

# WEEK 11 FAMINE & AFFLUENCE

# FOOD SECURITY

1. Available: food is available in sufficient quantities & on a consistent basis
2. Accessible: people can regularly acquire adequate quantities of food through socially acceptable methods
3. Utilizable: consumed food has a positive nutritional impact on people

## Food Insecurity:

a situation of limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways ([USDA](#))

# THE ETHICS OF FOOD SECURITY

- Do people have a right to food security?

*The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 25.*

*(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.*

- Are we morally obligated (or have a moral responsibility) to help provide others with food security?

# SINGER'S ARGUMENT FOR FAMINE RELIEF

## The Principle of Preventing Bad Occurences:

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. (Singer, 231)

1. Suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad
2. We ought to follow the PPBO
3.  $\therefore$  We ought to prevent death from famine, homelessness, etc., if we can do so without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance

# DOES DISTANCE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

- Why do I need to care about what happens to people who are spatially/geographically remote from me?
  - There is nothing about the PPBO that makes distance relevant, other than concerning what it is in one's power to prevent

# DO NUMBERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

*the principle makes no distinction between cases in which I am the only person who could possibly do anything and cases in which I am just one among millions in the same position. (Singer, 232)*

- Why do I need to do any more than anyone else?

# OBJECTIONS TO SINGER'S ARGUMENT

1. Erases the distinction between duty & supererogation
2. Too radical
3. Too demanding

# ERASES THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN DUTY & SUPEREROGATION

*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. (Singer, 235)*

- “Normal” acts of charity won’t count as charity according to PPBO



*Because giving money is regarded as an act of charity, it is not thought that there is anything wrong with not giving. The charitable man may be praised, but the man who is not charitable is not condemned. People do not feel in any way ashamed or guilty about spending money on new clothes or a new car instead of giving it to famine relief. (Indeed, the alternative does not occur to them.) This way of looking at the matter cannot be justified. 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. (Singer, 235)*

# IT IS TOO RADICAL

*One objection to the position I have taken might be simply that it is too drastic a revision of our moral scheme. People do not ordinarily judge in the way I have suggested they should. Most people reserve their moral condemnation for those who violate some moral norm, such as the norm against taking another person's property. They do not condemn those who indulge in luxury instead of giving to famine relief. (Singer, 236)*

- Moral judgments are not usually made that require such altruism towards others

# IT IS TOO DEMANDING

*we ought to give until we reach the level of marginal utility-that is, the level at which, by giving more, I would cause as much suffering to myself or my dependents as I would relieve by my gift. This would mean, of course, that one would reduce oneself to very near the material circumstances of a Bengali refugee (Singer, 241)*

- We should give all of our resources until we've reached some level of equality of distribution throughout the world

