

Example of article review on famine, affluence and morality by peter singer - que...

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Singer's Goal and Argument

The goal of Peter Singer in his article *Famine, Affluence and Morality* centers on the use of utilitarianism, but in an approach that tackles the implications of doing a morally just act through committing an act that is not morally good in itself. He notes that there are several people in different parts of the world suffering, most notably from poverty. In order to provide a solution to those problems, it is important for a person to do something about it. If the person possesses the ability to prevent a bad consequence to arise out of the situation, then it is morally sound for him to resolve the problem, as long as he does not commit something that would lead him to do something that is morally bad. As an illustration, he argues that helping a person recover from poverty is a moral thing to do if the solution does not involve having to steal or kill people – acts considered as morally bad or sacrificing adherence to the tenet of moral goodness. In that way, the notion of morality becomes balanced and does not justify any morally bad actions as circumstantially good (Singer, 1971).

Singer's Answers to Counterarguments

Distance

Singer raised the counterargument of distance as a possible dispute to his claim. He noted that distance matters to the extent that it is more important for a person to help a suffering fellow proximate to his distance than to donate to any charity that assists a far-flung village stricken with a deadly

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epidemic, for instance. He disputes that counterargument by saying that distance is irrelevant to his utilitarian cause, noting that hurting a victim from a farther distance is not less wrong than hurting one from a nearer distance (Singer, 1971).

Quantity of People

Singer followed up another counterargument in the form of the number of people that could help alleviate the situation. He said that a person who can help solve the situation is more morally sound compared to a situation in which more people could help. To counter that, he noted that it does not matter to the moral question posed by the situation, as anyone could help alleviate the situation responsibly. If none of those many people who could help do something, everyone becomes morally wrong (Singer, 1971).

Quantity of Moral Act Rendered

Singer said in another counterargument that a situation calling on several people to become morally responsibly could exempt people who do not wish to help but can render a morally good act, as there would be sufficient help to come from the many people who feel morally responsible. He disputed that by saying that the quantity of morally sound help coming in does not determine moral exemption on the part of an individual who could do something to save the situation. As long as that person refuses to commit something in the name of his moral capacity, then he is morally wrong (Singer, 1971).

Marginal Duty, According to Singer

Singer raised the contention of reaching marginal duty in rendering morally good acts. According to him, marginal utility is the point where a person committing morally sound actions reduces himself to the level of the person he is helping. As an illustration, it is morally sound for a person to help others only to the extent that he could render help, such that exemption falls only when he becomes poor like those persons he is helping. In this case, he justifies that rendering morally good acts do not require committing persons to suffer severely, consequentially (Singer, 1971).

Duty and Charity, According to Singer

Singer contends that there is no defining line demarcating duty from charity. He claims that being charitable is a duty for people capable of rendering charity - an argument different from the traditional and strict sense of the two terms. Strictly speaking, duty refers to acts people should not commit, while charity is an optional moral good for people. Yet, in his context, he argues in favor of charity being a duty for people who can render such, premising his belief on the fact that if one could do something about the situation, he must do something about it, as long as it is not morally bad (Singer, 1971).

Personal Argument

Singer presented a justifiable lens to morality, in the sense that he calls for people to awaken their moral consciousness in order to alleviate the strong degree of suffering the rest of the world is suffering. He does not oblige every person to help with the situation; he only expresses those people who

could render help to a certain situation as the people harboring moral responsibilities. At the same time, he defined potential counterarguments and made the effort to resolve those in line with his resolve. Such is highly useful to the problem of poverty – the main problem he raised every so often in his presentation of arguments. Poverty stems not just from natural circumstances but also from the actions of people. Thus, poverty, in a general sense, has largely something to do with the people themselves, as based on historically credible events such as the Holocaust, World War II, and all other major conflicts stemming from human misunderstanding, greed and self-interest. In this context, people are morally duty-bound to prevent those incidents through self-control and dutiful adherence to morality (Pogge, 2006).

References

Pogge, T. (2006). World poverty and human rights. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 19(1), 1-7.

Singer, P. (1971). Famine, affluence and morality. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 1(3), 229-243.