

Example of the singer
solution to world
poverty: a rude
awakening to our own
self...

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You should donate more. That is perhaps the most simple statement that can be made concerning helping those 2.2 billion people living on less than \$2 a day. According to the World Bank, progress on the way towards improving the living conditions of so many humbled individuals remains sluggish. This means countless more lives will be lost in the coming decades until the world's struggling societies will finally be able to turn their attention away from the most basic necessity of all - food. As I write this essay in response to Singer's interview and article, I can't help but feel a surge of guilt; it also sets a good example of just how mundane our own thinking is in accepting the above figures as simple pallid statistics.

Singer however, goes much further than to offer a blunt suggestion of donating to charity. He begins with a few basic examples of unrealistic situations in which the characters all commit revoltingly unethical actions. The first case is taken from a movie. It follows the actions of a Brazilian woman who receives a cash reward from organ traffickers for her involvement in the murder of a homeless boy. Case number two is borrowed from a book by fellow philosopher Peter Unger. It is about Bob, a pre-retiree who callously watches a child die as he prefers to save the vintage car he had spent his savings on. Both examples are painstakingly obvious situations in which the right choice was evident from the start; to the reader the characters are no other than monsters whose selfishness got the better of them.

Few readers will be able to grasp the greater picture without moving on to the rest of Singer's article. Their reaction is predictable: they are angry. They are confident they would have made the sacrifice and cleared their

conscience rather than allow helpless children to die. The reader is at this point also skeptical of whether the author actually knows what he's writing about and is eager to learn what kind of point he is trying to prove. He or she is ready to take in all the information that will follow, creating the perfect setup to influence the reader by exploiting this state of excitement.

Slowly but surely, Singer's intention is to explain his examples and bring them closer to life, clarifying how the strange and unbelievable circumstances relate to our own lives and us. His article is not merely a presentation of facts and figures, it tells a story. A story of American society and what it does not realize about itself. Upon the climax of this story lies the reader's shock as it strikes them Singer was not talking about Bob or a woman from a film in his examples. He meant everybody. Every single person who had read the article is accused as selfish enough of not having realized earlier how many people remain in need while they spend the larger part of their incomes on things they barely have a need for. Anticipating the inevitable guilt that results from his powerful choice of words and composition of his article, Singer again refers to Unger, who mentioned the telephone numbers and websites of influential charity organizations the reader could immediately contact to make a practical contribution to alleviating the effects of poverty in poor countries such as Brazil. To make this especially easy and free the reader of having to decide how much of their income to donate, he even provides the perfect sum of money - \$200. He argues that if all of it were to reach its target in a poor African or South American country, then "\$200 in donations would help a sickly 2-year-old transform into a healthy 6-year-old —offering safe passage through

childhood's most dangerous years”.

Speaking of Peter Singer as a “utilitarian philosopher”, as he refers to himself, I believe this is quite a deep and interesting world view. The main principle of utilitarian philosophy, it seems, is to always think beyond the obvious. Despite what an action (or inactivity) may appear to be, we must always bear in mind its potential consequences and relationship to other events. It is a far-sighted approach, one that seeks to better understand the existing philosophical concept of the interconnection between all things. Peter Singer and the author he referred to when writing his article, Peter Unger, are extraordinary people, who take the time and give just a little more thought to what most of us regard as simple and obvious. They are deep thinkers whose unexpected conclusions are often capable of awakening society from its, let us be honest, deplorable state of ignorance.

If I were asked to rate the article I have just read on a scale on one to ten, it would receive the highest rating. If I were prompted by an interviewer concerning the likelihood of me recommending it to a friend, my answer would be “very likely”. It is not just the moral issue of Singer’s publication that deserves attention. It is his method of proving his point that really amazed me and how effective his writing strategy was in influencing the reader. I was not surprised to hear in the video interview that Unicef and Oxfam had received $\frac{3}{4}$ of million dollars as a readers’ response to the publication of the article in 1999. After all, making a donation is the least you could do after realizing how much lives we could save if we all did it on a regular basis.

References

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