

HEALTH, DEVELOPMENT & HUMAN RIGHTS

The “Singer Solution” to World Poverty

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, it is *information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

Reading

Singer, P. (1972, Spring). Famine, Affluence, and Morality.
Philosophy and Public Affairs, 1(3), 229–243.

Questions

1. Peter Singer’s entire argument rests on only two premises to justify his conclusion that we have a moral obligation to assist those in poverty.
What are these two premises? Why are these justified? One of these premises comes in a “qualified” and “unqualified” form—what is the difference between these two forms? How does that difference affect Singer’s conclusion?
2. Singer believes that there are two controversial aspects of his argument. One concerns proximity, and the other concerns whether others are capable of providing assistance.
How does Singer address these two concerns?
3. Singer claims this argument challenges a traditional distinction between *duty* and *charity* when it comes to poverty. How so?
4. Finally, Singer presents two objections to his argument.
What are these two objections? How does he respond to them?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.