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**ESSAY 2 – FINAL**

**EFFECTIVE ALTRUISM: PRACTICAL OR NOT?**

In today’s rapidly growing world, it is becoming increasingly easy for humans to connect with each other. But, with this globalization, comes the responsibility to direct one’s attention to the underprivileged members of our society and strive for their happiness too. But should this help be one’s utmost priority? And if so, what defines help? A famous approach to this is an ideology called ‘effective altruism’. Defined by Peter Singer (2015), this ideology demands applying evidence and reason to find the most effective ways of helping others. But, effective altruism fails to be a flawless charitable model for today’s world because it promotes financial dependence, is against innovation and, fails to deliver a concrete comprehension of its core concepts.

Firstly, since this philosophy considers only monetary help as altruism, practicing effective altruism is bound to make the underprivileged financially dependent. The idea of effective altruism by Singer (2015) “involves using a substantial part of one’s resources to make the world a better place”, which clearly means donating material wealth is the only help required from an altruist. Additionally, Singer (2015) also requires humans give money to make “someone else better off” constantly and not occasionally, which results in a regular flow of money from the rich to poor. Now since humans only strive when in need, this constant supply of money from effective altruists will result in the underprivileged lot becoming financially reliant on immediate external help for survival. This habit of expecting money from others results in the poor ones never getting a chance to ponder over striving to achieve a financially independent future. Hence, practice of effective altruism never permits the poor to break the shackles of need.

Similarly, as Singer (2015) states, effective altruism demands that one must earn only to give away, hence, denying economic development. Being an effective altruist, one is not permitted to consider any self-interest apart from a minimally-acceptable life. This approach to life, demolishes the concept of capitalism and hence, economic development. But Singer fails to realize that rather than improving the financial condition of the poor, lack of capitalism results in the overall need problem increasing. Opposing singer’s ideology of effective altruism, Baggini (2015) argues that over the years, “economic development has done more to raise people out of poverty than aid”. Economic development results in increased job vacancies for poor, more sources of philanthropic aid and higher chances of poor becoming self-reliant on a hard-earned bread. This clarifies that capitalizing money instead of giving it away is evidently a long-term solution of poverty. A very famous example nullifies the importance of ‘effective altruism’ by stating that teaching a hungry man to fish, rather than donating him one fish enables him to be independent for survival. Considering all this, if capitalism is not promoted, poor will never get a chance to escape their economic conditions, proving Baggini’s point that “giving up all our luxuries to practice effective altruism might be counter-productive”. Hence, since ‘effective altruism’ does not provide a permanent solution to poverty, it is highly ineffective today.

Secondly, practicing effective altruism prevents humans from spending on innovation, discoveries and creativity, by prioritizing immediate human good only. Innovations are a key pillar behind evolution while creativity is the very definition of a human mind, and both are equally essential for the successful continuation of humanity. But, Singer (2015) states that effective altruism permits humans to live a life of marginal-utility (feed, house and clothe themselves only) and demands one to spend rest of the resources as charity. Hence, in practice of effective altruism, there is no leniency for a human to spend on a better and more advanced future of humanity. In fact, effective altruism, as stated by Singer (2015), considers innovations, arts and music as extravagance and utter selfishness, while completely denying the fact that all these have always, and will continue to transform humanity’s future. If researches and innovations were eliminated from human life as extravagance, humans would still be living in the Stone Age. Hence, this attitude towards innovation will result in irreversible dangers to the future, evolution and adaptation of humanity, making effective altruism all the more ineffective. In the same way, effective altruism never mentions that one must donate to research labs or scientific institutions that regularly strive to achieve a happier future for humanity, instead it solely highlights charities as the deserving candidates for aid. Singer (2015) states that one must “provide incentives for charities” and should direct all spare resources to help the needy. So, this philosophy fails to realize the importance of spending on innovations. Although charities have undoubtedly been successful in providing effective and immediate assistance to the unlucky lot, the concept is in complete denial of the fact that researches that led to higher genetic immunity, cure to deadly diseases, better farming practices and rapid communication mediums have done no less to make the world a better place. Today, humanity is progressing at a tremendous pace only because humans looked at the bigger picture and prioritized a successful future over immediate happiness. Ironically, an inference from the example of a drowning child by Singer (1997) supports the importance of spending on the future too. Although saving the drowning child is important, but what’s more important is to spend on proper safety measures to avoid any such occurrences in the future. Hence, the underlying idea behind effective altruism is very shortsighted, which, by denying long-term thinking, makes the philosophy of effective altruism irrelevant in today’s world, and probably in tomorrow’s too.

Thirdly, the philosophy of effective altruism fails to deliver a clear comprehension of its core concepts, which renders the philosophy ineffective. To begin with, the key terminologies employed by Singer’s philosophy are very subjective. Singer (2015) states that effective altruism requires living a minimally acceptable life and utilizing spare resources to help others. Now, one of the most important terms used to define this philosophy is ‘minimally acceptable life’, the meaning of which varies from person-to-person. This concept is correlational to the walk of life one belongs to. Baggini (2015) states that “the comfort in having the heating on, for instance, is nothing when compared to the sufferings of a malnourished…”. This implies that, for some, an expensive item might be a basic need, while others might find it utterly irrelevant. This leads to another term used by Singer (2015) that has no definite meaning: ‘basic needs’. People tend to have varying perceptions of what their basic needs are and more often than not, give in to their desires while considering them a necessity. Use of such loose vocabulary by Singer (2015) allows for leniencies in the concept of effective altruism, making it a very relative and inefficient way of helping others. Hence, the lack of concrete guidance leaves the concept of effective altruism ineffective.

On the other hand, the philosophy of effective altruism provides a concrete guideline to the term ‘most deserving ones’. Singer (2015) asks humans to do the “most good one can” and implies that “saving three lives is better than saving one”. Although it is clear that one must aid the cause with the highest impact, the bias of this philosophy towards needy people of a particular walk of life is equally highlighted too. Since the philosophy employs a strict cost-to-impact ratio in determining who to help, it indirectly prioritizes life of African children dying of malaria over an English child dying of cancer just because the cause does not fulfill the cost-to-impact ratio this philosophy proudly dictates. In today’s free world, everyone has the right to a ray of light known as ‘hope’ and no altruist, regardless how effective he may be, has the right to deny one his life just because it won’t have the largest possible impact in the given amount of assets. So, although Singer’s philosophy tries to ensure that all lives matter equally, unfortunately it implicitly demands one to favor the lives of the poorest lot in the world over one’s own family, friends or others in need. Hence, in trying to promote a utilitarian approach to altruism, the philosophy implicitly enforces a bias which renders the concept of effective altruism not-so-effective.

The idea of ‘effective altruism’ is largely ineffective in today’s world because it does not allow the poor to become financially self-reliant, prevents expenditures on a better future for humanity and above all, fails to explain its ideas properly. These shortcomings in Singer’s (2015) philosophy of effective altruism render it ineffective in today’s modern and increasingly complex world.

**Works Cited**

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