

Corbin Graham

Professor Robson

Philosophy 335

10 April 2021

Response to Question 2

The philosophers Peter Singer and David Schmdtz both share strong, insightful opinions of global poverty and the obligation of developed nations to come to their aid. Each philosopher argues that it is good to give to those who are suffering from measures which are preventable in the sense of total potential fiscal aid. Each philosopher, however, carries their own drastically differing solutions upon how the aid process is carried out, or parameters which define the need for aid. Peter Singer's arguments for aiding those in need develops core ideas and establishes a platform from which David Schmdtz has extended the terms of argument and outcomes.

Peter Singer first argues that suffering and death from a cause which may be prevented without causing the initial negative results upon the assisting candidate should always be prevented. It is in his opinion that we should give all that we may to those in need to prevent them from unnecessary suffering often from circumstances which they did not cause. Singer further believes that whenever it is within our power to assist those in need, that it is our moral obligation to do so. Even though often those who are suffering from events such as this may be thousands of miles away, since we have the ability to donate to responsible aid and relief organizations that it is well within reach to make the appropriate response towards these groups.

Singer makes somewhat broad arguments explaining his reasoning for the world's wealthy to give to the poor and share their wealth. I believe this is not by mistake, but that certain levels of ambiguity may assist in the ability and effectiveness of these reasons and

statements to have an impact on the decision-making process of those in the state of wealth. In this ambiguity however, many gaps in logic have formed which may lead to questionable practices. These questionable practices could nearly negate all positives of Singer's arguments.

Schmidtz proposes a solution to the logical errors of Singer's theory. He first makes the distinction between types of poverty and defines two types: rare/situational poverty, and long-term poverty. In the cases of situational poverty, this is when someone has had their house burn down in a bizarre fire and all of their belongings burnt with it, they likely still possess the same skills necessary to reacquire the same level of financial independence but would need fiscal assistance to get started in the process. Long-term poverty is the case of many third world countries where a lack of education and resources has led to poverty, but a continuous expected stream of fiscal donations keeps them alive but under the poverty line because they have not been given instead the resources to develop the skills necessary to thrive and create a non-artificial economy.

Long-term poverty is the most common and is the case of the "starving child" you see on TV. Singer argues that it is our duty to support them financially since they cannot afford food and it is a basic right of every human to eat. Therefore, we give them food, they have eaten, we have fulfilled our purpose. Except now, this child has eaten one time, so their hunger has grown, but they do not know how to get their own food. They must now wait for us to give them food in order for them to eat. Schmidtz makes the distinction that we must give to aid organizations who will teach them to make their own food so that they may eat for a lifetime instead of a single meal. This is what Schmidtz calls the tragic commons. Tragic commons according to Schmidtz is when you have given aid to one person, and another person, seeing how easily the other gained from the aid, places themselves in the same situation to also receive the free aid. This creates a

system that encourages those who are struggling to not fight to succeed, but to give up and expect aid.

A question posed at the end of the lecture on Schmdtz highlights a key element of the flaws in Singer's argument, and what makes Schmdtz's not only more compelling, but effective. What would happen if people in a society had to donate 20% of their wealth? Redistribution of wealth at this level would create an artificially inflated economy that would lead to higher levels of unemployment in turn leading to even higher needs for effective aid. The question we must work towards answering is why doesn't this work, and what is so important about creating the distinction between Singer and Schmdtz's arguments. Tragic commons are a pattern which Schmdtz has highlighted alongside the perception of many other philosophers. It can be understood with this analogy given in the lecture: A parent has dropped their child in pond. You may pay \$100 to save this child. Since the life of this child clearly outweighs the moral equivalent of \$100, the decision is clear. A parent walking past with their child sees what you have just done and tosses their kid in for an easy \$100. Again, since this child's life outweighs \$100, you pay again. The second child was in no state of harm before they were thrown in for the \$100. If you are given the decision between making minimum wage and working nonstop or receiving aid for an equivalent value with no need to work, the choice is clear. In practice, this has created many artificial ecosystems that rely on outside donations to keep entire towns surviving, and likely has led to the growth of panhandling in our own society.

While both authors had the same intent of outcome, Schmdtz prepares his in a way which in practice may be much more beneficial than any proposals of Singer. Schmdtz makes the most important distinction between effective aid and ineffective aid. My view follows Schmdtz's view and adaptations upon Singer's. The greatest relationships are those which both

parties may benefit. In the case of aid, it is very typically a one-sided beneficial relationship, but in the case of effective aid, it is more than likely that if fully effective, all parties equally benefit. Effective aid can be thought of as an investment, you give a portion of your fiscal wealth to an aid organization which uses that donation to provide services and education to those in need. If this aid organization is effective, (with a proper government incentivized ecosystem, most should be regulated for quality and consistency to ensure they are truly effective) then those who have been at the receiving end of the services will now have skills they can bring the workforce and in third world countries, use to develop a stable ecosystem. This would benefit not only those below the poverty line, but everyone in the ecosystem creating new, effective workers for the economy. I believe, like Schmidtz that it is our duty to give that which we can but in a way that may benefit those at the receiving end not for today and tomorrow, but for life.