brenda.

² For a similar case, see the mansion case in Dan Moller, “Should We Let People Starve – For Now?” *Analysis* 66 (2012): 240-247.

The second point ties back to effective altruism. I take it that in the vast majority of cases, the giving patterns of effective altruists more closely resemble what Nora did, or perhaps even what Brenda did, than they resemble what Sally did. That is, I take it that the self-sacrifice that results from the giving patterns that are typical of effective altruists do not rise to such a degree that they constitute significant harm to the agent. I will take it though that Sally's self-sacrifice does. But since admittedly I do not have any compelling empirical evidence for the former claim about the giving patterns of typical effective altruists, I am happy to have that claim be an assumption of this paper. So if one wishes one can think of this as the central question of this paper: for all those effective altruists whose pattern of giving is more like that of Nora or Brenda than it is to that of Sally, are their patterns of giving among the morally best acts?

Let's turn now to the category of the morally best acts. I begin with two negative points. The first is that the class of morally best acts is not the same as the class of supererogatory acts. To see that not all supererogatory acts are among the morally best acts, consider minor supererogatory acts, such as going a little out of one's way to volunteer an extra time at the local homeless shelter or doing a small favor for a stranger (that was not morally required). These acts are supererogatory, but they are not weighty enough to be among the morally best acts. There are also acts that are morally required, and therefore not supererogatory, yet they are among the morally best acts. For example, if someone promises to donate one of their kidneys to some stranger and no moral reasons override this, this plausibly makes this

person morally required to donate their kidney to that stranger. Yet this act is still among the morally best acts.

Nor is the class of morally best acts the same as the class of acts that are the morally best options in agents' option sets. Consider again a minor supererogatory act: even if such an act is the morally best option in someone's option set, it is still not among the morally best acts. Nor is being the morally best option in an option set necessary for being one of the morally best acts. For example, if there was an option open to Sally that was even morally better than the one that she pursued – suppose she could have donated an additional \$2,000 per year if she had also found a roommate to help her pay the rent – what she did was still among the morally best acts.

This yields two plausible necessary conditions on being a morally best act:

BENEFACTENCE: The act must result in significant good, or prevent significant harm, to others.

SELF-SACRIFICE: The act must involve significant sacrifice to the agent.

Minor supererogatory acts are excluded by BENEFACTENCE. And SELF-SACRIFICE helps to explain why donating one's kidney to a stranger is among the morally best acts.

SELF-SACRIFICE will be the focus of this paper. If it is a condition on being one of the morally best acts, it will exclude the acts of Nora and Brenda, as well as many patterns of giving of effective altruists, from the class of the morally best acts. Later I will look at some considerations for, and against, imposing SELF-SACRIFICE as

a condition on morally best acts. But first let me finish outlining the plausible conditions on the morally best acts.

A condition related to SELF-SACRIFICE is also needed. To see this, consider the following case:

Unnecessary Natalie

Natalie has recently increased the amount of money that she donates to effective altruism causes from \$30,000 per year to \$40,000 per year. This has come at considerable cost to Natalie. Her annual take-home pay is \$60,000. She used to live on \$30,000 of that, and gave the other \$30,000 to effective altruism causes. But last year, she started living on \$20,000, and increased her giving to \$40,000. Natalie did this just as Sally did: by selling her car, walking and riding her bike, moving into a less expensive and much smaller apartment, etc. And this has had the same significant negative impact on Natalie's well-being that it did on Sally's. However, unlike Sally, Natalie was offered a job promotion last year that would have increased her take-home pay by \$10,000, which would have covered her extra \$10,000 of giving. It would have involved just the same duties as her present job, and only a change in title. She knew all of this, but she turned down the promotion.

Natalie's decision to turn down the promotion and instead make herself substantially worse off in order to advance her moral goals is baffling. At a minimum, it was imprudent for her to do this. Of course, Natalie's giving is still morally good. But it is

much more plausible that Sally, who had no easier way to get her hands on an extra \$10,000 per year to give to effective altruism causes, did something that counts among the morally best acts than it is that Natalie did. So while perhaps it is not obvious that Natalie's act fails to be among the morally best acts, it is plausible that it does and that the following is an additional necessary condition on morally best acts:

NON-GRATUITOUS: The act must not result in any unnecessary sacrifice to the agent.³

As we will see later, my main claim will still go through even if I am mistaken that NON-GRATUITOUS is a condition on morally best acts.

One final condition is needed:

PERMISSIBLE: The act must not be morally wrong.

This condition is needed to exclude any possible acts that are morally wrong despite meeting the other three conditions. Clearly no acts that are among the morally best acts are morally wrong acts.

That concludes my sketch of this important class of actions. This class of actions, or something close to it, seems to be quite easy and natural to grasp; and it seems easy to recognize instances of this class of actions. Also, recognizing this class of actions does not require relying on any heavy-duty commitments in ethical theory. My main goal though in this section has just been to highlight this class of acts. The

³ Notice that NON-GRATUITOUS applies when comparing options within a single set of options. This contrasts with comparing among the actions of Sally, Nora, and Brenda – these comparisons are between options that belong to different sets of options.

main focus for the rest of the paper will be on whether SELF-SACRIFICE is a condition on being among the morally best acts. As we will see, the main claim that I want to establish about this will not rely on much from this section. So if it should turn out that I have missed some other necessary condition on the morally best acts, my main claim might still be true. Similarly, if it should turn out that either BENEVICENCE, NON-GRATUITOUS, or PERMISSIBLE, at least as I have formulated them, are not conditions on being among the morally best acts, my main claim might still be true.

2. IMPORTANCE

Why is it important to determine whether SELF-SACRIFICE is a condition on morally best acts? And, why is it important to determine whether the typical giving patterns of effective altruists fall into this category? In this section, I offer three reasons to think that these are important issues.

For one, it is theoretically important. One way to see this is to consider comparisons. If SELF-SACRIFICE is a condition on being among the morally best acts, then plenty of altruistic acts that entail harm to oneself, such as donating organs while one is still alive, adopting foster children, etc., are morally better acts than the acts that effective altruists typically perform, even when the latter bring about much more good.⁴ If true, this is an important thing to know since it would mark a theoretically

⁴ For other interesting cases, see Larissa MacFarquhar, *Strangers Drowning* (Penguin Press, 2015).

interesting difference among morally permissible acts that result in significant good to others.

These issues are also important because they bear on how we should measure the morality of various kinds of lives. Contrast someone who does plenty of good, but without enduring much self-sacrifice, with someone who does less good (though still significant good) but at significant cost to herself. Which actions are morally better? And what life – the one consisting mainly of acts of the first kind or the one consisting mainly of acts of the second kind – is the morally better life?

These issues also bear on which social norms regarding altruism and giving should be challenged and curtailed, and which should be defended and promulgated. If SELF-SACRIFICE is a condition on the morally best acts, then we have reason to promote a corresponding social norm. We should think better of acts that meet this condition than we do of acts that are otherwise the same but don't entail much self-sacrifice, and we should encourage others to do the same. My guess is that many current social norms regarding altruism and giving are like this. However if SELF-SACRIFICE is not a condition on such acts, then it might be better to have social norms that lead us to think more, perhaps much more, than we currently do of some acts that do not involve self-sacrifice.

We need to be measured though. At least initially, it seems that the issue of whether or not an act has to meet SELF-SACRIFICE to count among the morally best acts has no bearing on other key issues in ethics. First, agents who have few, or no, options which meet SELF-SACRIFICE in their option sets can still act ethically, and

they can do lots of good for others.⁵ In fact, how much good they can do for others is independent of whether they have options that meet SELF-SACRIFICE. And, second, whether one frequently has options that meet the SELF-SACRIFICE condition in one's option sets is largely a contingent matter that is outside one's control.⁶ That Sally, for example, has to significantly sacrifice herself to increase her giving by \$10,000 per year, while Brenda and Nora do not, is due to circumstances outside of Sally's control. No aunt, uncle, or anyone else left Sally an inheritance that she could use to substantially increase her giving; and no other opportunity arose for her to substantially increase her giving without sacrificing her own well-being.

3. PROXIMITY TO MAXIMIZATION

With its importance in mind, let's return to our main question: is SELF-SACRIFICE a condition on morally best acts? This section examines one attempt to show that it is. The attempt appeals to maximization. Recall that Sally did not maximize her giving since she could have given an extra \$2,000 per year if she took on a roommate, which is something she decided not to do. Consider then a proposal which says that Sally's giving and the burdens that it imposed upon her put her closer to the point of maximization than Nora's giving put her, or Brenda's giving put her. The point of

⁵ Assume that these options also meet the BENEFICENCE and NON-GRATUITOUS conditions.

⁶ This makes the presence or absence of such options a matter of what Thomas Nagel calls circumstantial moral luck. See Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck" in his *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge University Press, 1979).

maximization is the point where one has given all that one can.⁷ We might think that it is important whether people end up closer, or further, from the point of maximization because those whose total pattern of giving lands them further from this point leave more altruistic opportunities unrealized than those whose total pattern of giving lands them closer to this point. If this is right, then the distance from the point of maximization where one lands can then be taken as an indicator of how moral one's pattern of giving is. When one's pattern of giving involves significant self-sacrifice, one ends up close enough to the point of maximization that one's pattern of giving qualifies as a morally best act. But when one's pattern of giving does not land one close enough to the point of maximization, one has left too many altruistic opportunities unrealized for one's pattern of giving to count as a morally best act.

But exactly what is one traversing as one crosses this space? Is it one's own well-being or is it the opportunities that one has to help others? These are not the same. Obviously lots of things quite apart from items that can be used to help others can bear on one's well-being. But more importantly, as Brenda's case illustrates, when one realizes opportunities to help others, one's well-being can *increase*. Moreover, the benefits that Brenda enjoys as an effect of her pattern of giving – like her improved social life – cannot be converted into money (or anything else) that she could then use to increase her giving. As economists put it, these benefits are not *liquid vis-à-vis*

⁷ The argument works just as well if we use other points instead; for example, if we use proximity to the point of marginal utility.

money.⁸ That is, they cannot be converted into some other good that can then be diverted to effective altruist causes. Therefore the benefits that Brenda enjoys do not reflect any unrealized opportunities to help others. And so Brenda might well put herself as close to the point of realizing all of her altruistic opportunities as Sally puts herself.

To sum up, since the space in question must consist in opportunities to help others if it is to get at the moral status of various patterns of giving, and because some components of well-being are not liquid vis-à-vis money, one need not be sacrificing oneself – construed here as taking a net loss in one’s personal well-being – as one moves closer to the point of maximization.

4. EVALUATING AGENTS, EVALUATING ACTS

I want to discuss one other approach: perhaps SELF-SACRIFICE is best thought of as a condition on *an agent* being among *the most praiseworthy agents* for something the agent did, rather than as a condition on morally best *acts*. Or, as I will simply put it, maybe SELF-SACRIFICE is a condition on being worthy of the highest praise. The kind of praise at issue here is *local praise*, where this is praise that is directed at an agent for a particular act that she performed. This differs from various forms of global praise, which can be directed at a person for more general things, like

⁸ Liquidity differs from fungibility. A good is fungible just in case one unit of it is interchangeable with any other unit of it. A good is liquid vis-à-vis some other kind of good just in case a unit of the first good can be exchanged for a unit of the second good.

being the kind of person one is, or for all of the acts that one has performed in one's life.

I take it that acting from duty is a crucial condition on acting in a praiseworthy manner.⁹ Of course, there are competing views of what it is to act from duty. Still regardless of which one of these views is correct, each of Sally, Nora, and Brenda are naturally thought of as acting from duty. So whether acting from duty requires something like acting from the knowledge that what one is doing is right, or acting from some kind of appreciation of the right-making features of one's act, or acting from an appropriate desire, it is easy to fill in their cases so that each of Sally, Nora, and Brenda acted from duty.¹⁰

It is highly intuitive though that Sally is more praiseworthy than either Nora or Brenda is. In fact, I take it that the following is quite intuitive: Sally is *highly praiseworthy* for what she did; but Nora and Brenda, though certainly praiseworthy for what they did, are *not highly praiseworthy* for what they did. This appropriately reflects our different reactions to these cases, differences which seem to consist, in important part, in how we react to these three agents. If this is right, how might we explain why Sally deserves the highest praise, but Nora and Brenda do not?

⁹ The acting from duty condition goes under other titles, such as acting from right reasons and moral worth. For helpful discussion, see Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry Into Moral Agency* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁰ We don't have to think of Brenda as acting from self-interest any more than we have to think of effective altruists as acting from self-interest simply because they find fulfillment in giving. For reasons why finding satisfaction in doing something does not imply acting from self-interest, see James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (Random House, 1986), chapter 5.

There are at least two different ways to do this. As we will see, the SELF-SACRIFICE condition plays a very different role in each of these explanations. One approach makes SELF-SACRIFICE a condition on morally best acts, and then imposes a separate condition on highest praise that requires one to also act from duty:

ANALYSIS 1

An agent deserves the highest praise for one of her acts if and only if:

(A) that act is among the morally best acts, where this is so if and only if it meets all of our earlier conditions, namely:

- (1) BENEFICENCE
- (2) SELF-SACRIFICE
- (3) NON-GRATUITOUS
- (4) PERMISSIBLE

(B) in performing that act, the agent acted from duty.

Sally meets all of these conditions; so she is deserving of the highest praise. But Nora and Brenda are not deserving of the highest praise since they fail to meet the SELF-SACRIFICE condition on morally best acts, which is in turn a condition on highest praise.

However there is another way to yield the result that Sally is deserving of the highest praise for what she did, while Nora and Brenda are not. On this approach, SELF-SACRIFICE is directly imposed as a condition on highest praise. And it does not appear in the analysis of morally best acts. This is the analysis I have in mind:

ANALYSIS 2

An agent deserves the highest praise for one of her acts if and only if:

(A) that act is among the morally best acts, where this is so if and only if it meets these conditions:

- (1) BENEFICENCE
- (2) PERMISSIBLE
- (3) CONDITIONAL NON-GRATUITOUS: If the act involves significant self-sacrifice, then this self-sacrifice is

- non-gratuitous
 (B) in performing that act, the agent acted from duty
 (C) SELF-SACRIFICE

Sally meets all of these conditions; so again she is deserving of the highest praise. And again Nora and Brenda are not deserving of the highest praise. But now the reason Nora and Brenda are not deserving of the highest praise does not lie in a failure to act in one of the morally best ways – they did act in one of the morally best ways. Instead it is because they failed to meet a separate condition on highest praise.

Let's pause to note a feature of Analysis 2. To preserve the earlier, somewhat tentative intuition that gratuitous self-sacrifice excludes an act from being among the morally best acts (recall Unnecessary Natalie), CONDITIONAL NON-GRATUITOUS is imposed in Analysis 2 to exclude those acts from the category of the morally best acts.¹¹ However if it should turn out that NON-GRATUITOUS is in fact not a condition on an action's being among the morally best, then CONDITIONAL NON-GRATUITOUS is not a condition in Analysis 2. If this is so, my main claim about SELF-SACRIFICE can still go through.

We saw that Analysis 1 and Analysis 2 render the same verdicts about highest praise for each of Sally, Nora, and Brenda. Each tells us that Sally deserves the highest praise, while Nora and Brenda do not. However Analysis 1 and Analysis 2 render different verdicts about whether Nora's and Brenda's acts are among the morally best acts. Embedded in Analysis 1 is an analysis of morally best acts which

¹¹ NON-GRATUITOUS is a material conditional. Consequently, if its antecedent is false for some act, then the conditional is automatically true and the condition is met.

entails that their acts are *not* among the morally best acts. By contrast what is embedded in Analysis 2 is an analysis of morally best acts that entails that their acts *are* among the morally best acts. Consequently Analysis 2 delivers split verdicts in the cases of Nora and Brenda: their acts are among the morally best acts, but neither Nora nor Brenda is deserving of the highest praise.

So does satisfying SELF-SACRIFICE only matter for whether agents are deserving of the highest praise, as Analysis 2 has it? Or does satisfying SELF-SACRIFICE matter for whether agents are deserving of the highest praise *and* for whether various acts are among the morally best acts, as Analysis 1 has it? The point of disagreement here is about whether SELF-SACRIFICE matters for acts. I want to focus on Analysis 1. What should we think of Analysis 1's commitment to the claim that harm *upgrades* the morality of some *acts* that bring about harm?

To start to answer this crucial question, let's consider whether causing harm *ever* upgrades the morality of acts. This requires considering other areas in ethics. In the ethics of punishment, retributivists often hold that when harm is inflicted on a person who deserves that harm, this will (when other conditions are met) transform the act of inflicting that harm, which would otherwise be morally wrong, into an act that is morally permissible (or perhaps even transform it into an act that is morally required). Of course, this is a notorious feature of retributivism, one that some think is perverse axiological alchemy, but others think is a reasonable consequence of the best theory of desert. As a neutral term for this, I will use *axiological transformation*.

Non-retributivists about the ethics of punishment see things differently. While many of their favored theories of punishment hold that it can be morally permissible to inflict harm as part of punishing someone, they take punishment to be moral *despite* the harm that is inflicted on the wrongdoer. Retributivists, by contrast, hold that punishment is moral, in part, *because* of the harm that is inflicted on the wrongdoer. In the language of supervenience, retributivists maintain that the moral rightness of a punishment supervenes in part on the harm that the wrongdoer suffers, while non-retributivists maintain that the moral rightness of a punishment does not, even in part, supervene on the harm that the wrongdoer suffers.

The view that SELF-SACRIFICE is a condition on morally best acts is, like retributivism, committed to axiological transformation. To see this, consider a pair of acts that meet BENEFICENCE and PERMISSIBLE, and are otherwise just the same, except that one meets SELF-SACRIFICE, and the other doesn't.¹² The view that SELF-SACRIFICE is a condition on morally best acts will promote just one of these acts, the one involving significant self-sacrifice, into the category of morally best acts. It follows that, on this view, the harm to that agent figures into the explanation of why that act is promoted this way. It is promoted this way *because* it involves that harm. It is not promoted *despite* that harm. This echoes retributivism.

What we think of this feature of the view that says SELF-SACRIFICE is a condition on morally best acts depends on other views that we hold. Some ethicists

¹² Assume that the act that meets SELF-SACRIFICE also meets NON-GRATUITOUS. Notice that the other act, by not meeting SELF-SACRIFICE, automatically meets CONDITIONAL NON-GRATUITOUS.

are highly suspicious that any axiological transformations are plausible, even the ones that retributivists favor. They will count this commitment as a serious strike against the view of morally best acts in Analysis 1. For these people, this is sufficient reason to opt for the weaker version of morally best acts that is found in Analysis 2. Consequently, they will count what Nora and Brenda did as being among the morally best acts.

Others are open to axiological transformation, but prefer the simplicity of working with a theory that says causing harm never boosts the moral status of actions. These people will also be attracted to the weaker version of morally best acts in Analysis 2, and therefore to classifying Nora's and Brenda's acts as morally best acts.

Those who are open in principle to axiological transformation and are not so taken with such an appeal to simplicity will want to see what arguments the proponent of SELF-SACRIFICE have to offer. They might continue the comparison with retributivism by seeing if the proponent of SELF-SACRIFICE can say something as compelling as the retributivist can say. Retributivists have a resource, namely their theory of desert, to try to persuade us that the axiological transformations that they favor are plausible. If one of their theories of desert is correct, then axiological transformations are a feature of punishment.¹³

But of course retributivist machinery is of no help with our giving cases since obviously Sally does not deserve the harms that figure into her self-sacrifice, and she is not being punished. So what kind of machinery can the proponent of SELF-

¹³ The literature on desert is huge. For a thorough discussion, see Shelly Kagan, *The Geometry of Desert* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

SACRIFICE as a condition on morally best acts use to explain how, in the realm of giving, sometimes causing harm to an innocent person boosts the moral status of an action? I am at a loss as to what it could possibly be. It seems that there is a serious challenge here for the proponent of SELF-SACRIFICE. To meet this challenge, the proponent needs to answer three questions. First, what is the machinery that explains axiological transformations in the realm of giving? Second, how exactly does the machinery explain these axiological transformations? And, third, what independent evidence is there in support of such machinery?

The case against including SELF-SACRIFICE as a condition on the morally best acts can be strengthened. Return to the earlier intuitive assessments of our agents: only Sally deserves the highest praise; neither Nora nor Brenda do. *How* does the self-sacrifice that Sally endures help to make her deserving of the highest praise? Does it do this primarily because it upgrades the moral status of her action, as Analysis 1 would have it? Or does it do this because it speaks directly about her as an agent, as Analysis 2 would have it?

To answer, consider a variant on the Sacrifice Sally case. Suppose that in this case Sally does not anticipate the significant drop in her well-being that results from the sacrifices that she makes, and suppose that she only begrudgingly accepts this drop in her well-being. It isn't that she is initially surprised and disappointed about the drop in her well-being, but then comes around to reconciling herself to these changes. Instead she permanently begrudges the fact that her well-being has

decreased. Through all of this though her acts of giving and all of their other consequences are no different from those in the original Sacrifice Sally case.

It seems that in this last case, Sally does not deserve the highest praise. Her begrudging attitude colors our moral assessment of her. But since her actions – that is, her pattern of giving – is just the same as the original Sally's, it is not anything about her actions that affects the degree of praise that she deserves. So it must be something about her *as an agent* that affects it. This is some evidence that the self-sacrifice that the original Sally endures makes her deserving of the highest praise because it makes us directly think better of her, and not because it makes us first think better of what she did.

If this last argument is right, then we need to reformulate SELF-SACRIFICE in Analysis 2, so that it requires that the agent goes along in some sense with the self-sacrifice. I leave these details for another time, since they are not needed for my central point. As long as that condition can be reformulated to exclude begrudging Sally from being someone who is deserving of the highest praise, then we have another reason, consisting in cases like this last one, to reject the view that SELF-SACRIFICE is a condition on the morally best acts, and to instead accept the view that some modified version of SELF-SACRIFICE is a condition on deserving the highest praise.

I hope to have cast some light on how self-sacrifice might bear on the moral evaluation of acts, and how it might bear on the moral evaluation of agents. If the main claim that I have argued for is correct, self-sacrifice only bears on the moral

evaluation of agents, and it does bear not on the moral evaluation of acts. This last negative claim clears the way for the actions of effective altruists to count among the morally best acts. The upshot for effective altruists is this: for your typical acts of giving to count among the morally best acts, they do not have to hurt; but for you to deserve the highest praise, your acts do have to hurt.¹⁴

¹⁴ Thanks to one of the guest editors for helpful comments.