

Ethics: foreign aid essay sample



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Morality and ethical theories are attempts at guidelines that help define most every aspect of human nature. Understanding the differences between right and wrong has captured the minds of the worlds greatest thinkers for thousands of years. Even with so much effort being provided to the study of ethical behavior, we are still on unsound ground. Philosophers all over the globe continue to provide new ethical insights, and they determine their findings to be new standards for universally moral truths. One of many explored issues in ethics is that of Social Policy. Those who philosophically examine social policy review and make judgments on issues dealing with human welfare. With many philosophical inputs being provided to issues regarding social policy many disputes begin to arise. The debate between Peter Singer and James Shikwati over foreign aid and the distribution of aid to nations facing famine, shows a dichotomy in opinion with each man holding views on either side of this social political spectrum. While Singer and Shikwati both make great points in regards to their beliefs, there has to be something that can be done without arriving at either extremity.

Foreign aid to countries in need should be limited, while making sure it is used for the right purposes. Rather than giving away an excessive amount of money and material goods, developed nations should be promoting the internal advancements of countries in need. One dispute over social policy is that of foreign aid. It is not clearly known how much aid should be given, which method of delivery will produce the greatest outcome, or if it is even a moral obligation to provide foreign aid to countries facing famine. University of Princeton professor Peter Singer is a man who dedicates his life to famine relief. Singer believes that it is the duty of relatively affluent nations to keep

foreign nations from every facing poverty (Sommers 188). It is necessary that we reevaluate our whole moral concept and construct it in a manner in which we are morally obligated to “ prevent what is bad, and not promote what is good.” (Sommers 188) According to the utilitarian views of Singer, people in a position to help famine victims are bound by moral duty to do whatever can be done, and more, to ensure the safety and well being of people facing poverty.

In his essay “ Famine, Affluence, and Morality,” Singer chooses to focus on refugees of East Bengal in 1971. In this eastern state at the time in Bangladesh there were over 9. 5 million refugees (Luthra). Over 65, 000, 000 pounds of aid money was being sent to help these starving refugees; we were not close in our efforts to relinquish these people from suffering (Sommers 188). If our efforts were not close to being sufficient, then what could we have done? Peter Singer would have it that we give up everything we can, up until the point of marginal utility. To this extent every person whom is capable to help morally ought to give to the point until by giving more, begins to cause suffering to ones self. If everyone were to act in such a manner, we would redistribute all the wealth in the world, and eliminate poverty, even if it rendered us to a life of near refuge. Singer comes to this conclusion based on one premise: suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad.

As this is a predominantly accepted view, then it is up to the people who can help to perform actions that in themselves promotes a moral good capable of stopping a bad thing from happening (Sommers 188). this would mean that instead of buying a five dollar cup of coffee from Starbucks, we should give

our five dollars to famine relief (Kaitz). By spending money on coffee, we are behaving in a manner that does not function in providing for the most good. Giving way with our material goods and valuables allocated aid to areas of need. There is no excuse as to why we should not take this moral understanding and put it into practice. With always advancing technology, we are ever connected to people everywhere. In the “ global village” in which we have become, it is now possible to give aid directly to famine relief efforts all over the world (Sommers 189). Being impartial plays no role in deciding where our aid efforts should go. The new moral perspective introduced by Singer holds that ethical behavior is suppose to be displayed to everyone.

The moral community can't be limited to people in our close proximity, but must include man everywhere. Someone who struggles to survive in East Bengal or one whom struggles and whom is my neighbor both demand of me moral obedience in providing relief (Sommers 189). As the theory holds, morally we are obligated in doing whatever we can to help others. The relief theory of Peter Singer is seen in good light, but is met instantly by opposition. A new view is introduced that calls for the halt, and complete suspension of aid efforts by outside sources. The Executive director of the Inter Region Economic Network in Nairobi, Kenya, James Shikwati takes this stance and plays a key role in disputing the views presented by Singer. Shikwati, who sees poverty and famine everyday, believes that in order to allow a nation to economically rebuild, foreign aid must cease. The aid being sent not only funds corruption, but it kills any chance of a market economy to be sustainable. The enormous amounts of aid money being sent to

developing nations, is not being allocated to the right areas. Instead of being distributed amongst the people, large bureaucracies are ending up with the money.

Corruption by these functionaries is being displayed, and normal Africans are receiving no benefits (Sommers 195). Politicians in these developing nations are also using foreign aid in a corrupt fashion. Rather than doing what is good for the majority, political heads are using this aid as a free source of campaign. Food aid is being given to political constituents in order to lock in votes for upcoming elections (Sommers 196). The corruption produced by foreign aid does not start inside the countries who are relying on it, but it climbs the hierarchical ladder all the way to the United Nations World Food Program, who is in charge of aid distribution. According to Shikwati, member of the UN's food program are stuck between "being dedicated to the fight against hunger while, on the other hand, being faced with unemployment were hunger actually eliminated" (Sommers 196).

Shikwati is inferring that while members of the food program want to help with famine relief, they are forced to do the opposite to ensure that they remain taken care of. If these U. N. Agencies would stop granting aid funding, they would better the African people, but they would sacrifice their own jobs and status. While the corruption brought about by foreign aid is bad, the effects it has left on Africa's market structure is worse. Countries who are receiving aid from foreign nations, show no aspiration to start a free market. When aid is dispersed to citizens, it kills the entrepreneurial spirit (Sommers 195). People have no incentive to start businesses if cheaper alternatives will provided to them. Food aid has devastating effects on local

farmers in developing countries. Shikwati says, “ local farmers may as well put their hoes right away; no one can compete with the U. N.’s World Food Program” (Sommers 196). Shikwati suggests that food displacement by the U. N. Is keeping local farmers from selling any of their own product.

While it seems the U. N. Is helping, it is in fact destroying any possibility for economic growth. Industry also struggles when aid is so freely given. As donated clothes find their way into these developing nations, there is less need for textile employees. In 2003, 57, 000 people were employed by the textile industry in Kenya. This is a major decline from the 157, 000 people employed in 1997 (Sommers 197). Even with good intentions backing aid relief, more destruction is being created than benefits. If change for the better is to occur, it must come from the African people themselves.

Currently African’s view themselves as beggars who need aid relief to survive. If aid benefits were to cease, African people would have to establish trade relations with neighboring countries. Opening trade would thus call for laws to be implemented that would benefit a free market economy (Sommers 196). Eliminating aid is key in ending famine. We find ourselves stuck between polar opposite moral beliefs. On one hand, we are told that charity is in fact duty, and that we are morally obligated to do whatever is possible to prevent bad from happening.

The opposing opinion informs us of the negative consequences foreign aid actually produces. With both philosophical views presenting valid points, there must be a conclusion that can be drawn somewhere in the middle. The moral principles that guide our society today, would suggest that the ethical action would be to help people facing famine. If we are to continue to

provide aid, it must be in a manner that brings about the most good. Rather than simply providing monetary and material goods, we should be focusing on establishing sustainable economies within the borders of countries in need. Because so many people rely solely on aid relief, there is nothing being done to promote market advancements. As developed nations, we need to act as teachers in order to get other countries on the path toward alleviating their constraints. This could mean subsidizing foreign agriculture, buying shares in corporate business's, or lending money at very low interest rates. Providing aid does not require that we personally give away our possessions to people in need. Perhaps the best thing we can give, is the gift of national accountability. We can teach methods of improvement, but it must be up to these nationals to bring prosperity to their own countries.

In conclusion, a medium must be found that takes into account ideas from both philosophers. It is too extreme for everyone to give up most everything they have in order to end the famine struggle that many people face. If everyone were to give all their possessions, there would be no incentive to work hard. We would lose skilled workers who hold very important jobs because there would be no payout. The proposed ideals of Shikwati also appear to be radical. It would be wrong to completely abandon countries who require our assistance. Problems faced by poor nations would inevitably worsen. The best alternative plan would be to assist in strengthening the economies of weak countries. This would allow us to avoid such extreme measures while arriving at the same conclusion; an end to world famine.