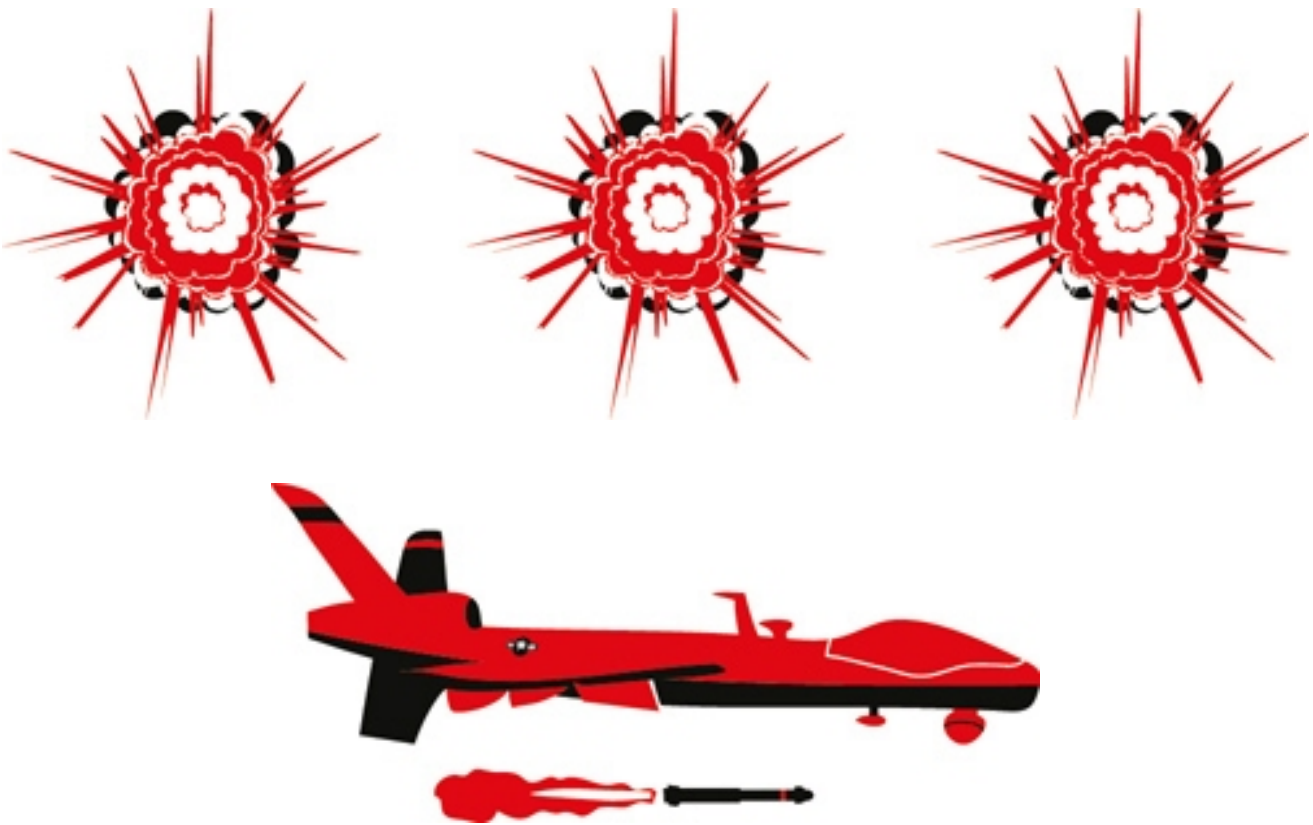


are two reasons for thinking this might be the way to go. The first is practical: there are lots of ways to do good without relying on politics. We may not know how to export democracy, but plenty of other things are much easier to export. One is money: these days you just have to press a button and it zips wherever you want it to go. Food is another: people who are starving can be helped directly by being provided with the thing they immediately require. Many parts of the world, including Europe, have much more food than they know what to do with. Other parts have nowhere near enough. So move it!



The second reason to focus on the need to do good is that global inequality constitutes a moral failure as much as a political one. Allowing so many human beings to face a constrained and perilous existence when we have the resources to alleviate it can be viewed as

a form of wickedness. That is how it has been painted by the moral philosopher Peter Singer, in a famous argument that draws an analogy with how we would behave if we encountered a drowning child. Imagine you pass a pond and you see a child about to go under. Would you dive in to help, if nothing was preventing you? Of course you would. No one would think twice, even if it were a serious inconvenience. Yes, your clothes will get wet, and yes, you might end up late for whatever you were on your way to do. So what? It would be unconscionable to walk on by. Now what if the child is thousands of miles away rather than right in front of your eyes, and starving or dying of a preventable disease rather than drowning? You still have the power to rescue the situation by extending your help: you can send money to stop it from happening. How can it be acceptable to walk on by in this case and not in the other? Why should mere physical distance make all the moral difference? Singer says that it can't. If you have the capacity to prevent a death and choose not to exercise it, your behaviour is morally indefensible, regardless of where the disaster is taking place. Pleading inconvenience – the money you spend to save a life is money you would rather have spent to make your own life a little more comfortable – is no excuse.

Singer argues that anyone in the West who has reached a comfortable level of affluence, beyond which any extra income is merely convenient rather than essential, has a moral obligation to give the surplus away to the planet's drowning children. What's the cut-off point? No one can say exactly, but another moral philosopher, Toby Ord, founder of the charity Giving What We Can, hit the news