

Adam Sharkey

Professor Sansevere

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### Teaching the World to Fish

“Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.” While often said, the merits of this phrase are rarely examined. The ability to fish, or provide for oneself, is a valuable asset that can create wealth and prosperity. For centuries, conflicts between the rich and poor and arguments about fair and just distribution of wealth have been all but absent from the tongues of both the enlightened and the ignorant. In the past, giving to charity was not as feasible. However, in an age of instant money transference and apparent excess, donating has become more possible than ever before. According to some, the people of the United States and other first-world nations are not taking advantage of these opportunities to spread their wealth. As the people of the impoverished nations of the world struggle to survive on a daily basis, many feel that it is not fair for those of the first world to live in such luxury, suggesting repeated multinational largesse as the only means of bettering the overall global situation. However, while the movement of these funds may serve to provide short-term improvements, a tax write-off, and a warm and fuzzy feeling inside, charity can often be counterproductive in that it makes less apparent the necessity for a nation to develop its own institutions of welfare, and can serve to discourage the creation thereof.

A very vocal minority has been quick to chastise the financially stable for not leveling the playing field and donating to charity. As a member of this minority, Peter Singer has gone so far

as to claim that the average American family should be donating \$20,000.00 to charity per year in lieu of spending money on luxuries (Singer 313). Many other figures for charitable donation are tossed around throughout the essay “The Singer Solution to World Poverty,” which is anything but a solution.

Essentially, the backbone of Singer’s guilt trip is that we, as a consequence of not changing a reality which he deems we have the power to change, are guilty of its perpetuation. He does this via hypothetical scenario: if a speeding and unmanned train is headed towards a child that is powerless to get off of the tracks, and Bob is standing next to the switch to redirect the train, the redirection of which would cause the train to hit his uninsured exotic sports car, which he has for some reason parked on the tracks, should Bob redirect the train (Singer 310)? Singer argues that we, as a wealthy nation, are in a position where we can pull that switch but instead we choose to protect our wealth (Singer 310). Although there is some merit to the statement, there are many reasons why it is just not that simple.

First, we need to examine why the world is the way it is in terms of rich and poor. The world is colloquially divided into four “worlds” that represent different stages of industrialization: the first world, the second world, the third world, and the fourth world. A first-world country has both natural resources and an economy to support them. A second-world country has one but not the other. A third-world country may have resources but is developing its ability to access those resources and the economy with which to support them. And finally, a fourth-world country essentially has nothing – fortunately, there are very few of these.

The first world consists almost exclusively of European nations and some of their imperial extensions, most notably Australia, Canada, and the United States. The reason for this

is simple: with the exception of the First and Second World Wars, none of these countries have really seen significant and prolonged war within their borders, unlike the rest of the world. War causes destruction of infrastructure and slows down the economy by discouraging shopping and commerce. There is also a psychological element of pessimism that comes from living in a war-torn nation. One example, albeit untimely, of a nation that rapidly joined the first world is Japan. In less than a century, Japan went from having a sword-wielding military and an agrarian economy to having the third-largest financial and manufacturing economy in the world, and its international presence is unprecedented. Other examples of rapidly developing nations that have embraced commerce and the international community are China, the United Arab Emirates, and India. In this economic and infrastructural development, tremendous good is being done for the people of these nations.

This good, however, is not a direct consequence of charity. To use India as an example, it took a great deal of national focus after gaining its independence following World War II, combined with the Pakistani identity crisis that formed Bangladesh and full-scale economic reforms in 1991 to create the India that we see today. It is amazing what a country can achieve under good government with a national sense of unity combined with political stability. Another example of a government creating the type of stability necessary for prosperity can be seen in Costa Rica, which eliminated the ground forces of its military in 1949 to avoid the coups d'état that were so common in Latin America at the time. This enabled the country to focus on creating social institutions of health and education that have made it one of the most peaceful, prosperous, and green nations on earth – take that, Canada.

It is necessary to show that there are logical steps to creating a nation that can sustain itself, which is ultimately superior to a nation that depends on external sources of generosity and charity, and much care must be taken in laying the groundwork for describing exactly why we have hunger and poverty in the nations to be discussed. It is not as simple as donating money, and it never will be. Although resources and money are an important part of developing the third world, throwing money at the wall and plugging one's ears is not going to accomplish anything.

One of the problems in the third world is a lack of functioning transportation infrastructure. People do not often think about the logistics of how the commercial networks of this country operate, such as those of supermarkets. Trucks cannot teleport to their respective destinations and deliver food – whoever invents that machine will be hailed as a savior by environmentalists and truckers alike – and as such they must drive on the usually intelligently designed highways of the United States. Nations that do not have these sophisticated highway systems, or any at all, and those that have either nomadic or far-flung populations cannot facilitate this type of transportation of food and other goods. This is one of the many reasons why the people of third-world nations are victims of circumstance that can only be helped by the kind of long-term development that comes from unity and stability.

As far as the fortune of certain developed countries juxtaposed to the misfortune of others, the argument of Singer is that we have a responsibility to drag these nations up rather than create an environment in which they can pull themselves up. However, it does them no good to cover the rope in epoxy to make sure they do not fall deeper. Rather, we should allow them to create a government under which they can fill the ditch and never have to fall back in again. Jan Narveson, who in her scholarly article “Is World Poverty a Moral Problem for the

Wealthy?” explores the idea that we owe our prosperity to nations less prosperous, believes that any concept of justice in arguing for wealth equality is flawed since “by and large, the world’s poor are not poor because we have made them so” (Narveson 398). This is indeed true, because, although contrary to the beliefs of many, we did not create our wealth necessarily at the expense of other nations.

There are some that believe that this is not the case, and that our wealth does come from robbery and avarice. For instance, the island nation of Nauru – formerly an English colony, then a sort of pseudo-British trusteeship, and eventually an independent island nation – is an eight-square-mile island that had an abundance of phosphates. However, in the 1980s, the supply ran out, and the island had few if any other institutions of production. This ruined the island’s financial position. This pillaging of resources represents a microcosm of what many say is the cause of global poverty. However, in the Nauru example, it should be noted that the phosphates are worth nothing on an island without chemists. The island was no better off before the mining than it was after its resources depleted. In this spirit, the argument is made that no nation after its resources are depleted is any worse off than before the resources were first tapped, and, thus, there is no net effect, even in the worst case scenario.

Many reasons for poverty in Africa come from a lack of unity in third-world African nations wherein many people still identify themselves as tribesmen rather than countrymen. This creates issues of loyalty and segmented populations, and Narveson is “admittedly tempted to ascribe the wholesale vice to the many human groups who devote most of their efforts to warring against their fellows” (Narveson 401). To use Somalia as an example – which may as well be called “Land of the Pirates” – the country is largely in a state of turmoil because it lacks a central

government and the tribes are constantly warring with each other. The same is true in Rwanda, both Congos, Sudan, the Central African Republic, and many other nations of Africa. It is especially hard to stop poverty and hunger in a nation with borders analogous to a neon light around a tree full of crushed bee hives where every bee thinks some other hive did it.

The lack of justice in the developing world is often caused by the governments that are created to try and solve them. Many of these countries have “genuine levels of injustice, namely the impositions of kleptocratic taxes and other charges levied on parties to exchange by their typically dictatorial governments” (Narveson 402). Through organizations like the United Nations, the international community can use its resources to develop these countries economically by pressuring them into freer, less protectionist economic systems. A perfect example of this is China. Even though China is technically a communist country, the fact that the global economy has embraced China has created a very cognitively dissonant China that is becoming more capitalistic by the day. As such, the situation has improved enormously in Eastern China – there are still some problems in the West, with situations like Tibet, the nebulous Northern arm of India, and other local issues of assimilation into the Chinese culture – and China has gone from an enormous nation with enormous problems with poverty to having an esteemed standing as the second-largest global economy.

Singer is quick to criticize people who buy “priceless vintage cars” saying that it is a waste to spend so much money on transportation when the difference in the prices between that and a modest sedan could save the lives of hundreds of children (Singer 311). On the subject of cars, however, there are hundreds of thousands of jobs created by the automobile industry, and the value of this industry comes from the variety. If every single person in the world drove a

Hyundai Sonata, it would not be a very valuable car and there would not be as much specialization devoted to the manufacturing thereof. Therefore, that which he deems waste and excess in the automotive industry, and, indirectly, many other industries, actually creates an environment within which more people can be employed, and, thus, more good can be done in terms of creating sustainable and lucrative jobs.

In the same breath, he calls out Americans who dine out, saying that the average American couple could save the \$200 necessary to send overseas to support the life of an impoverished child by foregoing romantic dinners (Singer 311). However, the United States has a primarily service-based economy. There are a lot of people that support their own families working in restaurants, and the restaurants would be less profitable if people did not go out to eat. While Singer would say that this logic is overprotective of our wealth, the people of this country are no more and no less entitled to a job than those of other nations in the grand scheme of humanity, so for him to begrudge us of our abundance of restaurants is both myopic and immature.

The overall problem with charity is summed up by Narveson, who concludes that “wealth cannot be fundamentally promoted by charity; production is basic, and showering people with unearned ‘benefits’ is necessarily a sideshow... the multinational corporation is by far a greater friend of the world’s poor than all of the international agencies’ elaborate sets of restrictions, and infinitely more so than the sort of programs that are inspired by ideological calls for ‘social justice’” (Narveson 407). The expansion of companies into other nations is a proven way to create jobs, and American and European companies typically have social and international pressure to pay higher wages than what is typical locally. The ultimate way to assure the people

of the world a decent quality of life is to create institutional and political machinery that works in the best interests of the people living under its dominion (Narveson 408). This, however, cannot be brought to fruition without the consent of the people.

A perfect example of a region rejecting its traditionally tyrannical governments is the Middle East. With rioters in Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, Oman, Syria, and Saudi Arabia demonstrating against governments that have been in place for decades, we see a people that have been told for years by the West that they should embrace democracy that are finally developing the social momentum with which to facilitate its implementation. It is difficult for any foreign power to create a government to which any native population would show allegiance, which is why it is so beautiful that these Arab nations have not only demonstrated against their governments, but also that many already have councils in mind to run them until legitimate elections can be held. Once legitimate and supported institutions are in charge, businesses will develop domestically and foster international partnerships that will conjoin them to a full international community, rather than having them maintain a role as the world's oil factory.

In conclusion, charity will always have its merits and a place in our world, because for as long as we have hearts there will be heartstrings at which to pluck. Charities that raise money for causes like disease awareness and research are great ways to supplement and even surpass the funds from grants. Also, organizations like the American Red Cross have done a tremendous job of raising money during disasters like the earthquake in Haiti and the recent and on-going tragedy in Japan. There will always be good and decency coming from charities that act reasonably and, well, charitably. However, relying on institutions of charity to institute social

change would create a stagnant world in which the poor remain poor and the rich serve no purpose but to patronize and subsidize poverty.

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