

Example of argumentative essay on goal and argument of singer

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



Questions and Answers on Famine, Affluence and Morality by Peter Singer

Famine, Affluence and Morality is an exposition of Peter Singer on utilitarianism containing his goal to establish that it is immoral not to use disposable wealth to reduce the suffering of a person, provided such usage would not cause harm to anyone. Singer emphasized that poverty has blighted the lives of many people in the world, with the solution lying within the ability of relatively wealthier people to do so. Therefore, a person commits a moral act when he uses his resources freely and without any prejudice to other people to alleviate the suffering of a person. For instance, a person could commit a moral act by assisting a poverty-stricken person without stealing from others or hurting anyone in the process. Given the foregoing, Singer justifies that a bad action done in the name of fulfilling a morally good duty could never become good by circumstance (Singer, 1971).

Addressing the Counterarguments

Distance

Distance does not affect the morality of a morally good act, according to Singer. The counterargument concerning distance states that a person gains greater morality if he helps a person within his considerable reach than helping those in distant areas. Supplying goods to a neighbor whose house got burned by a fire has more positive morality points than donating to a nongovernmental organization (NGO) working on preventing child labor in Africa, as long as the counterargument is concerned. In response to such a case, Singer emphasized the utility of helping people suffering from poverty

does not change with distance, given that the end result still leads to the alleviation of the plight of the chosen beneficiary (Singer, 1971).

Singer notes that a person does not become less morally sound in committing an act of morality if many other people could do the same thing. According to the counterargument, the morality of the act of a person reduces if there are many others who could perform similar acts, either through similar or different ways. With that, there is a strong implication that a problem that requires harder solutions to achieve entails greater morality for any person who could solve it. Yet, Singer refuted the foregoing by noting the importance of resolving the problem, notwithstanding the existence of a great number of people who could resolve it. For Singer, fulfillment of an actual problem by a person who did not use any immoral acts as means best measures morality (Singer, 1971).

A person could not excuse himself from helping another person in need if he has disposable resources that he could use to render help, notwithstanding the fact that there is sufficient help that could come from many more people. This time, quantity based on available moral acts serves as the main thrust of another counterargument logically assailed by Singer. According to Singer, no person could excuse himself from committing a morally sound act just because other moral acts could transpire in place of what he ought to do. The refusal of a person to commit a moral act despite his ability to do so corresponds to a morally wrong act (Singer, 1971).

The Concept of Marginal Utility

Marginal utility, in the context of committing morally sound acts, requires that the person doing so much experience reductions leading him to become like the person that receives help from him. Singer does not agree with necessitating marginal utility in rendering the person as morally good in helping others. A person who wishes to render help to other people may do so on his own volition based on the resources that he has at his disposal. The person has the right to stop rendering help if he thinks that his resources are already becoming inadequate for him, as he does not need to go through severe suffering in the course of helping those around him (Singer, 1971).

Duty and Charity Vis-à-vis Singer

For Singer, no clear line distinguishes duty and charity from one another. A charitable act becomes a duty when a person proves through his resources that he is capable of contributing to charity. Traditionally, the understanding on duty is that it is a term for acts required from people, whereas charity has an optional value that produces moral good when fulfilled. Yet, Singer deviates from the foregoing by stressing on the importance of making charity a duty for people who have the ability to do so based on his resources. Such hails from the argument of Singer that a person must do something to contribute to a problematic situation when he can, provided he does not commit morally bad acts in the process (Singer, 1971).

Personal Argument

The utilitarian viewpoint of Singer on ethics provides a pragmatic yet conscious-driven approach to morality, especially with the compelling need

to alleviate various forms of sufferings people experience throughout the world. Singer does not aim to place all people under the duty to render help to others - a premise firmly established in the affirmative for this study. Rather, he noted that people who have the resources to help hold the moral duty to render assistance to those in need of their help. The problem of poverty, for instance, is one that could positively benefit from the resources of other people capable of rendering such. Within the context of this study, it appears that the reason why poverty persists is that those who have the resources to render help simply do not contribute at all (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.