

HEALTH, DEVELOPMENT & HUMAN RIGHTS

Limits of Obligation

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

Fishkin, J. S. (1982). *The Limits of Obligation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Questions

1. Explain the three basic assumptions (given at the top of page 24) that James Fishkin assumes throughout his essay. What reasons does he give in favor of the third assumption, the “robust zone of indifference”?
2. What problem of accumulation does Fishkin see with the “Singer solution” to world poverty, even when only assuming the correctness of Peter Singer’s “weaker” premise (and not Singer’s “stronger” one)?
3. What is the difference between *strict* and *weak* consequentialism? Why does strict consequentialism have a problem in understanding limits of obligation that the weak version does not?

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.