

Helping people in need a supererogation or an obligation

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Helping people in need a supererogation or an obligation People in poor nations are starving to death when we are enjoying our delicious meal with our friends and family. There are various governmental aid-projects and privately run charities which are responsible for delivering donations from the relatively wealthy nations to the nations in need. I believe it is a morally right thing to help the people in need, but not every one of us would make donations regularly.

Peter Singer uses the drowning child example to make people rethink about this current scenario. He believes that it is our obligation to help the people in poor developing countries. There are objections to his stance, but before considering and discussing from both sides, I am now going to describe and explain the Singer's drowning child example first. Imagine a child is drowning in a shallow pond and saving the child's life means jumping into the pond and thereby getting one's clothes wet and muddy. Would you still save the child?

All of those having a rational mind will say yes. In spite of the bad consequence of fouling the clothes, saving the child's life is morally what we ought to do as the importance of the child's life so far outweighs the little cost of getting one's clothes wet and muddy. It is within our power to prevent the child's death without sacrificing something that is of even greater importance. Thus, this is what we ought to do and it is our obligation to prevent something this bad from happening (Singer, 1997).

Even when there are other people near the pond who are equally qualified of saving the child but are doing nothing but simply passing by, would you still jump in and save the child? Similarly, all of those being asked said yes. It <https://assignbuster.com/helping-people-in-need-a-supererogation-or-an-obligation/>

simply does not make any moral difference to the situation. Undoubtedly, not saving the child in this situation might make one feeling less guilty but everyone thinks that we ought to save the child. We agree that this is our moral obligation and it would be wrong not doing so (Singer, 1997). Then what if the child were being far away, maybe even in another country?

Would people still hold the same stance? The answer is yes. Distance and nationality do not make not saving the child just. Whichever child or even adult, if saving his life is what we are able to do without having something of great significance to us being sacrifice, we ought to do that. This is morally what we ought to do without violating other things that are of similar or higher moral importance (Singer, 1972). The situation of the drowning child example is actually synonymous with those hungry children and adults suffering from famine or other disasters, both natural or man-made.

If we agree that saving the child that are drowning in a pond is morally what we ought to do and not doing so is unjust, then why should we think otherwise when it comes to helping the people who are suffering in poor developing countries? Why does making regular donations to nations in need not our moral obligation whereas saving the child drowning in a pond is? We have agreed that distance and nationality does not matter in this moral stance. Moreover, the problem of being too far away from the sufferers and we might not be able to come to their aid in time has been overcome by the effort of charities.

What is it that stop us from making regular donations? There are explanations to this bipolar situation, giving reasons to help better understanding the causes leading to this global scenario. First of all, saving <https://assignbuster.com/helping-people-in-need-a-supererogation-or-an-obligation/>

the drowning child is helping out directly, while making a donation is not. The donation will be distributed to the people in need through the government or some privately run charities. Some of the donation will be used for administrative cost or get swallowed up in corruption.

People will never know how much of their donation can really be given to those in need. As corruption is usually a prevalent problem in many of the developing countries, people sometimes have the worry that their donation might not serve to their right purposes but only be ended up in greedy hands. This worry is reasonable but actually most of the donations can get to serve their proper purposes (Giving What We Can, 2012). Although not all of the sum can be used for aid, the part of it that gets to its destination still can make the best of its worth.

The aid organizations may not be one-hundred percent efficient, but they can help to solve the problem of distance, serving as an agent for delivery. There are many people around the world who are compassionate about the plight of the others. Charities and governmental organizations collect the aids and help distributing them to the areas in need. I think this is by far the most efficient way of giving out a helping hand. The cost for administration is inevitable and the part of donations spent on it could be seen as for supporting these organizations to keep running.

Furthermore, in my point of view, there are always ways to minimize corruption. We can donate money to aid projects that do not involve valuable goods or specifically make donations to programs which serves to tackle the corruption problem in where it is prevailing. The probability of wasting a proportion of the donations should not mean aiding being useless. Those that <https://assignbuster.com/helping-people-in-need-a-supererogation-or-an-obligation/>

can get though may make a significant change that we could not imagine. The second explanation is about the psychological difference between the drowning child example and the reality.

We feel more related to the sufferers when we could see them. The feeling of guilt for not helping is lesser when we could not see or witness the sufferings (Singer, 1972). Although it makes one feels less guilty without the sight of suffering presenting nearby, it does not make helping those further away a lower priority morally. As we have discussed that distance is not a considering factor in deciding whether it is our obligation to help or not, both of those from our own country and from the other countries deserve our help.

Moreover, in this age of the prosperous development of mediatechnology, charities and governmental aid agencies can effectively show the current situation of the emaciated children to the public. Therefore, it does not sound very plausible to me saying that people not making donations is because of the lack of awareness of the issue. According to Peter Singer, a moral philosopher, if we are able to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it (Singer, 1972).

Some people object this position. I am going to summarize those objections. For one of the reasons is that this is simply too extreme as most people do not judge those who are ignorant of the others' suffering. People usually criticize those who violate some moral norms, for example: murdering, sex assault, etc. Some writers, including Sidgwick and Urmson, Stated that if the

moral code that we set is too hard to uphold, there will be a general breakdown in the moral system (Singer, 1972).

The moral code that we are currently using mainly includes not invading the others' privileges, for example: stealing, killing, etc and other things that could help keeping the society safe and sound. Helping the poor nations is not necessary for the wealthy nations. Thus, people usually do not see it as what they must do. This is regrettable but understandable. If making regular donations to those in need is being made to be an obligation and a moral code, it might be too hard for everyone to follow. Eventually, people might choose not to follow anything from the moral code (Singer, 1972).

Singer argues that if the conduct is good, why should we categorize it into morally obligatory or morally optional? If morality means doing something good, then shouldn't a good conduct be in the moral code? Moreover, drawing a line to divide conducts into the aforementioned categories is by no means easy. It is hard to define the standard to be used for distinguishing conducts into two kinds. Helping the people in need in other countries is always be defined as a generous and selfless gesture. However, Singer thinks otherwise. He thinks that "our traditional moral categories are upset".

He objects the traditional distinction that is drawn between duty and charity by using the current standard. It is our moral obligation to prevent as much sufferings as possible in the meantime not sacrificing something else of comparable moral importance (Singer, 1972). How does a man act is actually influenced by the general societal values and the people around him. When a man making a donation or joining voluntary services to help those in need is

being praised for his generosity, he would think that what he has done is a supererogation.

Actually, coming to the others' aid to prevent suffering without sacrificing as much is an obligation that people usually overlook. This situation is for long being shaped by the general social atmosphere and this is what being upsetting. The moral attitude of people is shaped by each other and also the society. Admittedly, helping those in need is always greatly encouraged. However, this is by no means enough. Preventing as much sufferings as possible without causing sacrifices as significant is morally obligatory and not doing so should be seen as unjust (Singer, 1972).

I agree with Singer that if it is within one's ability to help, saving other people from suffering seems to be just and morally right, while otherwise seems wrong. Although there might be concerns that what we have given might not be able to serve their greatest worth, I believe that the part of aids that get to the hands of those in need is able to make a significant change in their lives. There are worries that helping those poor developing countries might worsen the current situation. Firstly, those countries usually have a higher birth-rate.

The aids that we give now would only support them to have an even greater population that the countries themselves are not able to feed (Giving What We Can, 2012). This might lead to a greater demand in foreign help and eventually turns into an ever-expanding cycle. This worry is understandable but there are always other alternatives to help in this kind of situation. For fear of the problem of overpopulation, donations could be made to

organizations that help in promoting and enhancing birth-control in the developing countries.

Moreover, the reason behind the scene of them having a high birth-rate is the high mortality rate of children. They need a large family size to ensure having enough manpower to take care of the family, to work and to earn. If their lives were not this hard, the birth-rate would presumably decline (Giving What We Can, 2012). The other worry is that the developing countries might become more and more dependent on the aids (Giving What We Can, 2012). This worry is again not necessary as there are many aid projects that are actually aiming at helping those developing nations to be self-supportive.

People in some of the poor nations are taught to grow crops for supporting themselves and for selling to make money. Donations could be made to support this kind of projects. Moreover, helping those in need does not necessarily means lengthening their life expectancy but might be about improving their living quality (Giving What We Can, 2012). One example is performing a simple eye operation to cure their eye diseases so that they could see the world more clearly. It is our obligation to help the others in need when it is within our own power without sacrificing something of higher importance.

Death and sufferings are things that should be prevented. This is what we ought to do. With the gap between the rich and the poor growing everyday, our moral attitude towards giving out aids should be revised. Helping should not be seen as a supererogation but an moral obligation. References: Giving

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