

# What should a billionaire give and what should you? essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Poverty](#)



Faulty Thinking in “ What Should a Billionaire Give – and What Should You?”

Peter Singer’s persuasive essay strips us bare of our selfish wants as he equates our tendency to accumulate all the stuff we don’t need with ignoring the plight of drowning children and, as such, being responsible for the death of those children. We are, Singer convincingly argues, products of our fortunate “ social capital”; therefore, we have an obligation to those who do not have a social capital. Life is priceless. It is God’s greatest gift and should be returned to the Creator through good actions and charity. From this perspective rose philanthropy, with the aim of improving human life quality. Many attempts to “ fight global poverty” were led during this century by some individuals but the core of the solution lies , according to Peter Singer in his article “ What Should a Billionaire Give – and What Should You?”, in the collaboration between all classes of people. Singer dissects through his persuasive essay the different reasons that led to disparity and philanthropy, in addition to the exposure of a strategy in order to combat poverty in developing countries. The history of developing countries has always been marked with poverty.

The origins of scarcity may lie in the field of colonization and the exploitation of people, lands and resources by the European empire-building in the nineteenth century. As a fact, poor people had less access to health, education and other services. Therefore, the percentage of disease, ignorance and wars increased dramatically thus worsening the situation and dragging poor countries into even deeper problems. Then, with the twentieth century, rose globalization and the promise held by developed countries to help inferior countries escape poverty by elaborating strong bonds between

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nations and offering spiritual, economical, emotional and physical aid. “ All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”. This extract represents the first article of the declaration of human rights which states that people from all over the world should gain the same benefits of life and struggle hand in hand to reduce imbalances and disparity between them. However, our world is far from being perfect and inequalities are easily identified within a region, country or even a city.

The Singer proposal would greatly benefit impoverished nations as well as the economic status of others. This statement can be considered a pro or con depending on the nation you represent. An evident pro of Singer’s proposal would be the compassion for the country, and the saving of lives. A con, the unwillingness to contribute from the wealthy parties or stress on the economy the proposal’s affect could fuel. The Millennium Development goals include reducing extreme poverty, and hunger, increase education, reduce mortality rate, provide safe drinking water and reduce the spread of disease. None of this is possible without donations, especially from the ones that live on the higher end of society. About the first 10% in our society today could make up for the hardships that are being faced in other countries while still leaving them with an acceptable living wage income. Therefore, there is no reason why any person should be without the proper necessities that are needed to sustain life. Furthermore, because we patronize and live in a state

of interdependence on international corporations for our goods and services, we are obliged to help the poor in developing countries.

For after all, these countries, led by despots and other unsavory characters, make deals with international corporations, selling raw materials for a higher price than they would by keeping their resources in their own countries. The result is that people living in developing countries starve as their resources are leached by international corporations. Singer's argument has numerous pros. It is important to aid those who are suffering due to hunger and poverty. These people are just as deserving of a good, healthy and prosperous life as those who are already prosperous. Therefore, to give up one's luxuries so that less fortunate human beings can actually acquire necessities is a fair and simple request. Humans don't need luxuries such as frivolous electronics and excessive clothes and accessories. However, humans do need food, shelter and other basic amenities. The fact that so many people have both necessities and luxuries while others have neither is a shocking reality that needs to be changed. Furthermore, by donating your extra funds to overseas aid organizations you would be helping a needy person out. You're making a difference in somebody's life.

At the same time you're helping a person out, you feel good about doing so. You're contributing to something much bigger than yourself and you're making an impact on somebody's life. By donating your extra money you feel like you're doing the right thing and not spending it on a luxury that you want, but spending it on something that really is important. Agreeing with Singer's solution, one could argue we have become too materialistic in

today's society. Our wants have overcome our needs as we try to keep up with friends in having the most. This selfish desire can be theoretically eliminated by focusing that energy on ending world poverty. On the other hand, Singer's plan to end world hunger has many fundamental flaws. In our materialistic society, many people care more about their own happiness and security than that of others. Many Americans, unless forced, would be reluctant to give up luxuries and give all money previously allocated to frivolous expenditures instead to aid organizations. It is a presumptuous notion to assume that Americans will indeed follow Singer's advice.

The plight of their fellow human beings will weigh gravely on the minds of Americans for only a short time after reading this article. Soon after, they will be again caught up in their own materialistic and short-sighted world, presumably forgetting any resolutions they made to give up their luxuries. Picture a young man whose family does not have much money, they have all the necessities of life, but no extra money for luxury items. This young man wants more for his future family so he studies hard, goes to college, and gets a good job. Twenty years later he has a good income and can afford luxury items. The argument against Singer would be people should not have to give up what they worked hard for. Although there are fewer opportunities in other parts of the world, the poverty stricken should work to improve their situation and not rely on the help of others. The cons of Singer's theory are much stronger. There are too many questions to ask that have no definite answer because society itself and its people can never be definite. There is no doubt that the inspiration behind the theory to help feed, shelter and

clothe the poor is morally right, but the means of achieving this could not be effectively carried out by this theory.

The major question arises that directs the beam of doubt over the entire theory: would people voluntarily give away the money they work so hard for? Is the only way to achieve this by government "encouragement"? Although Singer's Argument seems like it can only do good things, how can we be sure? How can we be sure that we're really helping and that what we're doing is actually making a difference? Many things can go wrong when you're trying to donate. When donating to an organization, especially one overseas, you have to be sure that it is a legitimate organization. If you don't do your research and you're not careful you could be in a very bad position. You think you're giving your money to help someone, but really you're only contributing to a scam. You need to be very careful and cautious when donating to an organization that you're not too familiar with. While part of me would like to embrace Singer's moral imperative and spread Singer's gospel of uncompromising charity throughout the world, the skeptical part of me questions just how realistic Singer's ideal is.

For what Singer is arguing for is nothing short than a form of spiritual socialism, that is a condition in which human beings renounce their selfish desires for the "finer things in life" in order that they distribute their wealth as evenly as possible. This is a noble, saintly ideal indeed, but it contradicts our reptilian hard-wiring. I'm sad to say this, but without selfish motivation, most of us will not be creative or innovative. A world in which we all share our things in a communal potluck and don't aspire to materialistic excellence

is a banal, dreary and colorless world without creativity and innovation. Only when we are enticed by technological razzle-dazzle, model dream homes and exquisite clothing glorified by the silky-tongued fashionistas do we find the reptilian sparks in our brains' creative nerve centers exploding in glorious paroxysms and it is in these nerve explosions that we create and innovate. Sad as it is my friends, selfishness is high-octane rocket fuel for creativity. I'm not arguing that we should be selfish pigs in order to encourage our creativity and aspiration.

What I am arguing for is a balance. It was Aristotle who wrote about finding the golden mean. If we error too much in selfishness, we're thoughtless imbeciles, moral gnats, and reptilian sub-humans. On the other hand, if we strive to become spiritual socialists, we will become drab, stagnant and bovine. The truth lies somewhere in the middle. Now if we follow Singer's logical moral imperative to its ultimate conclusion, then we are forced to accept that we must renounce our worldly desires and achieve a spiritual condition that is so disdainful of personal comforts and luxuries that we must live only on bare necessities while giving all else to the poor. Anything short of this ideal would be, to use Singer's analogy, equivalent to being responsible for the deaths of drowning children. This may be true in some incidents but not for the entirety. Although the proposal holds great appeal, it does not function well with today's society. There are many arguments that could defend, argue, or qualify Singer's rationale because the line between luxury and basic need becomes fuzzy.

Cell phones, for example, to some seem a luxury, because of advancements in technology, cell phones bring a lot of enjoyment, yet to some a commodity, a basic form of communication to loved ones and safety. In addition, the theory, however, is just that: a theory and a very flawed one at best. Many aspects of it would result in blockades that would not allow it to succeed. It does not say that the government enforces this donation, but implies that it is voluntary. Who would give away such a great deal of money, forsake their luxuries and live off the basics to sustain a living in America? If this were in some way enforced, then a belief of “ what is the point of working so hard to feed people I do not know?” would result. People may see it pointless to struggle through 40-50 hours a week only to know that a large majority of that money will be taken from them. This was a common thought process that resulted in the failure of communism. The aim was to work for the good of the whole, but people are now willing to work as hard in industrial America today because it is for themselves.

Then the people who receive this money from the donations can recuperate, but they have no need to try to better their lives and get a job if they are guaranteed sustenance from this foundation of the rich. This is a constant occurrence in our present welfare system. A woman became pregnant and divorced her husband so the state agreed to pay for her apartment and food. She admitted to her mother that after a year she had no intentions of returning to work and fend for herself if the state would continue to support her. Yet another problem that would result is deciding when the donations would stop. At some point in the course of carrying out this theory, the



wealth would become evenly distributed and no one would have money for luxuries. Then the capitalist competition to make more starts anew. The theory also never defines what a “luxury” is and certainly the definition would vary. Some need a car to get to work, while others live and work in the same building. This would raise a huge controversy that could enflame both the supporters and opposers of this proposal.

For example, to some people a television is considered a luxury, while others may consider it a need. There are several excellent arguments for why the TV could be considered a need. People need to know what is going on in the world. Television is how the average person gets their news. Without the news, one wouldn't know what was going on in their country and in the world. Some people don't need a TV because they say they have the newspaper, but then you could say the newspaper is not a need, so they must have a TV or whatever else, and the argument keeps going back and forth and on-and-on. Peter Singer's theory could result in numerous problems and raise questions that could prevent it from ever succeeding in the way he originally desired. While both sides present a good argument, I disagree with Peter Singer. It is unfair for people to have to give up what they have worked hard to earn.

Not only would we not own anything of higher standards or value, but the poor people wouldn't know how to use the money if all we did was hand it over. This reminds me of a funny essay I once read by Peter Nguyen telling me that the phrase “nickels a day can feed a person” isn't because they bought some extremely cheap food, nooooo, they just ate the damn nickels.

What about the poverty in the United States? We cannot help all the poor people of the world if we have poverty stricken people right here on our own soil. Personally, I feel the needy in America are much more worthy of our support so we should help them before we help other and overseas nations. The world has a problem of a gap between the rich and the poor. Peter Singer proposes an argument to help the people of the world that are starving and sick with no means to help themselves. He believes that all the money spent on luxuries could be donated to the poor and every person can contribute a certain percentage of their income to help end world poverty. That percentage, also known as their "fair share", is based on how much money a person makes annually. However, he does not take into account the capitalist society on which our nation is built.

The theory would help the poor, but the natural order of society and the economy would not allow for an effective execution of this plan.

Unfortunately, the cons of Singer's plan outweigh the pros. Realistically, Americans will not embrace his proposition with open arms or wallets. In theory, Singer's plan is simple and effective. In practice, it falls short of truly capturing the nation's attention and persuading Americans to fork over their hard-earned money in order to give unfortunate people the food and medicine they so desperately need. The people of society must be the first to embrace the sacrifice to help the poor, but money does not have to be all the help. The "rich", or rather those that are not poor, may be willing to help in other ways besides simply giving away money. Peter Singer's solution has

good motivations propelling it forward, but the necessary results prove an unsurpassable boundary unless adjustments are made.