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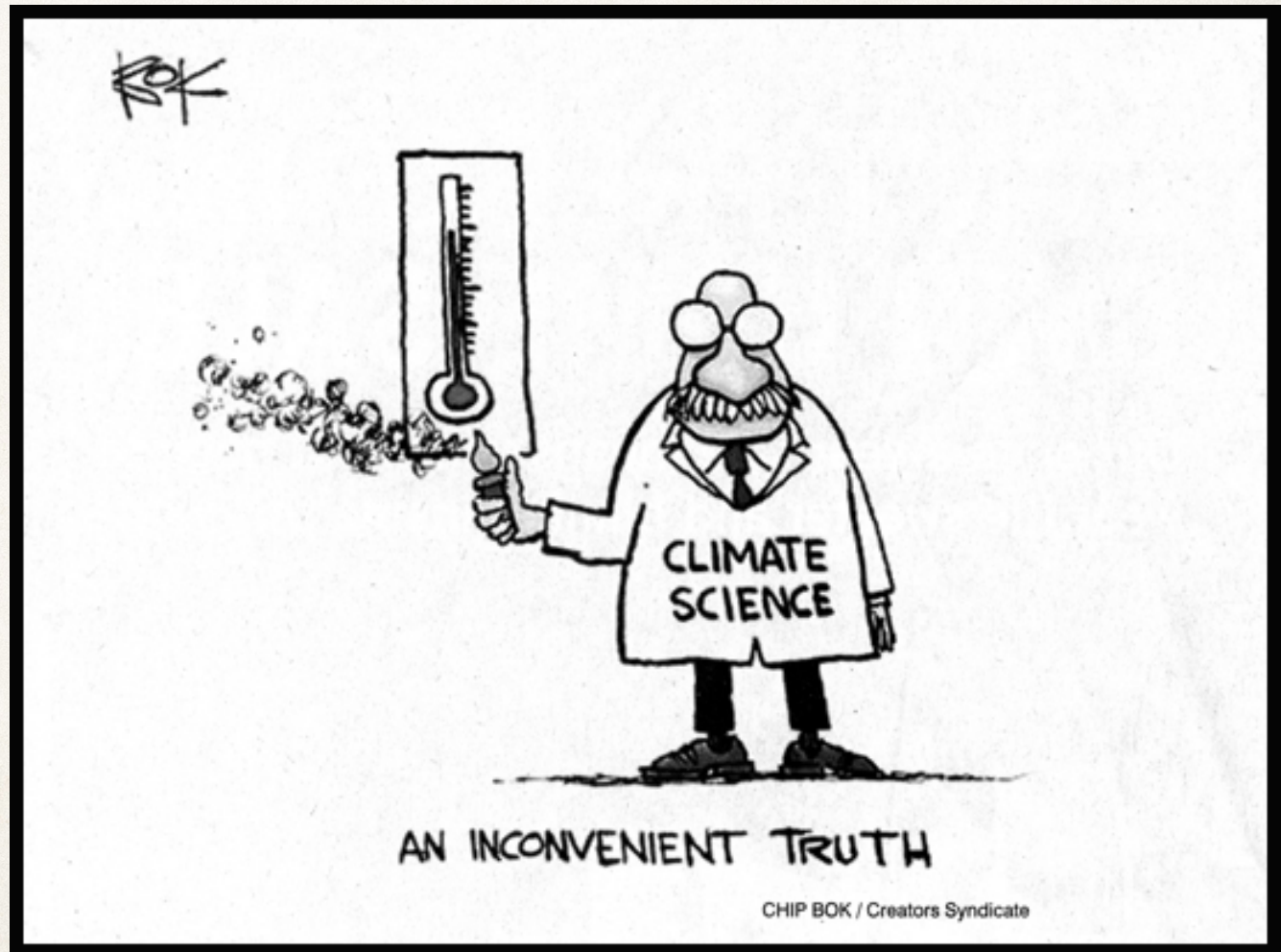
PHI 171 - Fall 2014

Are We Morally Obligated to Donate Our Money to the Poor?

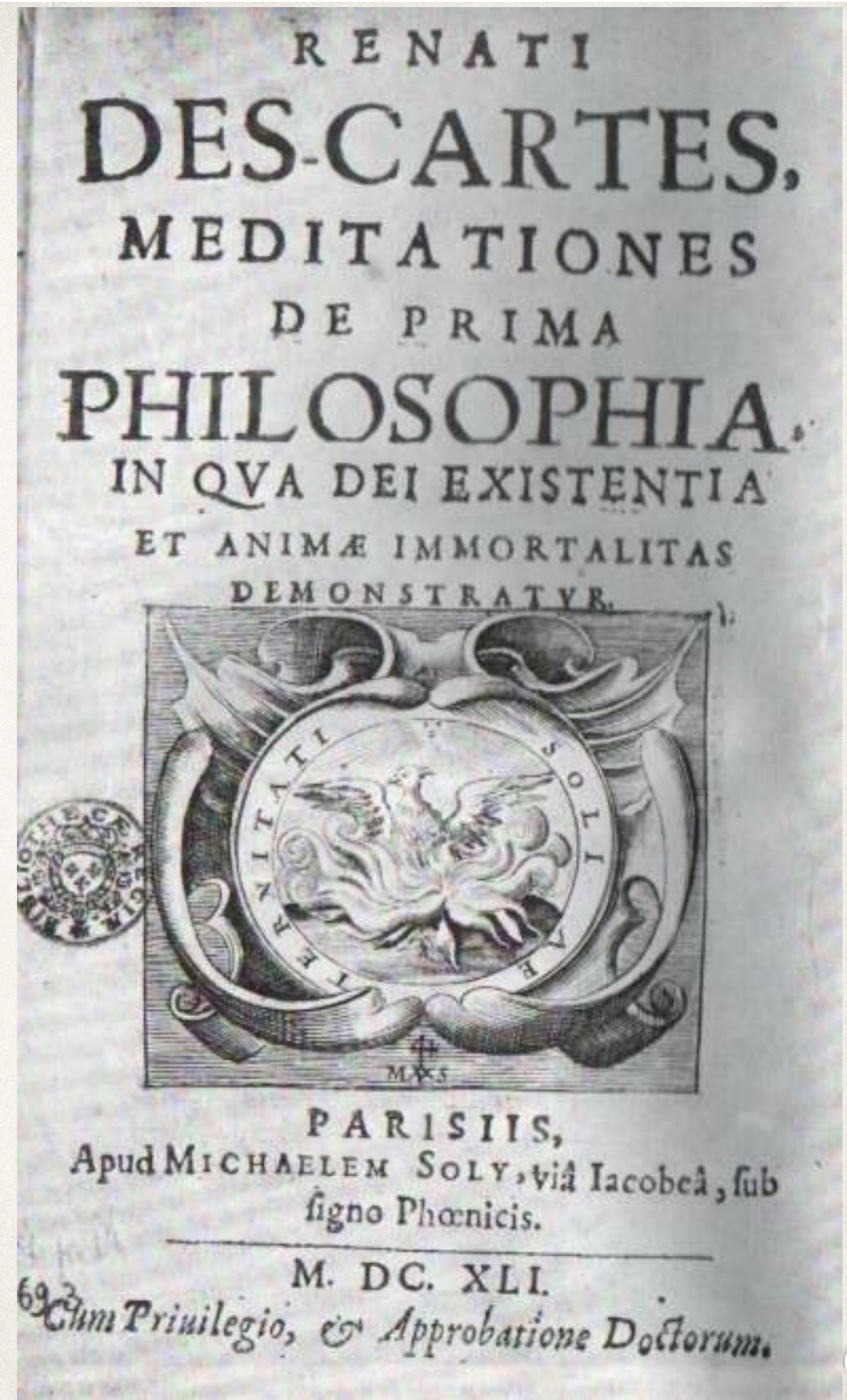
Beliefs, Justification and Skepticism

How do we
justify our beliefs?

Can everything
we believe be
false?

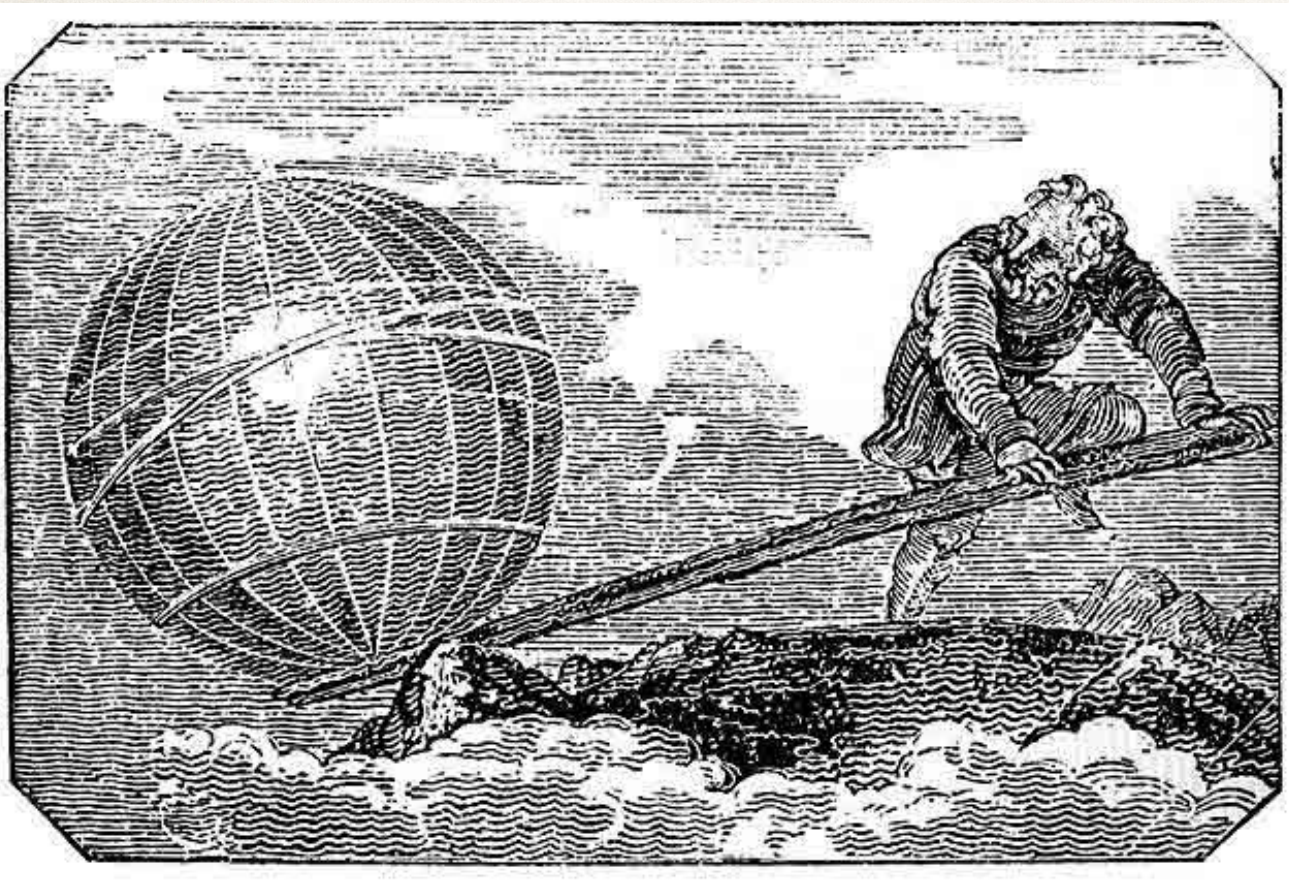


Descartes' Answer to Skepticism



I Can Doubt As Much As I Like, But
There Is One Thing I cannot Doubt—
That I Exist

“I think/I Exist” Is the Archimedean Point



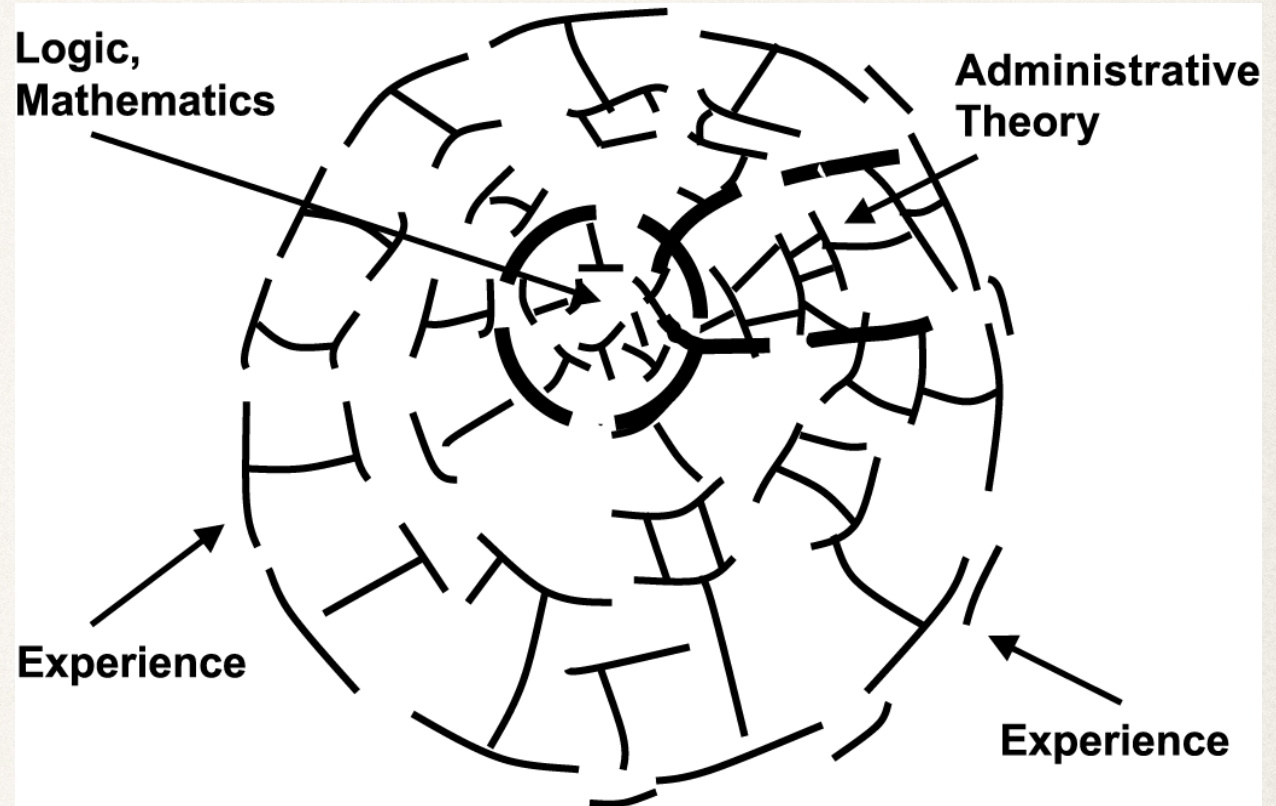
“Archimedes said that if he had one firm and immovable point he could lift the world with a long enough lever; so I too can hope for great things if I manage to find just one little thing that is certain.”

Descartes' Foundationalism

- Begin by justifying with absolute certainty some basic beliefs, for example “I exist” and “I am a thinking thing”
- Next, justify other more complex beliefs, for example, “God exists”, on the basis of the basic beliefs.
- Next, justify more and more complex beliefs on the basis of beliefs previously justified.
- And so on...



from Foundationalism *to* the “Web of Beliefs”



Web of Beliefs: There is no sure/certain proposition on which everything else rest. Rather, our beliefs are connected with one another as a web, without any of them being certain. It is the “working together” of different beliefs that makes them justified.

Ludwig
Wittgenstein
(1889-1951)



Certainty Is Needed for Doubt

“114. If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either.

115. If you tried to doubt everything, you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty.”

—Wittgenstein, On Certainty

Understanding, Meaning and Doubting

“26. I am not more certain of the meaning of my words than I am of certain judgments. Can I doubt that this colour is called “blue”?
(My) doubts form a system.

127. For how do I know that someone is in doubt? How do I know that he uses the words “I doubt it” as I do?

”

–Wittgenstein, On Certainty

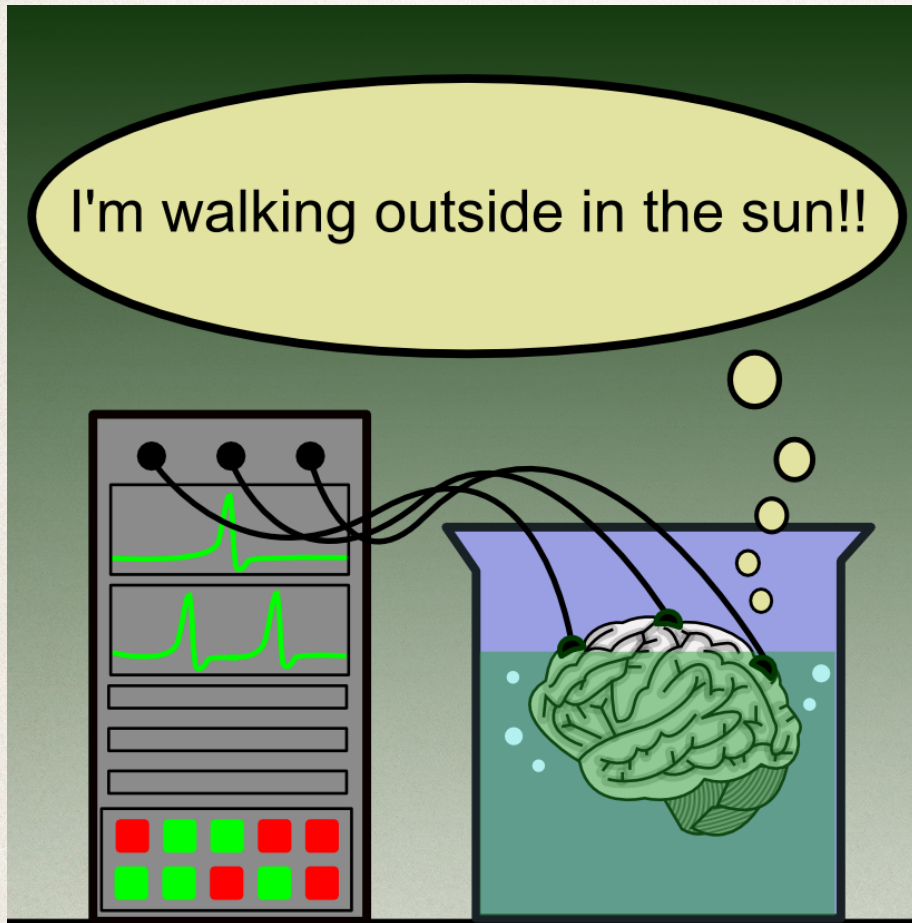
Can You Meaningfully Assert That
You are a Brain in a Vat?

Hilary Putnam

(1926-)



Suppose We Were Brains in a Vat



- If we were brains in a vat, the words we use to communicate what we mean would not mean what we they ordinarily mean.
- In a world populated with brains in a vat, there would be no tables, ice creams, the sun, etc. There would be electrochemical stimuli that make us believe that there are such things.
- So, if we were just brains in a vat, words such as “table”, “ice cream”, “sun” etc. would mean, or refer to, the electrochemical stimuli created by a supercomputer.

(A Variation on) Putnam's Brain in a Vat Argument

1. If I were a brain in a vat, the words "brain" and "vat" would not refer to what they ordinarily refer to. They would refer to electrochemical stimuli of the brain.
2. If I were a brain in a vat, the sentence "I am a brain in a vat" would have a different meaning from its ordinary meaning.
3. If I were a brain in a vat and asserted "I am a brain in a vat", I would not be able to assert what we ordinarily intend by the sentence "I am a brain in a vat".
4. So, if I were a brain in a vat, I couldn't truly say I was a brain in a vat.



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Our Final Course Topic — The Good and Justice



The Good and Justice

Angono, Philippines
*Lester Garcia for
National Geographic*

Are we morally
obligated to donate our
money to the poor?

What is a just society?
Can economic
inequalities be
justified?

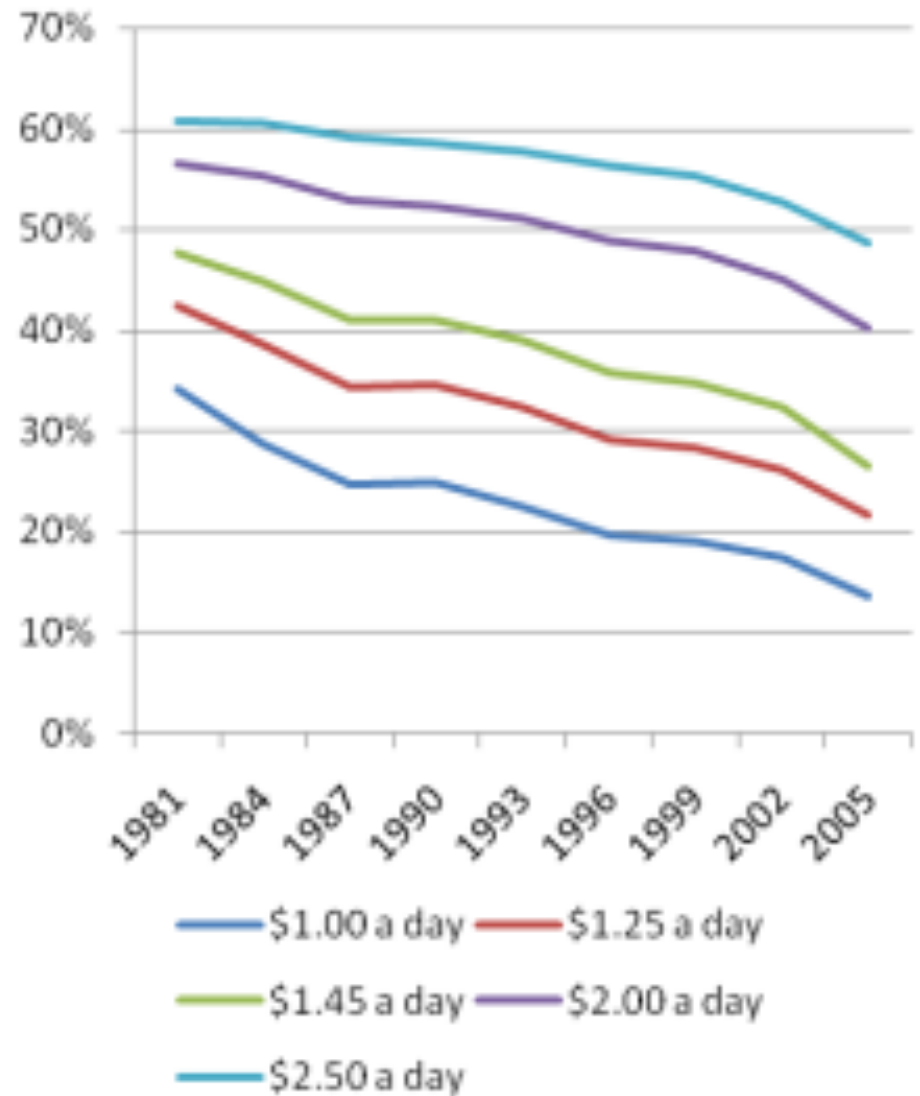
Relative v. Absolute Poverty

- ❖ Absolute (or extreme) poverty = *not having enough income to meet the most basic human needs for adequate food, water, shelter, clothing, sanitation, health care or education*. The World Bank has established an absolute “poverty line” of an income of \$1.25 per day per person, below which the total number of people has varied from 1.8 billion in 1981 to 1.3 billion in 2005. As of 2008, 950 million people in the world were malnourished. The annual death toll from poverty-related causes is 18 million, or one third of all human deaths.
- ❖ Relative poverty = *poor by comparison to others in one’s own society*. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that in 2010 the nation’s official poverty rate was 15.1 percent, up from 14.3 percent in 2009. There were 46.2 million people in poverty in 2010, up from 43.6 million in 2009.

Is Absolute Poverty Decreasing?

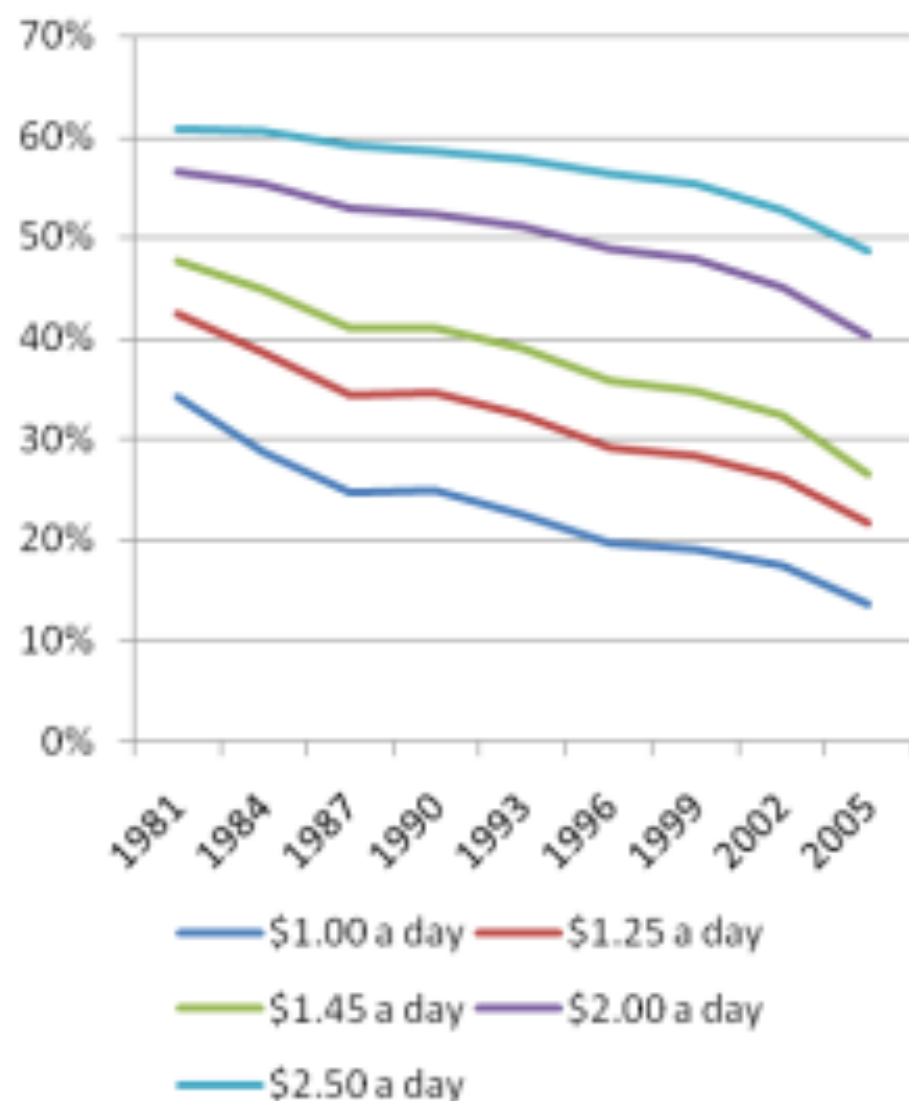
Looks Like Poverty Is Decreasing

**Poverty levels over time
world population (%)**

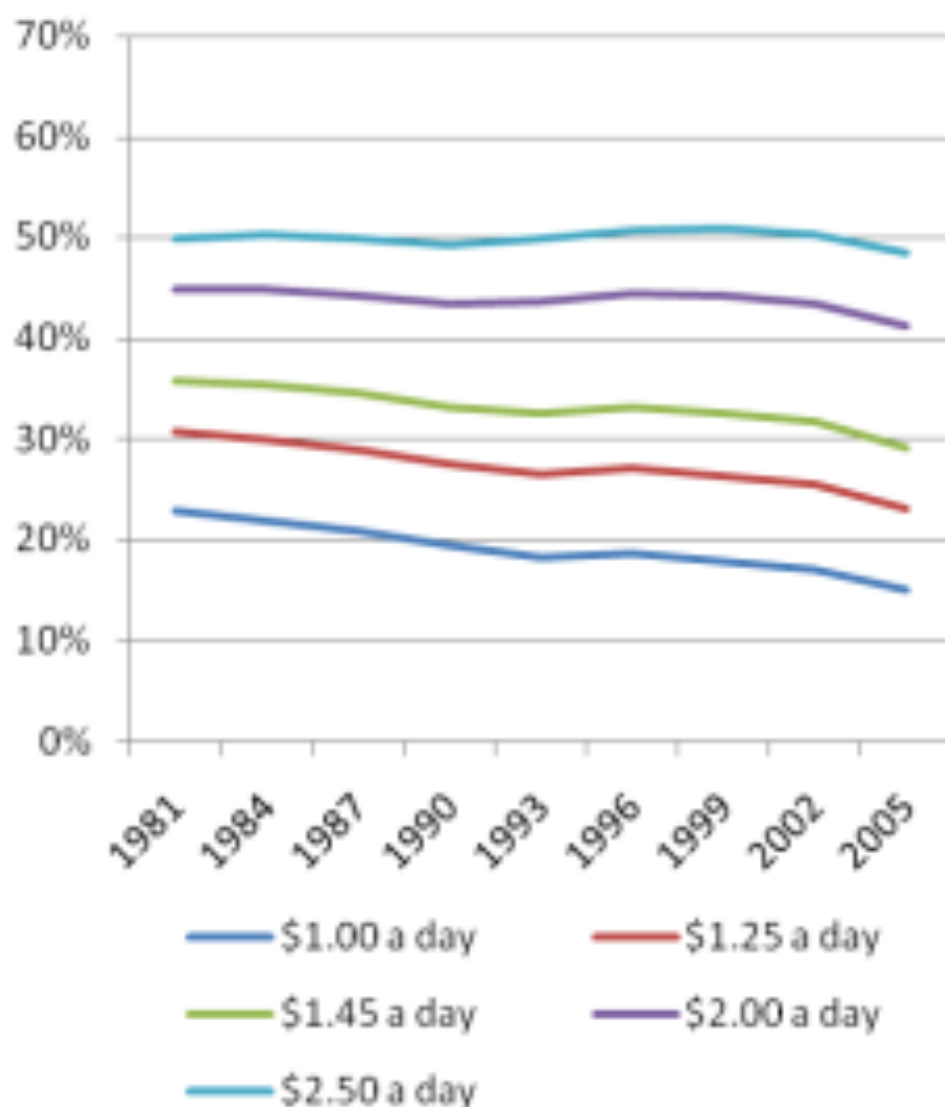


But Let's Look Closer...

Poverty levels over time world population (%)



Poverty levels over time excluding China



Source: World Bank Development Indicators 2008

Are we Morally Obligated to Donate Our Money to the Poor?

Here “*money*” means “*money we could live without*”. Indeed, we cannot be morally obligated to donate money that are necessary for us in order to buy basic items such as food and shelter.

Think About Something You Bought But You Didn't Need

Examples:

Clothes; chocolates and snacks; tickets for a show; a bottle of wine; french fries; etc.

Peter
Singer
(1946-)



A Drowning Child

“On my way to give a lecture, I pass a shallow ornamental pond and notice that a small child has fallen in and is in danger of drowning. I look around to see where the parents, or babysitter, are, but to my surprise, I see that there is no one else around. It seems that it is up to me to make sure that the child doesn’t drown. Would anyone deny that I ought to wade in and pull the child out?

This will mean getting my clothes muddy, ruining my shoes and either cancelling my lecture or delaying it until I can find something dry to change into; but compared with the avoidable death of a child none of these things are significant”

Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence and Morality”

What Is the (*Morally Significant*)
Difference Between a **Drowning Child**
and a **Starving Child Living Far Away?**

Why don't we give money to the starving child?

Singer's Principle

If we can prevent something bad without sacrificing anything of comparable significance, we are morally obligated to do it.

We are morally obligated to save the drowning child even though this would require messing up our new shoes because our shoes are less important than the child's life

We are morally obligated to give money to the starving child in the third world even though this would require giving up some of our money because the pleasure we derive from keeping our extra money is less important than the child's life

Singer's Argument

- (1) If we can prevent something bad without sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance, we are morally obligated to do it.
 - (2) Extreme poverty is bad.
 - (3) There is some extreme poverty we can prevent without sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance.
 - (4) Therefore, we are morally obligated to prevent extreme poverty.
- This means we should give up some of our money and wealth — money and wealth we could live without — to help the poor.

Are you convinced by Singer's argument?