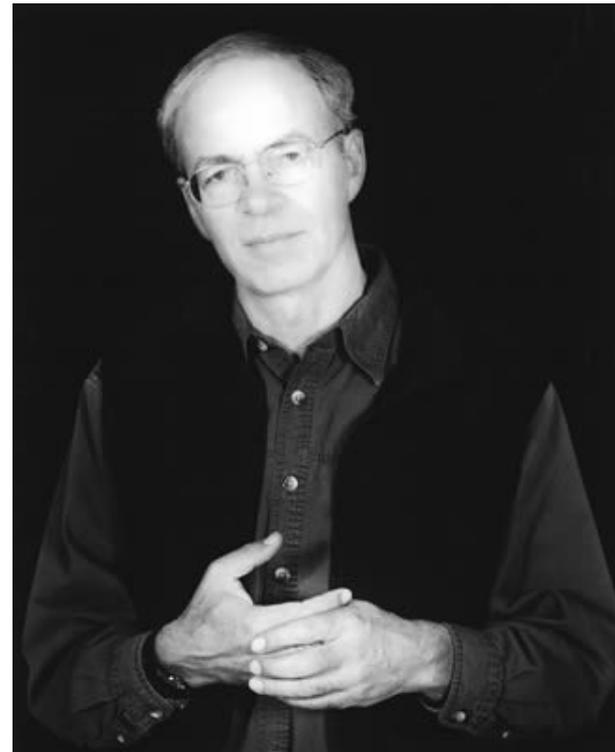


Famine Relief

Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality"

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- 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



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

- Suppose you are walking by a shallow pond and you see a baby drowning
- Two options
 - Option 1: don't save child because it will ruin your new shoes
 - Option 2: save the child and ruin your new shoes
- What should you do?

Recent Facts about 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

The Main Argument

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

Evaluation of the Argument

- Is it valid (if the premises are true, the conclusion has to be true)?
 - Yes – the argument is valid – it is impossible for the conclusion to be false, given that the premises are true
- Is it sound (valid and true premises)?
 - It is hard to reject premise 2 and 3 – they seem to be true
 - If we going to find anything wrong with this argument, it will be in premise 1. Note that premise 1 is at odds with the common sense view. It is says that we *ought* to give if we don't sacrifice anything of comparable moral importance. But, the common sense view says such acts are superogatory, i.e. we are not morally required to do them..

Comparable Moral Importance

- Is CMI (Premise 1) Plausible? Consider an application of the principle:
 - If Jimmy is walking past a shallow pond, and he sees a child drowning, he ought to dive in and rescue the child.
- Cost: Muddy Clothing
- Benefit: Saving someone's life
- Point: saving the child is not, most would say, a superogatory act, it looks like it is morally required; Jimmy is doing the wrong thing by not jumping in to the pond. But, if that is correct, what is the difference between the pond scenario and our own position towards distant others who are in dire need of food, medical provisions, etc.

- Is our indifference to the sick and dying across the world any different from negligence in the pond scenario?
- Wherein lies the difference?
 - Is distance relevant? No.
 - Is our affiliation with the person relevant? No.

How Much Should we Give?

- **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
- **Moderate CMI:** we should prevent *very bad* occurrences unless, to do so, we had to sacrifice something morally significant
 - We ought not consume trivial matter (cosmetics, rims for cars, expensive wines, etc) but give to famine relief
- Consequence on economy? Cosmetics industry might suffer... even the economies of entire countries.
- Singer: we should stop the trivial consumerism not drastically but perhaps as much as it maximizes the amount of famine relief we can provide

Why Should I Give when Others Don't?

- Singer: we should not be misled by the following argument:
 - 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 no gives

Objection: It is too demanding

- **Objection:** It is too drastic a revision of our moral scheme. We cannot draw the common-sense distinction between duty and charity where it has traditionally been drawn. We're considered generous when we give, but if we accept this principle, giving charity is a duty.
- **Reply:** The argument stands on the principle, not on common beliefs. We can explain **why** people judge differently, but this is not a justification. We justify our beliefs by considering arguments – and if we are convinced by the above argument, we ought to do - that others don't do so is not relevant.
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Objection: It is wrong to give to Charity

- **Objection:** Giving doesn't address the real problem of population control. By giving to the needy, we create a problem, because our giving encourages population control.
- **Reply (Singer):** We know that this last item is a red herring: The best way to reduce fertility is to improve people's lives – i.e. their education, living standards, etc. Also, if one thinks this, then one should spend all of their money to programs that regulate population. Different theories on what makes this happen

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