**Critical Thinking**

**Tutorial 5: Evaluating Premises**

***Evaluating Sources***

***Exercise 1.***

In each of the following scenarios which involve an *appeal to authority*. In each case, consider

1. whether it is a legitmate appeal to authority (that is, would you accept the claim just based on the authority) and **b)** explain why or why not.
2. *Joe went for a swim after the storm and said that there were fewer fish in the bay.*
   1. *\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*
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1. *My endocrinologist told me I shouldn’t eat sushi, because it will aggravate my thyroid condition.*
   1. *\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*
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1. *Maria owns a lot of horses. She says that kicking a horse’s belly makes the horse speed up.*
   1. *\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*
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1. *Donald was getting worried about the cracks in his wall. He asked a builder to look at them, but the builder was too busy. He said that the cracks are nothing to worry about, but that he could have a look in six months time when his schedule freed up.*
   1. *\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*
   2. *\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

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1. *Sam said he saw the hamburglar pickpocket the woman. Sarah was sitting next to Sam and says she didn’t see anything of the sort!*
   1. *\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*
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1. *Tom took his car into the repair shop for a busted tire. The mechanic said not to bother buying the cheap tires, and that Tom should buy the more expensive tires.*
   1. *\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*
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1. *Charlotte is the bandicoot expert at the state botanic garden. She tells children that you can identify bandicoot poop because it sparkles in the sun.*
   1. *\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*
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1. *After culinary school, Helen became famous for her health food recipes in a popular food magazine. Helen said that a homemade avocado mask is really good for revitalizing heat - damaged hair.*
   1. *\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*
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***Exercise 2.***

Read one of the following articles. Choose one claim which is supported only by an appeal to authority. This authority may be the author of the article, or an independent authority cited by the author. For that claim, answer the questions which follow.

***Article 1:***

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN \* [*MIND Guest Blog*](http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/mind-guest-blog/) \* DECEMBER 7, 2015

**How Facebook Learns While You Forget: The science behind social media nostalgia**

BY JULIA SHAW

In the not-so-distant past, [*Timehop*](http://timehop.com/) made social media nostalgia mainstream.

It was one of the first popular social media features to give us a deliberate glimpse into our personal past by digging up photos from our online libraries. The photos were from years past, of events that presumably carried some significance, and the app made them easy for us to share with our friends. Facebook liked the idea so much that in 2015 it decided to roll the feature out universally on Facebook, calling it [*On this day.*](https://www.google.com/search?q=facebook%2Bon%2Bthis%2Bday&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8)

Facebook has even taken it upon itself to appropriate the very term [‘memory’,](https://www.facebook.com/help/1422085768088554) classifying things as ‘memories’ only if they were posted on its site. It seems to be not-so-subtly implying that *if* *something wasn’t posted on Facebook it may as well have not happened at all.*

The feature helps us remember *critical* life events such as how many people *liked* our narcissistic social media indulgences and on what date we made the life-changing decision to *friend* someone.

But is Facebook appropriating more than just our pictures and comments, and instead actively reshaping what we remember in real life?

**Helping Facebook learn**

Make no mistake, Facebook works tirelessly to steer what we see on its website.

One of the many computer algorithms Facebook uses to optimize what we see online is the ‘memories’ algorithm, which presumably tries to present us with pictures from our past that we are most likely to *share with others*. As such, we help Facebook learn by engaging with things we like - and the more we like and share something, the more of it we see.

The problem is that algorithms have no empathy.

Algorithms don’t care that you may not want to see photos of your late cat, or of co-workers from a job you recently lost. You may soon be able to prevent Facebook from showing you photos of your ex, [helping you to get over a breakup,](http://www.technewsworld.com/story/82794.html?rss=1) but most other bad memories remain potential candidates for your intrusive *On this day* updates.

Some have adeptly said that [not every memory needs to be rehashed](http://www.theverge.com/2015/4/2/8315897/facebook-on-this-day-nostalgia-app-bringing-back-painful-memories) and that we can do with less [“inadvertent algorithmic cruelty”.](http://meyerweb.com/eric/thoughts/2014/12/24/inadvertent-algorithmic-cruelty/) Facebook has been known to make mistakes and has even [officially apologised](http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/dec/29/facebook-apologises-over-cruel-year-in-review-clips) in the past for showing users grossly inappropriate *memories*, which were selected and displayed via their ‘memory’ algorithms.

As a memory researcher who is interested in how [our memories can go really wrong,](http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/news/releases/people-can-be-convinced-they-committed-a-crime-they-dont-remember.html) this makes me wonder whether this reminiscing as the result of apathetic social media algorithms is good or bad for our memories.

**Helping us forget**

Ok, so there are two sides to this.

The first side is that remembering specific life events is going to *enhance* memories for those

specific events. In the scientific literature this is known as the “testing effect” or “retrieval practice”, which means that [simply recalling information enhances our memory of it.](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1364661310002081)

It is such a strong effect that simply remembering something is known to produce better retention of information than studying the same information for the same amount of time. This suggests that ten minutes of reminiscing may be better for your memory than ten minutes of studying.

BUT, by having intrusive Facebook notifications constantly reminding you of certain memories you also have the potential to severely *distort* your reality.

You see, on the other side of the argument we have the science demonstrating “[retrieval induced](http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/bul/140/5/1383/) [forgetting](http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/bul/140/5/1383/)”. This means that every time we retrieve a memory, the memory traces in the brain that form that memory become pliable. In other words, every time we remember something, the network of cells that make up that memory becomes active, and that network can easily change.

For example, say you are reminded on Facebook of a vacation you took two years ago. The prompt will most likely be a single photo of the event with some caption, like #WhatHappensInVegas, or something else that may now seem cringe-worthy.

Science says that as you remember the particular moment in which the photo was taken, you are likely [forgetting related and unmentioned information.](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3682126/) Forgetting related information like what the pool at your hotel looked like, or that you went to a show while you were there.

Mind you, it’s not just Facebook that can have this memory-altering effect. Rehashing memories in any situation has [the potential to distort them.](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25180807) What *is* different about Facebook is that the prompts are being selected from your online persona so they already represent a distorted, social-media appropriate, version of your life.

This means that Facebook memory prompts give you *double-distortion* - distorting the memory in your brain with a previously distorted memory from on your social media.

**Your reality or Facebook’s reality?**

By having Facebook choose which events are presented as the most meaningful in our lives, it is potentially culling the memories the algorithm ignores. Simultaneously it is reinforcing the memories it has chosen, potentially making some memories seem more meaningful and memorable than they originally were.

Both of these are problematic processes that can distort our personal reality. We may be helping Facebook learn to optimize its features, but the relationship is not symbiotic. Facebook’s nostalgia features are messing with our memories.

To prevent this from happening we could go on a Facebook hiatus, [or turn *On this*](https://www.facebook.com/help/439014052921484/)

[*day* notifications off entirely.](https://www.facebook.com/help/439014052921484/) *But,* in reality, this is one of those features that many of us may beunable to completely avoid. We may choose to shut off our notifications, but our friends and families will likely continue to use them

So, be cautious when using social media nostalgia features. Seemingly small memory prompts can have important implications for our personal memories.

This post is part of a series of articles called “Memory Mondays”, which focus on debunking common misconceptions and beliefs about how our memory works.

[Dr. Julia Shaw](http://www.drjuliashaw.com/) works at London South Bank University in the department of Law and Social Sciences. She is a senior lecturer, researcher, and author of [*The Memory Illusion: Why you may not be*](http://www.drjuliashaw.com/the-memory-illusion.html) [*who you think you are,*](http://www.drjuliashaw.com/the-memory-illusion.html) tobe published in 2016 by Penguin Random House.

***Article 2:***

NEW YORKER \* MARCH 5, 2015 **Remembering a Crime That You Didn’t Commit** BY DOUGLAS STARR

1906, Hugo Münsterberg, the chair of the psychology laboratory at Harvard University and the president of the American Psychological Association, wrote in the *Times Magazine* about a case of [false confession.](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/12/09/the-interview-7) A woman had been found dead in Chicago, garroted with a copper wire and left in a barnyard, and the simpleminded farmer’s son who had discovered her body stood accused. The young man had an alibi, but after questioning by police he admitted to the murder. He did not simply confess, Münsterberg wrote; “he was quite willing to repeat his confession again and again. Each time it became richer in detail.” The young man’s account, he continued, was “absurd and contradictory,” a clear instance of “the involuntary elaboration of a suggestion” from his interrogators. Münsterberg cited the Salem witch trials, in which similarly vulnerable people were coerced into self-incrimination. He shared his opinion in a letter to a Chicago nerve specialist, which made the local press. A week later, the farmer’s son was hanged.

Münsterberg was ahead of his time. It would be decades before the legal and psychological communities began to understand how powerfully suggestion can shape memory and, in turn, the course of justice. In the early nineteen-nineties, American society was recuperating from another panic over occult influence; Satanists had replaced witches. One case, the McMartin Preschool trial, hinged on nine young victims’ memories of molestation and ritual abuse—memories that they had supposedly forgotten and then, after being interviewed, recovered. The case fell apart, in 1990, because the prosecution could produce no persuasive evidence of the victims’ claims. A cognitive psychologist named Elizabeth Loftus, who had consulted on the case, wondered whether the children’s memories might have been fabricated—in Münsterberg’s formulation, involuntarily elaborated—rather than actually recovered.

To test her theory, Loftus gave a group of volunteers the rudimentary outlines of a childhood experience: getting lost in a mall and being rescued by a kindly adult. She told the subjects, falsely, that the scenario was real and had taken place when they were young. (For verisimilitude, Loftus asked their parents for biographical details that she could plant in each story.) Then she debriefed the subjects twice, with the interviews separated by one or two weeks. By the second interview, six of the twenty-four test subjects had internalized the story, weaving in sensory and emotional details of their own. Loftus and other researchers have since used similar techniques to create false memories of near-drownings, animal attacks, and encounters with Bugs Bunny at Disneyland (impossible, since Bugs is a Warner Bros. character).

Earlier this year, two forensic psychologists—Julia Shaw, of the University of Bedfordshire, and Stephen Porter, of the University of British Columbia—upped the ante. Writing in the January issue of the journal *Psychological Science*, they described a method for [implanting false memories,](http://pss.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/01/14/0956797614562862.abstract%23aff-2) not of getting lost in childhood but of committing a crime in adolescence. They modelled their work on Loftus’s, sending questionnaires to each of their participant’s parents to gather background information. (Any past run-ins with the law would eliminate a student from the study.) Then they divided the students into two groups and told each a different kind of false story. One group was prompted to remember an emotional event, such as getting attacked by a dog. The other was prompted to remember a crime—an assault, for example—that led to an encounter with the police. At no time during the experiments were the participants allowed to communicate with their parents.

What Shaw and Porter found astonished them. “We thought we’d have something like a thirty-per-cent success rate, and we ended up having over seventy,” Shaw told me. “We only had a handful of people who didn’t believe us.” After three debriefing sessions, seventy-six per cent of the students claimed to remember the false emotional event; nearly the same amount—seventy

per cent—remembered the fictional crime. Shaw and Porter hadn’t put undue stress on the students; in fact, they had treated them in a friendly way. All it took was a suggestion from an authoritative source, and the subjects’ imaginations did the rest. As Münsterberg observed of the farmer’s son, the students seemed almost eager to self-incriminate.

One young woman spun a story about a kind of love triangle. In the first debriefing, she remembered the incident as a fistfight between her and another girl. In the second, she remembered having thrown a small rock at her adversary after the girl uttered a slur. By the third debriefing, the rock had grown to the size of her fist and she had hurled it at the girl’s face. “It was very emotional,” Shaw said. “Each time she’d reënact the event, the rock would fill her hand a little bit more.” Nothing in the woman’s affect suggested that the memory was false. She earnestly believed in the truth of her confession, as most of her fellow-participants did theirs. The memory was vivid, loaded with details about the crime that the interviewer had not furnished. Moreover, Shaw and Porter could find no personality traits that distinguished the false confessors from the few holdouts, and no way of identifying who was most susceptible.

These are troubling findings. They mimic, in the gentlest way, what can happen during police questioning: a small lie, told to shake loose the truth, rattles around in a suspect’s imagination and takes root. The psychologist Saul Kassin has studied interrogation and false confession for decades. He told me that Shaw and Porter’s experiment illustrates perfectly how social pressure can make innocent people admit to wrongdoing. “Think about the dilemma the suspect now faces: ‘I don’t have a memory for this, but the person who took care of me does. Therefore it must be true and I have to find a way to remember it.’ ”

Kassin cited the example of Martin Tankleff, a high-school senior from Long Island who, in 1988, awoke to find his parents bleeding on the floor. Both had been repeatedly stabbed; his mother was dead and his father was dying. He called the police. Later, at the station, he was harshly interrogated. For five hours, Tankleff resisted. Finally, an officer told him that his father had regained consciousness at the hospital and named him as the killer. (In truth, the father died without ever waking.) Overwhelmed by the news, Tankleff took responsibility, saying that he must have blacked out and killed his parents unwittingly. A jury convicted him of murder. He spent seventeen years in prison before the real murderers were found. Kassin condemns the practice of lying to suspects, which is illegal in many countries but not here. The American court system, he said, should address it. “Lying puts innocent people at risk, and there’s a hundred years of psychology to show it,” he said.

Shaw and Porter’s study also provides further evidence of the inaccuracy and malleability of human memory, evidence that is already compelling enough to have persuaded the state supreme courts of New Jersey and Massachusetts to mandate that judges instruct juries that eyewitness testimony is inherently unreliable. “Evolutionary theorists say memory is good enough—just good enough for us to survive and to reproduce,” Shaw told me. “But, at the very least, this research calls into question whether we should be putting so much weight on any memory in court”—especially in the absence of corroborating proof. “It’s sort of a reality check.”

**2.1 Claim:** What is the **claim** which relies on an appeal to authority?

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**2.2 Who is the authority? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**2.3 Authority:** Is the source in a **position to know**? What is the relevant knowledge?

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**2.4 Trustworthiness:** Is there any reason to doubt the **reliability** of the source?

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**2.5 Corroboration:** Is there **independent evidence** from other sources? If not in the article, canyou find any?

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**2.6 Overall, how credible is the source?**

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**2.7 What do you think the content of this article tells us about the reliability of eyewitness testimony?**

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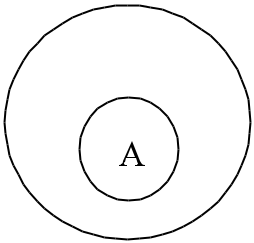
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***Evaluating Universal Generalisations***

**Exercise 3**

Which of the following statements can be interpreted as universal generalisations? For those that can be so interpreted, rephrase the statement so that it is in one of the following forms:



B

All A are B

No A is B

You might also find it helpful to draw a diagram.

**Example** Any bank that makes too many risky loans will fail. Thisis a universal generalisation:

All **A** are **B** **A** = banks that make too many risky loans; **B** = banks which fail

1. Not all guilt feelings are psychological aberrations.

**A =** **B =**

1. Every jazz fan admires Duke Ellington.

**A =** **B =**

1. Any television show that depicts violence incites violence.

**A =** **B =**

1. Manipulators do not make good marriage partners.

**A =** **B =**

1. Only nuclear-powered vehicles are suitable for deep-space exploration.

**A =** **B =**

1. No shellfish except oysters make pearls.

**A =** **B =**

1. Only diabetics require insulin treatments.

**A =** **B =**

1. There are concerts in Central Park.

**A =** **B =**

1. A pesticide is dangerous if it contains DDT.

**A =** **B =**

1. John Grisham writes only novels about lawyers.

**A =** **B =**

1. Modern corporations are all run in the interest of their managers.

**A =** **B =**

1. All fruits except pineapples ripen after they are picked.

**A =** **B =**

1. Monkeys are found in the jungles of Guatemala.

**A =** **B =**

1. Feathers are not heavy.

**A =** **B =**

1. Bats are the only true flying mammals.

**A =** **B =**

1. Not every river runs to the sea.

**A =** **B =**

1. Dolphins are swimming between the breakers.

**A =** **B =**

1. Nothing in this room should be thrown out.

**A =** **B =**

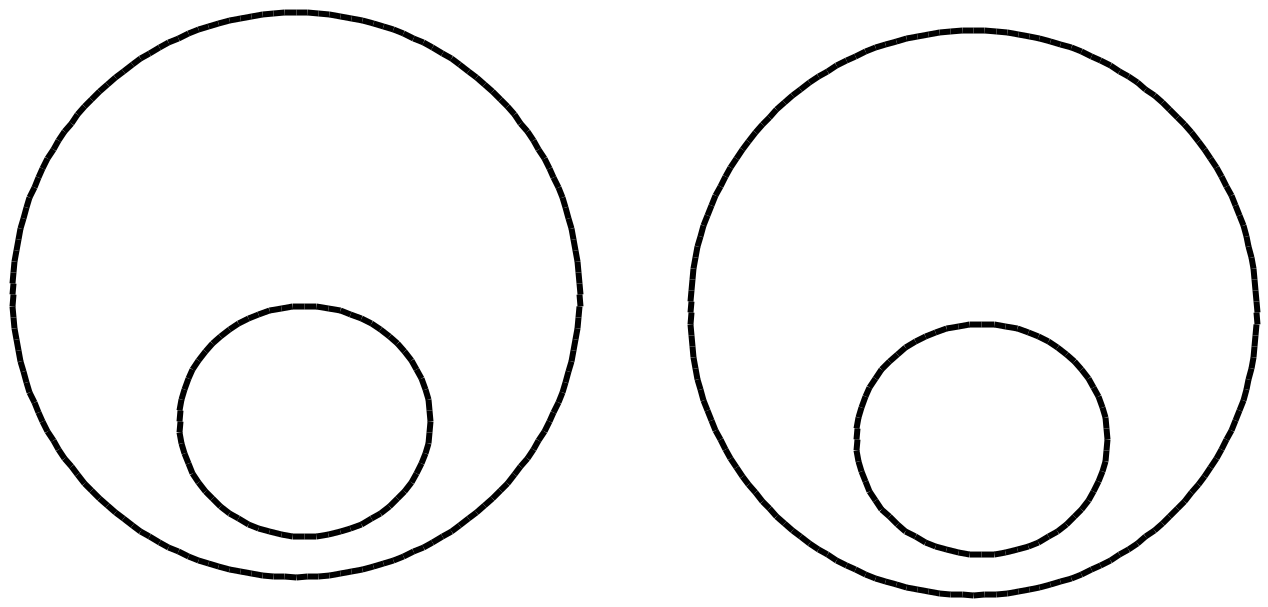
**Exercise 4**

It has been claimed that an action is morally good only if it benefits another person and was performed with that intention; whereas an action that harms another person is morally bad if such harm was intended or if reasonable forethought would have shown that the action was likely to cause harm.

Which one of the following judgements most closely conforms to the principle cited above?

1. Pamela wrote a letter attempting to cause trouble between Edward and his friend: this action of Pamela’s was morally bad, even though the letter, in fact, had an effect directly opposite from the one intended.
2. In order to secure a promotion, Jeffrey devoted his own time to resolving a backlog of medical benefits claims. Jeffrey’s action was morally good since it enabled Sarah’s claim to be processed in time for her to receive much-needed treatment.
3. Intending to help her elderly neighbour by clearing his walkway after a snowstorm, Teresa inadvertently left ice on his steps; because of this exposed ice, her neighbour had a bad fall, thus showing that morally good actions can have bad consequences.
4. Jonathan agreed to watch his three-year-old niece while she played but, becoming engrossed in conversation, did not see her run into the street where she was hit by a bicycle.

Even though he intended no harm, Jonathan’s action was morally bad.

Can you fill in the diagrams so that they represent these claims about morally good and bad actions?

**The philosophical argument of the week:**

**Singer on why charity is obligatory**

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. […]

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 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 outcome of this argument is that our traditional moral categories are upset. The traditional distinction between duty and charity cannot be drawn, or at least, not in the place we normally draw it. … When we buy new clothes not to keep ourselves warm but to look "well-dressed" we are not providing for any important need. We would not be sacrificing anything significant if we were to continue to wear our old clothes, and give the money to famine relief. By doing so, we would be preventing another person from starving. It follows from what I have said earlier that we ought to give money away, rather than spend it on clothes which we do not need to keep us warm. To do so is not charitable, or generous. Nor is it the kind of act which philosophers and theologians have called "supererogatory" - an act which it would be good to do, but not wrong not to do. On the contrary, we ought to give the money away, and it is wrong not to do so. (Singer 1972, *Famine,* *Affluence, and Morality;* see also *The Life You Can Save* and *The Most Good You Can Do*, as well as<http://www.thelifeyoucansave.org/>and <https://www.ted.com/speakers/peter_singer>)

1. Which general principles does the argument assume?
2. How might one go about criticizing the resulting argument? And how would such criticisms affect the general principles?
3. Let’s say you are now convinced by Singer’s conclusion. Does the argument give any indication of whom you should be giving your money to and how it could be put to the best use?