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Why the Numbers Should Sometimes Count

I

Your spaceship is out of control as you enter the Alpha Centauri system. Your cargo is a remarkably powerful explosive that detonates on impact. You have lost all control over the situation, with the exception of two buttons. One button would fire a small retrorocket, but there is only enough fuel to fire it once. The other button will eject you and your life support system into safe orbit around Alpha Centauri, and you know that your own life is not in jeopardy; you will be saved in due course by the Intergalactic Patrol ship that comes around from time to time. Your problem is this: should you fire the retrorocket before you leave the ship?

This is a problem for the following reason: your onboard computer informs you that you are on a collision course with the third planet of the system. It also calculates that the ship with its cargo will destroy the entire planet should it crash into it. Furthermore, the computer informs you that the planet is home to ten billion people who have elected to have no intercourse with civilization outside their system. They will be killed if your ship hits their planet. If you fire the retrorocket, you can avoid such a collision, but doing so will put the ship on a collision course with a small capsule in orbit about the planet, one that is occupied by a single astronaut. If the ship collides with the capsule (as it surely will if the retrorocket is

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fired), the astronaut will be killed. You must make a choice: destroy the planet, with its ten billion lives, or destroy the capsule, with its one life.

Relatively common intuitions about this science-fiction example, buttressed perhaps (but not necessarily) by some well-known ethical theories, would suggest that, all other things being equal, the choice is straightforward: one ought to fire the retrorocket. The reason for this seems equally straightforward to those who have these intuitions: one ought to act in such a way as to save the most lives. John Taurek, on the other hand, has argued that one ought to flip a coin.¹

Taurek's argument, briefly stated, goes like this. In the absence of special reasons for greater concern for the one than for the ten billion, or of special reasons for greater concern for the ten billion (singly, in groups, or all together) than for the one, you should give everyone a fifty-fifty chance to live in this terrible circumstance.² Hence the coin toss. Flipping a coin is meant only as a way of representing some procedure that acknowledges each individual's equal potential loss, and emphasizes your effort at expressing equal concern for all those involved with the consequences of your decision. A crucial part of Taurek's argument is his contention that

1. John M. Taurek, "Should the Numbers Count?" *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 6, no. 4 (Summer 1977). Page numbers in the text refer to this article. There has arisen a minor industry in Taurek articles. See, for example, Derek Parfit, "Innumerate Ethics," *ibid.* 7, no. 4 (Summer 1978); Charles Fried, "Correspondence," *ibid.* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1979); Derek Parfit, "Correspondence," *ibid.*; Gregory S. Kavka, "The Numbers Should Count," *Philosophical Studies* 36 (1979); William H. Shaw, "Elementary Lifesaving," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 18 (1980); James F. Woodward, "Why the Numbers Count," *ibid.* 19 (1981); and Frances Myrna Kamm, "Equal Treatment and Equal Chances," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 14, no. 2 (Spring 1985).

2. Special reasons could include an estimate of the great contributions that this one person might make (because of special characteristics), or that these ten billion might make (or one of them, or some of them), to your own welfare, or to the welfare of others, or to something else that you deem important. Because of the puzzles engendered by such special reasons my science-fiction story stipulates that the Alpha Centaurians have elected to have no intercourse with civilization outside their system. I hope this is enough. Taurek, in conversation, has suggested the following example as a way of more neatly separating the numbers question from issues involving "special reasons": Imagine ten billion planets, each with a civilization similar to Earth's. Your dilemma is to choose between killing one innocent Earthling and killing one person on each of the ten billion worlds. This may avoid some confusions involving special reasons, but not all of them. Furthermore, it makes for a much sloppier science-fiction story. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that in Taurek's suggested revision there is the virtue of avoiding the necessity of considering the loss of a civilization—or an entire ecosystem—which may in the minds of many be an additional horror, beyond the loss of a great many people, that would be a consequence of the destruction of the planet in *my* version.

personal losses or sufferings do not add up across persons in the way one might uncritically suppose, and that there is therefore little sense to the idea that there is “greater suffering” or “greater loss to the persons involved” if the planet is destroyed than if the capsule is destroyed. The only relevant loss is the loss to each individual of his or her life, and there are ten billion and one persons who face this loss in our example. Taurek’s position reflects the idea that you should do as much as you can for all these persons, and this suggests maximizing each person’s chances for survival. You should therefore flip a coin, thus giving each person a fifty-fifty chance, and thus taking every person’s potential loss seriously.³

I do not intend to argue that Taurek is wrong regarding the additivity of people’s losses or sufferings. I agree with Taurek that these simply do not sum. I would even agree that as far as losses *to* the ten billion and one Alpha Centaurians are concerned, there is no greater loss if the planet goes than if the capsule goes. It is not that there is a greater loss to the ten billion, but rather that more people suffer an equal loss. It might be thought

3. The question that Taurek addresses generates a remarkably rich variety of further questions. As a way of highlighting such matters, imagine the following rather curious case. Six persons have been captured by members of a little-known cult and are being subjected to a perverse ritual: First they are to draw lots which will distribute them into two rooms, the green room and the red room. The lots are such that one person will go into the green room and five persons will go into the red room. Second, the cult will capture another innocent passerby (you, as it happens), and will insist that he decide which room will be burned to the ground (perhaps under the threat that all seven prisoners will be shot and the game begun again with other captives if no decision is forthcoming). Barring the possibility of escape or rescue, what should you do? Better, assuming that you *should* choose one room or the other (which is not an altogether obvious assumption), how should you go about making your choice? Let the persons be completely unknown to you. Change the story from case to case so as to give different information to the persons involved. Does that make a difference? Does it make a difference that the first six victims know—or do not know—the significance of the initial lottery? Does it make a difference whether you know—or do not know—that the victims have been distributed by means of a lottery? What if the victims, knowing why they are choosing lots, are able to come to some agreement about what you should do, and they communicate this to you? Does that make a difference? The mind reels. The principle that you should maximize each person’s chances may yield a determinate solution in some cases, but not in others. I am not sure that this is an embarrassment to Taurek’s position, since he can hold on to the principle in some cases, drop it in others (due to “special reasons” for a particular choice), and even acknowledge indeterminate cases without betraying his fundamental thesis. Nevertheless, the thesis would be better supported if these issues were explicitly discussed. I am indebted to Richard Bense for raising them. Quite a different concern arises if one considers carefully the idea that death constitutes a loss to a person—an idea central to Taurek’s discussion if not to his theoretical point. Is this really an appropriate way to think about death? I am not sure that it is. Nevertheless, consideration of Taurek’s interesting argument against counting the numbers requires that we suspend such concerns.

that this consideration leaves open the possibility of an ethically significant way of multiplying losses across persons, but Taurek's examples make this idea tricky to support, and I will not explicitly quarrel with him here, either.⁴

Nevertheless, even granting Taurek all of this, there are reasons to think that the numbers *should* count, at least sometimes. I shall contend that his thesis requires not only that one show equal concern for the loss to each person involved, but also that one invest this principle with such strength as to block other kinds of considerations that may appear to be relevant. The thesis that the numbers should not count requires that Taurek's "principle of equal concern" rule out any consideration that persons are worth saving just because they are persons. This is a strong requirement, and it receives no defense in Taurek's article.

II

Taurek's first effort to persuade his readers that the numbers should not count involves a case in which six people are dying of some terrible disease. Fortunately, Taurek has a drug which can save people who are dying of this disease. Unfortunately, he does not have enough to save all six; he has only enough to save five. But he cannot save *any* five: one of the six is so sick that he would require all of Taurek's drug if he were to be saved. The other five are not so sick; they could all be saved, given the amount of the drug that Taurek has. The remaining detail of the story is crucial: the one very sick person is David, a person that Taurek knows and likes. The others are strangers.

Taurek contends that he is entitled to give the drug to David, just because he is someone that Taurek likes. He acknowledges that others

4. Derek Parfit does quarrel with Taurek on this point. See "Innumerate Ethics." Parfit's argument in behalf of additivity is, however, implausible. It amounts to this: one person might choose to have a migraine for a half-hour rather than have a thousand minor headaches over the next year, judging that the latter is worse. We might all agree. But then why should we not agree that it is worse for a thousand people to have minor headaches than for one to have a migraine? Surely the right answer to Parfit is that it is in large part the cumulative effect of a thousand minor headaches that *makes* them worse than a migraine in the one-person case. No such cumulative effect is to be found in the many-person case. Parfit also, in passing, cites an elegant passage from C. S. Lewis that enunciates nicely the contention that pains *do not* sum across persons. The passage is from Lewis's *Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1978), and appeared originally in defense of the Christian doctrine of suffering.

might view such an act as immoral, and so begins his argument that numbers should not count. In particular, he argues that if he is right in thinking that he may give all of the drug to David—and that the numbers should not count in *this* situation—then it is hardly likely that the numbers should count in a situation where none of the six is known to him:

The problem, then, is to explain, especially perhaps to these five people, how it is that merely because I know and like David and am unacquainted with them I can so easily escape the moral requirement to save their lives that would fall on most anyone else in my position. The only relevant consideration here is that I happen to like David more than I like any of them. Imagine my saying to them, “Admittedly, the facts are such that I would be morally obligated to give you this drug, if it didn’t happen that I prefer to give it to him.” The moral force of such facts must be feeble indeed to be overridden by an appeal as feeble as this. (pp. 297–98)

Taurek offers examples and a discussion that suggests that it *would* be all right to give the drug to David, and he contends—correctly, I think—that this need not be because of some obligation that he has to David. Taurek is certainly right in contending that merely knowing and liking someone entails no such obligation, and he may be right about the legitimacy of saving the person he knows and likes in situations like the ones he outlines.⁵

Taurek then considers the case where he knows none of the six, but the other details of the story remain the same. For Taurek, the new case becomes one in which he has equal concern for all six people. Here is what he says about the relevance of numbers in such cases:

It seems to me that those who, in situations of the kind in question, would have me count the relative numbers of people involved as something in itself of significance, would have me attach importance to human beings and what happens to them in merely the way I would to objects which I valued. If six objects are threatened by fire and I am in a position to retrieve the five in this room or the one in that room, but un-

5. I do not mean, here, to claim that no relevant obligations attach to *friendship*. It is just that Taurek’s case is carefully set up to avoid the need to consider the special case of friendship. Taurek, in the story developed in his paper, merely knows and likes David. (Gregory S. Kavka’s discussion of Taurek’s argument seems to have missed this point, as does that of James F. Woodward. See Kavka, “The Numbers Should Count,” and Woodward, “Why the Numbers Count.”)

able to get out all six, I would decide what to do in just the way I am told I should when it is human beings who are threatened. Each object will have a certain value in my eyes. If it happens that all six are of equal value, I will naturally preserve the many rather than the one. Why? Because the five objects are together five times more valuable in my eyes than the one.

But when I am moved to rescue human beings from harm in situations of the kind described, I cannot bring myself to think of them in just this way. I empathize with them. My concern for what happens to them is grounded chiefly in the realization that each of them is, as I would be in his place, terribly concerned about what happens to him. It is not my way to think of them as each having a certain *objective* value, determined however it is we determine the objective value of things, and then to make some estimate of the combined value of the five as against the one. If it were not for the fact that these objects were creatures much like me, for whom what happens to them is of great importance, I doubt that I would take much interest in their preservation. As merely intact objects they would mean very little to me, being, as such, nearly as common as toadstools. The loss of an arm of the *Pietà* means something to me not because the *Pietà* will miss it. But the loss of an arm of a creature like me means something to me only because I know he will miss it, just as I would miss mine. It is the loss *to this person* that I focus on. I lose nothing of value to me should he lose his arm. But if I have a concern for him, I shall wish he might be spared his loss.

And so it is in the original situation. I cannot but think of the situation in this way. For each of these six persons it is no doubt a terrible thing to die. Each faces the loss of something among the things he values most. His loss means something to me only, or chiefly, because of what it means to him. It is the loss to the individual that matters to me, not the loss of the individual. But should any one of these five lose his life, his loss is no greater a loss to him because, as it happens, four others . . . lose theirs as well. And neither he nor anyone else loses anything of greater value to him than does David, should David lose his life. Five individuals each losing his life does not add up to anyone's experiencing a loss five times greater than the loss suffered by any one of the five. (pp. 306–7)

These are the considerations, then, that lead Taurek to conclude that he should flip a coin, thus taking equally seriously the loss to each of the six

people. The fair coin gives each person a fifty-fifty chance. Taurek concedes that in the case of objects, the matter would be different. There the numbers would count (is it the case that they *should* sometimes count? Taurek does not say), but that is because there the concern is loss *of* valued objects, not loss *to* the objects. Where persons are involved, he considers loss *to* persons (creatures like him), not loss *of* persons. To consider the persons as one would consider objects is not Taurek's way.

It is here, I think, that objections are most fruitfully raised. The initial objection might go something like this: Taurek is probably on the right track when he distinguishes between cases where we are concerned about objects (and the loss *of* them) and cases where we are concerned about people (and the loss *to* them). This distinction is likely to be helpful in all kinds of situations, and should not be ignored when we are trying to decide upon the right thing to do. But it is not so clear that the distinction in question is going to help in the particular kind of case with which we are presently concerned. If Taurek is right in thinking that where he has no special concern for any of the six people in his example (or any of the ten billion and one people in my example) there is no greater loss to the group than to the individual, one might reason as follows: since it seems to be a matter of indifference, in terms of losses *to* persons, whether one saves the group or saves the individual, one should look to other reasons for making one decision rather than another. In particular, one should consider loss *of* persons. One should not flip a coin, because persons are valuable: they are worth saving just because they are persons. In cases like Taurek's and mine, where there are no grounds for distinguishing between losses *to* the relevant persons, one is justified in considering the differential loss *of* persons. And here the numbers should count, just as they do, for Taurek, where six valued objects are threatened by fire.

It is not clear that this initial objection would be decisive in cases of harms short of death, or in cases of benefits to be bestowed.⁶ But where loss of human life is concerned, the objection might go, surely one may add up the numbers of lives to be lost in each of the two options, and surely one should opt for the decision which avoids the greater loss of persons.⁷

6. I think it could be, but I shall not explore the matter here.

7. For an appeal to this view, without an explanation of it, see Philippa Foot, "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect," *Oxford Review* 5 (1967): 5–15. See also Foot, "Euthanasia," in *The Philosopher's Annual*, vol. 1, ed. David L. Boyer, Patrick Grim, and John T. Sanders (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978), especially p. 70 (the article appeared originally in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 6, no. 2 [Winter 1977]). Both pieces are re-

This, of course, is just what Taurek says is not his way. But the objection might be advanced against even *this* claim. Just what is at stake in Taurek's earlier claim that it is legitimate to save David, his very sick personal acquaintance, rather than the five others who could be saved by the same quantity of the wonder drug? Here, too, after all, there is no distinction to be drawn between the loss to David and the loss to the others. The five losses-to do not add up. All we can compare, at most, are losses to individuals. If losses-to were all that were at stake here, then it would seem that we should flip a coin here, too, on Taurek's view. So what *is* at stake? Clearly, the difference is to be found in the fact that Taurek knows and likes David. But is not this just a way of saying that Taurek values David more than he values the five? Is it not just a way of saying that the loss of the five is better, for Taurek, than the loss of David? If this is an acceptable interpretation of Taurek's view of this case, then it will not do for him to say that it is "not his way" to treat people in the way he would treat valued objects, and the objection might well be decisive, at least where loss of life is at stake.

III

Taurek has an answer to this objection, and it is not altogether implausible.⁸ He would say that the case where he knows and likes David is *not* acceptably interpreted as a case in which he values David more. He is concerned *for* David. He aches *with* David. Because of this special empathy he is more concerned about the loss *to* David than he is about the loss to the other five. In the case where he knows none of the six sick people, he has empathy for each of them, because they are creatures like him, and

printed in Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978). For Foot, the view that we should cause "less injury" rather than more, in cases where both our options involve bringing aid or both involve avoiding injury (and neither involves special duties), seems to be a fixed point in her analysis of other issues. It is just this view that Taurek criticizes. It seems to me that the present discussion explains why Foot is right and Taurek wrong. At least in cases where lives are at stake, we evaluate the relative loss of persons. For a mercifully brief—and somewhat more conservative—statement of concerns like Taurek's about whether the numbers should count, see G.E.M. Anscombe's reply to Foot's piece on the doctrine of double effect: Anscombe, "Who is Wronged?" *Oxford Review* 5 (1967): 16–17. For a valuable response to Anscombe, see Jonathan Glover, *Causing Death and Saving Lives* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 207–10.

8. I rely here on Taurek's remarks during a discussion of his article sponsored by the Institute for Humane Studies in Menlo Park, California, during the summer of 1980.

because he knows how terrible the loss would be to him, were he in their shoes. But there is no greater loss to five people who die than to one person who dies, and in this case there is no special empathy that justifies saving the one rather than the five, or saving the five rather than the one.⁹

In addition, Taurek would insist that the coin toss, which he counsels in case none of the six are known, is not fairly appraised as reflecting indifference between the two outcomes. It is not a mere shrug of the shoulders, but rather a fair procedure, one which acknowledges the equality of the losses-to among all six people. It would not do, for example, to use just an arbitrary decision procedure. It would be wrong to help the one lone individual because he is wearing a red sweater and red is your favorite color, or to help the five because five has always been your favorite number.

Taurek would say, then, that the objection with which we ended the last section simply misses his point. It relies (or seems to rely) on the contention that where there are no grounds for distinguishing among the losses to the relevant persons, losses-to become irrelevant in making a decision. But, Taurek would say, because the losses-to are equal and because it is the losses-to that are ethically important, a fair procedure must be chosen for making the decision, one that does not ignore the importance of losses-to. It is not a matter of indifference what you do: in cases where the only distinction to be drawn involves numbers, one *ought* to flip a coin. That is what is required, according to Taurek, if one gives due consideration to what is at stake for each of these persons.

Taurek makes his case by way of examples. He does not defend his contention that we ought to attend to the losses to persons, but rather appeals to our intuitions about what is proper. Intuitions are, of course, “as common as toadstools.” But Taurek has hit upon a rather central one, and it is impossible to shrug it off. His problem is that the intuition that the num-

9. But *why* does Taurek have special empathy for David in the first case? Is this really so different from saying that he values David more? This is not just a side issue. Taurek might suggest that the difference the numbers *seem* to make in some cases is really a psychological difference in us; we are more appalled by the idea of many dying than we are by the idea of just one death. Taurek might then question the ethical relevance of such a reaction, and that seems fair enough (but *why* are we more appalled?). But is Taurek's concern for David's loss so very different? David, after all, will lose no more than any of the others would. This is puzzling. It is hard to understand how we are to explain Taurek's view of the case where he knows and likes David, if neither the loss of persons nor our psychological reaction to such losses is to be considered. But if either is considered, then it is hard to see why the numbers should not sometimes count.

bers *should* count is just as common and just as central. At the very least, Taurek does a nice job of highlighting a tension that may sometimes exist between the view that persons should be regarded as persons, rather than objects, and the view that sheer numbers are relevant in cases like the ones at issue.

It is nevertheless revealing to look back at the objection offered above in Section II, in order to see just how Taurek's response is supposed to work against it. This will serve to expose the power that Taurek's principle must have if it is to lead to the conclusion that the numbers should not count.

Let us say that I am faced with Taurek's decision in the case where none of the sick persons is known to me. Let us say, further, that I follow the procedure recommended in the objection discussed in Section II: I note that there is no greater loss to the five than to the one, but I am left uncomfortable about the prospect of flipping a coin. I consider: human life is valuable, but not just to the person living that life. People are valuable. They are certainly valuable to me, in terms of things they do instrumentally for me, but it seems to me that they would be valuable even if they did not do anything for me. They are creatures like me, and that invests them with some importance, but I am not sure that even this captures what I mean when I say that people are valuable. People are intelligent to one degree or another, they become concerned over ethical issues, they respond to the world emotionally—I cannot help feeling that the world is a better place with people in it than it would be without them.¹⁰ This may be in some sense a parochial view. (If toadstools had anything to say on this question,

10. A couple of clarifications may be in order here. First, the idea that the world is a better place with people in it than it would be without them does not imply that a world with *more* people in it is always better than one with fewer people. While one *might* take such a position (with its rather dramatic implications for questions concerning overpopulation and birth control), it is not a necessary consequence of the idea that human life is valuable. Water is valuable, too—but one can drown in it. A second clarification may be needed concerning the contention that human life is valuable in ways that transcend both the value it has to the person living that life and the direct benefits received by those making the evaluation. This may, but need not, lend support to a doctrine of the *absolute* (nonrelative) value of human life. I do not think absolutism *follows* from the contention in question, but, for present purposes, that is neither here nor there. All that is required to undermine Taurek's argument is a convincing case that the value of human life is relevant to cases like the ones we are discussing, perhaps alongside consideration of the value life has to the person living that life. It is unfortunate that Taurek has framed the issue in terms of a contrast between loss-to and loss-of, since even the loss of a valuable object (whether a person or a work of art or whatever) may still be a loss *to* someone, or at least a loss with respect to some background. Since Taurek's argument against the relevance of sheer numbers in these situations involves, in a fundamental way, a denial that people should be thought of as valuable objects, it should involve equally a denial that the value of people *to others* is relevant. This is what makes it difficult

they might suggest that intelligence and the like are not really very important. But then, if toadstools had anything to say on the subject, perhaps they *would* regard intelligence highly after all. No telling about toadstools.) But that does not seem to make much difference. That is what I think and feel. People are valuable. They are worth saving because they are people. They *are* objects, although they are surely rather special objects. That is what makes them so valuable.

I am in a position to save five lives, or one life. I choose to save the five. Do I do something wrong?

If Taurek is right in contending that the numbers should not count, he must say that my decision *is* wrong. It is wrong because I have counted the numbers. But why have I counted the numbers? It was because I considered human beings to be valuable (or worthy of saving) in their own right, because they are persons. If I consider them in that way, it seems to be perfectly appropriate that I count the numbers. Taurek allows that it is because objects are valuable to him that he would count the numbers where objects of similar value were at risk. So the infection spreads: the thing I do wrong is to consider persons to be valuable in and of themselves. The reason this is wrong is that persons should not be thought of as objects, valuable or otherwise. It is not just that this is not Taurek's way; if he is right that the numbers should not count, it follows that this should not be my way, either. I should not count human beings as valuable.

This, then, is the real force of Taurek's argument: his principle of equal concern must rule out any thought that persons are worth saving because they are persons, or that human life is valuable or worth saving in and of itself. We must never consider the loss *of* persons, only the loss *to* persons. Taurek gives no argument that would provide independent reasons for rejecting such thoughts, yet his position requires that they be rejected. They *should* be rejected.

IV

In the end, then, we seem still to be faced with a war of intuitions. But it is hard to see how Taurek's intuition can hope to do much damage in that war. The crucial intuition, for him, is that persons should not be treated like objects. The intuition enters the argument when Taurek distinguishes between loss to and loss of. Persons suffer losses; they are crea-

to bring Taurek's main argument into line with what he says about the case involving his acquaintance David.

tures like me; and so on. Objects do not suffer losses, Taurek says, but why does he believe this? Only because he believes that persons are not objects. Is it not more felicitous to suggest that persons are different from *other* things in this way, but that this does not make them nonobjects?

Perhaps this grates too much. All that counts, though, is that we make the distinction in a reasonable way, and we may be able to do this without allowing the object/person problem to crop up. The most reasonable approach seems to be this: I can be concerned about the loss of all kinds of things. I can be concerned, in particular, about the loss of people. It is only in the case of people, though (or, perhaps, sentient creatures generally), that the question of loss-to arises. That means that I can be concerned about either the loss to persons or the loss of persons. It may be that, in many cases, it is the loss to persons that should be the most important consideration. It is not clear, however, why this should be the *only* consideration, especially in situations like the ones described by Taurek.

Total victories do not come easily in wars of intuitions, of course. Taurek wants us to reject consideration of the numbers of persons involved in cases like the ones we have been discussing. I have argued against that view, and for the view that the numbers are always ethically relevant (even when not decisive). There is, however, a halfway position that may be congenial to some. It is possible, I suppose, that Taurek is right in thinking that if the choice is between saving one and saving five, one should flip a coin; perhaps a rejoinder from Taurek would make it plausible that, in *such* cases, consideration of losses-of is simply outweighed by his principle of equal concern. Nevertheless, in cases like the one with which we began this discussion, where the choice is between saving one life and saving *huge* numbers of lives, Taurek's view loses all intuitive plausibility. Perhaps the problem should be recast, for those who agree with Taurek in the one-versus-five case: perhaps the question should be *when* the numbers count. It might be that Taurek's principle of equal concern ought to be decisive in some cases, but that the numbers become decisive when they are substantial—perhaps when they cross some threshold.¹¹ If such a position could be sustained, then perhaps even Taurek, should he find himself in a disabled spaceship plummeting toward an inhabited planet, would make the proper decision.

11. As should be clear by now, it seems to me that consideration of the numbers—of losses-of as well as losses-to—is always at least relevant to ethical decisions. The question here has to do with the varying weights that should be attached to the different concerns in different circumstances.