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Philosophy 303

Assignment 20

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Peter Singer takes a position that it is morally wrong to not help those that you are capable of helping. He presents an argument and an analogy to explicit his position. Singer contends that by not contributing to charity to relieve third world poverty you are necessary breaking a moral obligation. In the following paper, I will be explicating Singers views on this matter.

To show to consequence of not giving to charity, Singer presents the following situation which he believe is analogous to giving to charity. A character named Bob is close to retirement and has invested in a Bugatti, a very rare and expensive car that is growing in market value. Selling this car is the way that Bob intends to live comfortably after retirement. Bob takes his Bugatti out for a ride and parks near the end of a railway; he gets out and starts walking down the track. After a walk Bob notices that a train cart is coming down the track heading straight for a small child in the distance, too far to hear Bob’s shouts to move. The option that Bob faces is whether to flip a switch that will change the cart’s path and send it directly at the Bugatti instead of continuing towards the child. Bob decides not to flip the switch to protect his the Bugatti as it is a portion livelihood.

Singer contends that the above analogy shows how not giving a manageable portion of you livelihood in order to prevent the preventable loss of life you have necessarily failed a moral obligation. Singer’s argument is simply made with 3 premises. First that suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad. Second that if you are capable of preventing something bad without sacrificing anything nearly as important, it is morally wrong not to prevent it. Third that by donating a manageable portion of you income to aid agencies you can prevent preventable suffering and death without sacrificing anything nearly as important. Concluding that it if you are not donating a portion of your income to aid agencies you are nessesirly doing something morally wrong.