

Singer trying to persuade as many people as possible - that requires being understandable to everyone, not just good readers

231

Famine, Affluence, and Morality

approachable, basic logic;
agree w these basic statements,
then agree w conclusion

that I take, so that anyone who accepts certain assumptions, to be made explicit, will, I hope, accept my conclusion.

I begin with the assumption that suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad. I think most people will agree about this, although one may reach the same view by different routes. I shall not argue for this view. People can hold all sorts of eccentric positions, and perhaps from some of them it would not follow that death by starvation is in itself bad. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to refute such positions, and so for brevity I will henceforth take this assumption as accepted. Those who disagree need read no further.

My next point is this: if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it. By "without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance" I mean without causing anything else comparably bad to happen, or doing something that is wrong in itself, or failing to promote some moral good, comparable in significance to the bad thing that we can prevent. This principle seems almost as uncontroversial as the last one. It requires us only to prevent what is bad, and not to promote what is good, and it requires this of us only when we can do it without sacrificing anything that is, from the moral point of view, comparably important. I could even, as far as the application of my argument to the Bengal emergency is concerned, qualify the point so as to make it: if it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it. An application of this principle would be as follows: if I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out. This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing.

The uncontroversial appearance of the principle just stated is deceptive. If it were acted upon, even in its qualified form, our lives, our society, and our world would be fundamentally changed. For the principle takes, firstly, no account of proximity or distance. It makes no moral difference whether the person I can help is a neighbor's child

consistent w util view of all lives as = in value
affirms view of Singer theory as descendant of util

200s not
returning one
argument, however
ridiculous, hurt
Singer's
case?

refuses to
engage w
ridiculous
dissenters

underlines that
this is NOT
OPTIONAL under
his moral law
emphasis, scares
people into action
what 200s
"moral good"
encompass?

repetition
of this idea
happens it here
as a moral
imperative

we don't initially
realize that
applying this
very admirable
sentiment
changes our life

simple
assumption note
can agree w

THESIS
SUPER
internal colloquial
language
again preserve
broad audience
why any
more controversial?

analogy works
bc inconceivable w
suffering there
can be applied to
so many situations

• Recycling

• Voting

• Donations

we're used to
"passing the buck"
to others at fault

ten yards from me or a Bengali whose name I shall never know, ten thousand miles away. Secondly, the principle makes no distinction between cases in which I am the only person who could possibly do anything and cases in which I am just one among millions in the same position.

least approachable
of Singer's
assumption to
me as a
layperson

I do not think I need to say much in defense of the refusal to take proximity and distance into account. The fact that a person is physically near to us, so that we have personal contact with him, may make it more likely that we shall assist him, but this does not show that we ought to help him rather than another who happens to be further away. If we accept any principle of impartiality, universalizability, equality, or whatever, we cannot discriminate against someone merely because he is far away from us (or we are far away from him). Admittedly, it is possible that we are in a better position to judge what needs to be done to help a person near to us than one far away, and perhaps also to provide the assistance we judge to be necessary. If this were the case, it would be a reason for helping those near to us first. This may once have been a justification for being more concerned with the poor in one's own town than with famine victims in India. Unfortunately for those who like to keep their moral responsibilities limited, instant communication and swift transportation have changed the situation. From the moral point of view, the development of the world into a "global village" has made an important, though still unrecognized, difference to our moral situation. Expert observers and supervisors, sent out by famine relief organizations or permanently stationed in famine-prone areas, can direct our aid to a refugee in Bengal almost as effectively as we could get it to someone in our own block. There would seem, therefore, to be no possible justification for discriminating on geographical grounds.

retorical choice
by Singer to
expose opponents'
egotism

physicis reveals
how slight
geographic dist
is

ease of Internet
donations access to
into amplifies
this trend

Singer theory
largest
product of
modern
tech

There may be a greater need to defend the second implication of my principle—that the fact that there are millions of other people in the same position, in respect to the Bengali refugees, as I am, does not make the situation significantly different from a situation in which I am the only person who can prevent something very bad from occurring. Again, of course, I admit that there is a psychological difference between the cases; one feels less guilty about doing nothing if one can

easier not to
feel bad in
Bengal case

But by
Bengal isn't
first in terms
of you and
since others
can alleviate it

2010 work I
has to look up
G by Reason - Singer
want to be accessible
to everyone

Moral obligation
doesn't care about
your selective
empathy/personal
connections

is slightly
higher
efficiency a
reason to
favor local
causes?

Still no 1-1
perfect efficiency
equivalency

Still some
problems same
potential solution
only diff is
whether I
feel fully
accountable