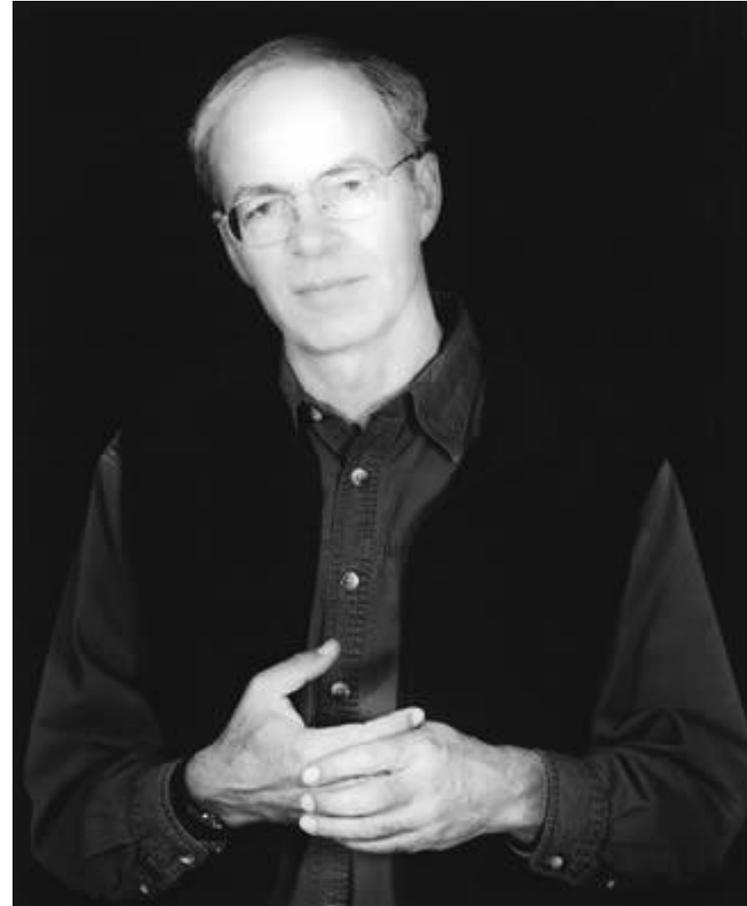


Famine Relief

Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence and Morality”

Peter Singer

- Professor of Applied Ethics at Princeton University
- Professor at Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, University of Melbourne
- Political and moral activist
 - *Animal Liberation*: animal rights
 - *One World*: global warming and economy
 - *Bio-ethics*: ethical issues about medicine, genetics, bio-technology
- <https://www.princeton.edu/~psinger/>



Common Sense on Charity

- Charity = donation of time or money to help other people
 1. Charity is a good thing
 2. Charity is NOT morally required i.e. it is not wrong, not to give to charity
- Technical term: charity is **superogatory**
 - over and above what is morally required
 - “doing more than your duty”

The Pond Case

- Pond Scenario
 - Suppose you are walking by a shallow pond and you see a baby drowning
 - Here is what you could do
 - Option 1: don't save child because doing so would ruin your new shoes
 - Option 2: save the child and ruin your new shoes
 - What should you do? Most would say you should save the child
- Western World
 - most Westerners spend a sizable chunk of their annual income on luxury goods
 - Westerners could be donating to causes that save people's lives around the world or that help improve people's lives. Instead of saving the lives of other people, we opt to, say, buy a luxury car.
- What is the difference between most Westerners and the person at the pond? Aren't westerners just as negligent as the person at the pond who doesn't save the child because he does not want to ruin his shoes?

Suffering Around the World

1. More than 800 million (2.5 X the population of the US) people go to bed hungry every day...300 million are children
2. Nearly a billion people entered the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names
3. Almost half the world — over three billion people — live on less than \$2.50 a day (purchasing power)
4. At least 80% of humanity lives on less than \$10 a day (purchasing power)
5. Every year six million children die from malnutrition before their fifth birthday

Source (2001): 1-2 Millenium Project (United Nations), 3 (Unicef), 4-5 World Bank

Spending and Need

Spending

Global Priority	\$U.S. Billions
Cosmetics in the United States	8
Ice cream in Europe	11
Perfumes in Europe and the United States	12
Pet foods in Europe and the United States	17
Business entertainment in Japan	35
Cigarettes in Europe	50
Alcoholic drinks in Europe	105
Narcotics drugs in the world	400
Military spending in the world	780

Need

Global Priority	\$U.S. Billions
Basic education for all	6
Water and sanitation for all	9
Reproductive health for all women	12
Basic health and nutrition	13

Source: United Nations Human Development Report 2001

Singer's Argument made Explicit

1. [CMI] If it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, then we morally ought to do it
2. Suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad
3. It is in our power to prevent suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance
4. Therefore, we ought to prevent suffering and death

How Much Should we Give?

- Singer argues for Strong CMI, but thinks at least moderate CMI should be done.
- **Moderate CMI:** we should prevent *very bad* occurrences unless, to do so, we had to sacrifice something morally significant
 - **Very bad:** disease, death, malnutrition, vaccines, infant mortality
 - We ought not consume trivial goods (cosmetics, rims for cars, expensive wines, etc.) but give to famine relief instead
- **Strong CMI:** we should prevent **bad** things from happening unless in doing so we would be sacrificing something of comparable moral significance
 - As long as others have more things that provide for their happiness we ought to give to make them more happy

The most moral people in history

- Bill and Malinda Gates and Warren Buffett are three people who have donated their enormous fortunes to charitable causes.
- They have saved tens of thousands of lives
- Because utilitarianism is based entirely on the consequences of these actions, these are, by far, the three of the most moral people in history.
- Note that the intentions of the people plays no role



Why Should I Give when Others Don't?

- Objection: It is not fair for me to give much of my money while others don't. My fair share is to contribute only as much as if everyone contributed.
 - If everyone gave \$5, it would suffice
 - So each person should give \$5
 - There's no reason why I should give more than others should.
 - So, *I have no obligation to give any more than \$5*
- Problem (Singer): do not make our decision in a context in which others *will* give their \$5.
- The question is how much should we give, given that we know few give

Objection: Charities are Ineffective

- **Objection Against Singer:** Although we might agree that a person who gives to charity is well-intentioned, there are few, if any, reliable charities. So, that money is largely wasted. So, charity should not be required.
- **Reply on behalf of Singer:** There are many reliable and effective charities that operate around the world. Some charities even allow the donator to interact with the parties who they help (Kiva). Others are more hands-off.
- Reliable Charities
 - Bill and Malinda Gates Foundation: <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/>
 - Kiva (micro-loans): <http://www.kiva.org/>
 - Against Malaria: <http://www.againstmalaria.com/>
 - Charity Ratings: <http://www.givewell.org/>
- Hear more from people that run charities
 - [Bill and Melinda Gates on Giving Away their Wealth](#)
 - [Peter Singer: Why and How of Effective Altruism](#)
 - [Melinda Gates on Birth Control](#)
 - [Bill Gates on Mosquitos, Malaria, and Education](#)
 - [Buffett's pledge](#)

Objection: View is too demanding

- **Objection against Singer:** Singer is committed to the view that the more we give the better or more moral our actions are. But, this is a too demanding standard of morality. Many of us want to give some money to charity, but we are not wrong if we don't devote our entire life to it. So, this view is wrong.
- **Reply:** Accepting this objection means that we should also accept that we have not special demand to save a child that is drowning in a pond. Since there are so many other people dying around the world --- I can say that it is too demanding of me to help this person.

Objection: It is wrong to give to Charity

- **Objection against Singer:** Giving doesn't address the real problem of population control. By giving to the needy, we create a problem, because our giving encourages population growth. Someone who is not starving, with the help of charity, will be able to have children, in which case the problem only grows. Now, instead of one person, we have several more living in poverty. In this way, population growth becomes out of control. So, it is **wrong** to give to charity.
- **Reply (Singer):**
 - The best way to reduce fertility is to improve people's lives – i.e. their education, living standards, etc. In almost all western countries, the population is not growing.
 - Also, if one thinks that populations will grow, then one should spend their money to programs that regulate population, such as education about contraception.

References

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