

## Poverty Relief: Philanthropy versus Changing the System

A critical discussion of some objections to the 'Singer Solution'

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### Poverty relief: philanthropy versus changing the system: a critical discussion of some objections to the 'Singer Solution'

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## Poverty relief: philanthropy versus changing the system: a critical discussion of some objections to the ‘Singer Solution’

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The aim of this paper is to present and evaluate a specific critical discussion of Peter Singer’s view on philanthropy. This critique of Singer’s position takes several forms, and here we focus on only two of these. First of all, it is claimed that philanthropy (based upon the giving up of luxury goods) should be avoided, because it harms the poor. As we shall see this is a view defended by Andrew Kuper. However, philanthropy is also accused of harming the poor by being sub-optimal and standing in the way of the more effective and lasting poverty relief brought about by changes in the political and economic system. This second complaint is defended by, among others, Paul Gomberg, Anthony Langlois and David Schweickart, as well as Kuper. To our knowledge, little systematic work has been done on the presentation and evaluation of these objections to philanthropy. In what follows, the objections are dealt with in connection with private donations made by individuals, as this is the focus, and target, of the philosophers/scientists we wish to discuss.

**Keywords:** ethics; philanthropy; Peter Singer; poverty relief; The Singer Solution

### 1. Introduction

One of the greatest moral problems of our time is mass poverty in a world of extreme wealth. Almost one person in 6–1.2 billion men, women and children – is currently living in extreme poverty, surviving on the equivalent of less than a dollar a day (UNDP 2012). This may not sound too bad to those who have travelled the world with dollars in their pockets; after all, a few bucks will take you a long way in most developing countries. However, the dollar a day just referred to represents the value of \$1 spent in New York in 2009. This will not get anyone far, and the results of the poverty of which it is an index are devastating: Every day, 824 million people go to bed hungry or have an unsteady food supply; 500 million of these people suffer from chronic malnutrition (UNDP 2012). In contrast, the rich are richer than ever before. The current net wealth of the 10 richest billionaires is \$6 billion per person, more than twice the total national income of the least developed countries (UNDP 2012).

However (and perhaps because of the overwhelming wealth of the rich and the wider economic inequality in the world), there is a growing realization that world poverty is no longer an unsolvable problem. For example, the United Nations Development Programme has expressed the view that ‘Extreme poverty could be banished from the globe by 2015 ...’ (UNDP 2012). Jeffrey Sachs is only a little less optimistic: ‘Our generation can choose to end extreme poverty by the year 2025’ (Sachs 2005, 1). If we accept that it is at least possible to solve this horrendous problem in our world, we are also faced with the question: What are the moral responsibilities of those living in relative wealth towards those living in extreme poverty?

One philosopher who has spent much time and effort on this question, and who has had a considerable impact on both public and academic debate on this topic over the past 40 years, is Peter Singer. From his 1972 article ‘Famine, affluence, and morality’ to his 2009 book *The*

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*life you can save*, he has developed a distinctive applied ethics on the subject. The result is a 'practical morality' which states very specifically that most individuals who are relatively rich should do a lot more to help the poor, if we are to consider ourselves morally decent human beings.

Singer's argument is built around a by-now famous analogy of a drowning child in the pond which, in its shortest form, runs as follows:

If I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out. This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing. (1972, 2)

Singer's claim is that if we agree to save this child at an insignificant cost to ourselves, we should at least save all the children we are capable of saving at insignificant costs to ourselves. Donating a few dollars to an organization providing, say, inoculations can save a child's life in the poorest parts of the world. So unless losing a few dollars is a significant loss for us, we are morally obliged to donate to aid organizations and the like. The implications of this argument are radical, because of how much it requires of us in terms of philanthropy. In its strongest form it requires us to give up all the spending we can without seriously harming our lives. In a more moderate form, it demands that we give at least 5% of our income to the poor of the world – and that would be just to start living a morally decent life according to Singer (2009, 18). If, for example, 10% of the richest people in the USA would follow Singer's (2009, 168) proposal, we could eradicate most poverty by the year 2015. Singer's solution has been criticized from many sides of the philosophical and political spectrum. He has changed his mind about the precise demands it places on us quite a bit over the years, but the basic argument continues to stand and attract counterarguments. The aim of this paper is to present a critical discussion of one line of criticism; the common theme of this line of attack is that philanthropy is morally misguided because it harms the poor by, for example, sidestepping the real issue of eradicating poverty.

This critique of Singer's position takes several forms, and here we shall focus on only two of these. First of all, it is claimed that philanthropy (based upon the giving up of luxury goods) should be avoided, because it harms the poor. As we see in Section 2, this is a view defended by Andrew Kuper. However, philanthropy is also accused of harming the poor by being sub-optimal and standing in the way of the more effective and lasting poverty relief brought about by changes in the political and economic system. This second complaint, which is defended by, among others, Paul Gomberg, Anthony Langlois and David Schweickart, as well as Kuper, is the subject of Section 3.<sup>1</sup> To our knowledge, little systematic work has been done on the presentation and evaluation of these specific kinds of objections to Singer-style philanthropy.<sup>2</sup> In what follows, the objections are dealt with in connection with private donations made by individuals, as this is the focus, and target, of the philosophers/scientists we wish to discuss. However, the objections could just as well be applied to governmental or some other kind of public spending on poverty relief, where the focus is not on system change but on direct help and the care of those who are desperately in need of food, water, medicine and so forth.

## 2. Philanthropy caused by giving up luxuries harms the poor

According to Kuper, Singer's approach 'is likely to seriously harm the poor' (Kuper 2002, 106). Kuper objects to Singer's idea of giving up luxuries and instead donating the money freed up to poverty relief. He points to the fact that '... 50% of the world's manufacturing jobs are now located outside the OECD region' (Kuper 2002, 111), and that luxury trades such as tourism are something that many poor countries depend on economically. As a result, cutting down on luxury spending in developed countries might be disastrous for many of those countries.

Kuper's solution is a form of fair trade: we should buy our luxury products from poor countries at fair prices instead of donating money and/or go on vacation to southern Africa instead of Paris, for example. However, it is not obvious that Kuper's empirical claims about the effects of abstaining from luxuries are necessarily true. Cutting down luxury spending by 5%, as required by the moderate version of Singer's pledge, would probably not ruin the lives of many citizens in developing countries. As things are now, a lot of the money spent on luxuries does not go to the developing countries; most ends up in the pockets of people living in the developed world. Given that not all of the 5% comes from luxuries bought from developing countries, donating the whole amount might just as well give a *net benefit* to those in poor countries. Add to this that the money from philanthropy might be *distributed more fairly*, because of the great care that we should take in how our donations are made, and the benefits to the poor are even greater. Furthermore, as regards the positive effects of fair trade, there is nothing in Singer's proposal that blocks this as one of the ways we can donate; it may well be that we decide to combine fair-trade buying behaviour with donations of money. If paying a fair price for goods from developing countries is shown to be an effective way of fighting poverty, then that is what we should do. Being open to suggestions as to how to optimize the donations is not the same as leaving the theory open to sub-optimal solutions. On the contrary, it is a way of acknowledging that the problem is complex and difficult, and that work is needed to figure out how to solve it. Kuper chooses to interpret Singer's proposal as one about giving money away blindly (Kuper 2002, 112), because Singer does not pretend to be an expert on the foreign aid and trade. However, Singer shows us the responsibility we, as individuals in affluent countries, have. He makes a suggestion as to how we can live up to it. The rest is an empirical question of what works best.

The only other support Kuper provides for his claim that donations seriously harm the poor runs as follows: he mentions that there have been many examples of unsuccessful aid programmes – of programmes 'gone wrong'. This is of course true, and it does make up a reason for not giving aid. But the fact that some aid projects turn into disasters does not tell us everything we need to know about whether aid is a reasonable means of dealing with the problem, as other aid projects do much good. We would at the very least require figures on projects that *have* worked and helped people. Kuper does not even mention the fact that successful aid programmes exist and can be made to exist. In short, he does not really back up his claim that philanthropy is likely to seriously harm the poor in a convincing way. Instead, he creates a straw man argument, saying that Singer wants to fight poverty in an ad hoc way without considering the end results, when in fact the opposite is true. They basically agree that the rich are morally obliged to fight poverty, using the best means possible.

### 3. Philanthropy harms the poor because it detracts us from solving the causes of poverty

Kuper also thinks private donations are harmful in a wider perspective. He claims that private donations are sub-optimal, and that because of this they somehow detract attention and effort from a permanent solution, and in this way harm those living in poverty.

... his [Singer's] individualist language of selfishness versus sacrifice, and his rigid refusal to seriously explore alternatives other than charity, weaken our realistic case for reform. It would be far better if he focused on how to create political and economic institutions that include the poor in the ongoing benefits of social cooperation. (Kuper 2002, 126)

In this criticism, Kuper is joining ranks with Gomberg and others, who also think Singer's philanthropic approach is damaging. Gomberg claims that when we continually propose

philanthropic solutions to the problem of poverty, the focus on philanthropic traditional aid comes to stand in the way of innovative discussions of how to solve the problem.

The philanthropist assimilation of problems of poverty to duties of rescue rivets attention on saving the victims. Thus it tends to deflect attention away from investigations of the institutional causes of hunger and from practical proposals that would attack those institutions ... philanthropy tends to limit discussion of these radical alternatives. For that reason ... it [philanthropy] is harmful. (Gomberg 2002, 63)

It is because we concentrate (as Singer tells us) on our moral obligation to treat victims of poverty in the same way as victims of calamities that we lose sight of solutions to the underlying problems. According to Gomberg (2002, 53) philanthropists say: 'Drowning? Pull her out! So Hungry! Feed her!' The result is that we feed the hungry, while nothing is done about the systemic causes of hunger. To our minds, Gomberg makes a good point here – that merely feeding the hungry is not a sustainable solution in the long run. In some catastrophic cases it is of course exactly what should be done – for example, when dealing with tsunamis, earthquakes and such like. In a perfect world, where everybody in the rich part of the world donates 5–20% of everything they own and earn, the problem would probably be solved or at least transformed. Setting these observations aside, however, the question remains: Why can we not do both? Singer would agree: Why not save lives now, and at the same time, work to change a system that creates so much misery and inequality? Gomberg thinks we cannot succeed in doing both:

The task of 'rescue' (relief of poverty) is so immense (and by the philanthropist assimilation it has priority) that the philanthropist never gets around to addressing causes. (Gomberg 2002, 53)

Gomberg makes an empirical claim here that is in some ways problematic. Whether the combined task is too great – whether we could not both be donating and changing the system, because doing so would be economically too demanding, or too time-consuming – is, of course, an empirical question. It cannot be answered in the absence of empirical investigation. Thankfully, there are, however, quite a few influential voices in this field, including Thomas Pogge (2002), Peter Singer (2004), Jeffrey Sachs and the UNDP (2012), who *have* done the maths. Their findings show that, economically, it is indeed possible to do both. Sachs, for one, found that developed countries could lift everyone over the poverty line by giving something like 0.7% of GNP (2005, 289). If this calculation and other, similar submissions are correct, the relatively rich could at the same time afford time to do some serious work on changing or replacing capitalism, as Gomberg, Schweickart, Pogge and others suggest, without sacrificing anything nearly as important. Gomberg, however, thinks:

The best response to extreme poverty is to attack the capitalist institutions that create and recreate it, to put an end to market institutions that systematically deprive people of entitlements to food, to put in their place social understandings and relationships that put the fundamentals of human well-being outside the market. (Gomberg 2002, 61)

Whether or not this strategy is a good one, the problem is that Gomberg is not prepared to accept any attempts at relieving current poverty, for the reason that this will narrow the discourse, giving false hope that the problem of poverty can be solved without an anti-capitalist solution. As individuals, we should instead get together, start a revolution and overthrow capitalism. All other approaches 'short circuit' these solutions and are therefore harmful, according to Gomberg. We may choose to donate money to the poor, but in fact that would be morally wrong, because in doing so we would be obstructing the real solution.

Setting aside the empirical 'feasibility' question whether or not we can both fight for systemic political change and give philanthropically, there are some serious moral problems with Gomberg's reluctance to work both on helping victims of poverty and furthering revolution. This is because his solution is likely to be both lengthy and uncertain. We suspect that most

people would endorse our prediction that the revolution is not going to happen tomorrow or even this year; and the uncomfortable fact is that while we struggle, alongside Gomberg, to make the revolution come, 27,000 children (UNDP 2012) and many adults are dying every day from poverty-related diseases. Meanwhile, according to Gomberg, we should not be donating anything to alleviate this suffering, because it that will detract from the revolution. As a result, the poor of today continue to die. This means that by choosing Gomberg's long-term solution, we are in effect choosing to ignore the desperate situation of people today, instead choosing to work towards (we hope) helping their grandchildren to a sustainable solution.

If we accept that we are morally obliged to assist victims of poverty, ignoring this amount of suffering is wrong. Theoretically, it may save more lives in the long run if we focus on systemic change instead of immediate poverty relief. However, even if we knew that capitalism would be overthrown within a limited period of time it would be wrong not to save lives now, and it is even more wrong when we consider the likeliness that this revolution will ever occur. Gomberg is aware that radical, collectively created systemic changes are not in fashion these days as a result of lessons learned from earlier, similar endeavours such as the Soviet system. The question whether his claim that these lessons are not to be taken as definitive, or his argument that the starvation in Maoist China was better than the starvation in capitalist India, are sound does not fall within the scope of this paper. His recognition that he favours the well-being of future generations in developing countries (thus discounting the value of actual people in developing countries) does not seem to keep him from further accusing the philanthropists of picking and choosing.

Gomberg also holds the view that it would be immoral for private individuals to donate because that would mean choosing to help *some people* and thereby leaving others to die (Gomberg 2002, 50). He shows himself as something of a monistic egalitarian here (i.e. wedded to the notion that equality is the only thing that matters morally). According to him, keeping everyone at a low level is better than helping those you can, because then no one is worse off than others. This view is of course extremely cynical.

To conclude this section, it is clear that Gomberg and Kuper's claim that philanthropy harms the poor by detracting from any attempt to change the economic system assumes that we cannot do both at the same time. Neither writer has provided sufficient reason to accept this premise, and many writers have shown that the world is now so unfair that it would be quite a modest sacrifice for the rich of the world to lift the poorest out of their worst misery. There would be plenty of funds left to reform or overthrow capitalism if so required and desired. As we have seen, exclusive reliance on a long-term solution, such as a political revolution, has its own moral problems inasmuch as it prioritizes the poor of tomorrow over the poor of today.

Like Gomberg, Schweickart and Langlois have concluded that Singer's philanthropic approach to fighting world poverty will, in the end, harm the poor. Philanthropy will do the wrong thing instead of fixing the problem of poverty. However, their arguments differ from those pressed into service by Gomberg. This section presents a critical discussion of the objections posed by these two philosophers. First, we examine the case made by Schweickart, who argues that capitalism is the cause of the widespread poverty we see in the world today, and this is why it must be overthrown. We then turn to Langlois, who is more directed towards reforming capitalism.

Schweickart claims that Singer's and Thomas Pogge's suggestions about how to fight poverty ignore the 'elephant in the room' (Schweickart 2008, 479). This poor mammal is capitalism, and in particular its inherently poverty-creating mechanisms. Schweickart accuses Singer and Pogge of mentioning the problems connected with capitalism, but not treating them with the care they deserve. His claim is that poverty is, and always has been, an inseparable element of

capitalism. As a result, to do away with poverty, we must do away with capitalism. He argues this point using a number of empirical claims.

According to Schweickart, one of the inherently poverty-creating mechanisms in capitalism is its reliance on a certain amount of unemployment.

If the unemployment rate gets too low, workers get uppity and press for higher wages, which leads to higher prices, more pressure for wage increases, ultimately runaway inflation – which is bad for all of us. (Schweickart 2008, 480)

Schweickart further observes that this unemployment must be ‘quite unpleasant’ (2008, 481) in order to serve as a tool for keeping the workers disciplined. In other words, the threat of being laid-off, and of starving, is what drives workers to get up and go to work in the morning.

This is an oversimplified version of how the employer/employee relationship works. We know of examples where capitalism works, and has continued to work well, as a result of high unemployment benefits. Take the Scandinavian ‘Flexicurity’ system. This uses high benefits to make it easier for employers to hire and fire the employees they need and therefore achieve a sleek corporate structure. Schweickart dismisses this arrangement in a footnote, saying that social-democratic systems are ‘inherently unstable’ (2008, 490). A detailed discussion of the potential instability of the Scandinavian countries is outside the scope of this paper. However, ‘unstable’ is not the most common word used to describe the situation in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

Schweickart also presents a moral objection to Singer’s and Pogge’s plan. In essence, he questions the moral value of the state of affairs that would eventuate if that plan were to work and donations eradicated the direst cases of poverty:

Think about it. *Even if* the GRD [Pogge’s solution] proceeds managed to raise everyone above the \$2 a day threshold) – which is highly unlikely – does anyone seriously believe that the social pathologies associated with global poverty would disappear? There might be fewer under-5 poverty-related deaths – but wouldn’t that simply give us more poor children living in squalor, more glue-sniffing youths living in slums? Would a world structured much as it is today, but with half its population earning less than, say, \$3 a day, approximate a *just* global order? (Schweickart 2008, 482)

There are at least four responses to the thinking behind these rhetorical questions. First, of course, what is described here is not a just world order; but considering the immense suffering that extreme poverty imposes on people, it seems extremely arrogant to claim that this small increase (large to those who benefit by it) is not worth working towards. It would be analogous to not saving a child from drowning because she might drown tomorrow, or might have poor, drunken parents. Secondly, revolutionaries like Schweickart should consider that not constantly being on the brink of starving to death might afford people renewed energy to fight to improve their own lives. And one of these improvements might be to overthrow an unjust government – something which is even harder to do if you are starving and uneducated. Thirdly, and in connection with population growth, it is well known that the better off people are, the fewer children they tend to have. Demographic studies have demonstrated that when people have a higher standard of living, they have fewer children. If this is true, it certainly points towards the conclusion that fewer (not more) glue-sniffing children will be born. Fourthly, if Schweickart really believes that a slum life has no more value than no life at all, the implications of his train of thought are quite scary. One might ask him: Instead of helping them, should we put them out of their misery?

Reading Schweickart kindly, one can see that his point must be that we must do more than just get people over the threshold of \$2 a day if we are to achieve a just world order. This generosity of interpretation is not one that Schweickart extends to Singer, however, for he claims that Singer wants us to stop giving once the threshold of \$2 a day is crossed. This is a grave misreading of a philosopher who has consistently argued that we are morally obliged to give



everything away to the poor that is not of decisive importance for our lives. Schweickart is attacking a straw man, rather than engaging in real debate.

Let us now turn to Langlois, who also concludes that private philanthropy is sub-optimal when it comes to the eradication of poverty, but for reasons rather different from those given by Schweickart:

Although such philanthropy may well have the capacity to save many lives and affect many good outcomes – indeed, while it may be precisely what we require *until we can* establish a global regime for economic justice – it is not, in itself, an adequate foundation for global justice. (Langlois 2008, 687)

This passage neatly summarizes Langlois' attitude to the notion that we can successfully address global poverty through philanthropy. His concern is with helping the poor and ending world poverty, and he claims that the proper instrument is some kind of economic justice. He also reflects, at an empirical level, on what works best in reducing poverty, and he gives several empirical reasons for his belief that, in the long run, working for justice is a better tool for fighting poverty than philanthropy. One of these reasons concerns the flow of wealth. Langlois claims that philanthropy is not as reliable a solution as a system based on legislation when it comes to distributing wealth. He points to the fact that one of the key components of a justice system is that its rules are enforceable; this is what makes it possible to secure the flow of wealth from rich to poor. In the case of philanthropy, the flow of wealth is guided by the philanthropists' priorities, making the recipients vulnerable to economic and other instabilities in the developed world. The enforceability of a justice system controls this issue: those who do not pay can be punished.

In theory, Langlois may have a point in insisting that a justice system has an advantage in this respect. However, in practice the many organizations distributing aid make sure that the funds do actually flow ceaselessly. Achieving global justice through a global legislative system, as Langlois suggests, is also a very long and uncertain process, so giving aid in the meantime will be necessary if we are not to sacrifice the poor of today for the benefit of the poor of tomorrow. Again, it is incredible how close Langlois' view is to Singer's. There is nothing in Singer's argument that opposes Langlois' suggestions, but instead of recognizing this, he builds a straw man version of Singer's argument that insists on philanthropy as the only viable solution.

Another reason Langlois gives for favouring a political solution over philanthropy is that the latter might encourage political apathy among donors.

There is no reason to suppose that monthly bank balance deductions in the direction of voluntary foreign aid donation is going to engage people in the *political* project of instituting a global ethic like that envisaged by Singer in *One World*. (Langlois 2008, 695)

Langlois is worried that large-scale philanthropy will damage our political culture and deter people from getting involved in political debate and action. If this were to happen, philanthropy would not be the first step in changing the economic system. Giving money might keep people from acting politically; it may become their excuse not to work to change the system. We believe there are at least two problems with this claim. First, the claim involves a psychological speculation, and it is virtually impossible to evaluate whether or not that speculation is correct. In fact, the opposite might just as well be true: it may well be that those who give a lot are more likely to get involved in and/or vote for parties working to change the system. Giving money may, as it were, serve to remind donors that something is wrong and in that way keep them involved.

Second, Langlois seems to reverse the real order of things in the above excerpt. He appears to be saying that Singer somehow expects that the act of donating will encourage people who donate to also act politically. This is a strange reading of Singer, to say the least, and an equally strange vision of moral action and psychology. The change in ethics must come first, and then the action, whether the sphere in question is that of monthly bank balances or revolution

in the economic system. Generally speaking, people do not give away their money first and then try to decide why they did it. First, you become convinced that the world is horribly unjust; then you give what you can, run for office or take it to barricades, or all of the above. The notion that, with people donating money, the whole ethical culture will change is plainly far-fetched – nor does Singer claim this. Ethics is one important reason for acting, and if we were not already convinced that it was the morally right thing to do, we would not give away wealth to strangers. Finally, it seems likely that if individuals raise their donations, and if more and more individuals donate and are therefore showing an interest in fighting global poverty, this very fact will be noticed by politicians. With more and more people becoming interested in fighting global poverty, it will be in the interests of politicians to take the topic seriously. Eventually this might lead to greater political support for state donation and systemic change.

Langlois' final reason for holding that political change offers a solution to the problem of world poverty that is superior to that afforded by philanthropy focuses on the individuals and institutions that control the distribution of wealth. He is worried that donations of money to private charities will eventually erode the political culture that controls the funds. The concern is this: the more money that goes into NGOs, the more powerful they get and the less democratic control we have over them. The result, Langlois suggests, will be that those making donations to those in need will not exercise their responsibility to see that it goes to the right places.

Again it is important to repeat that Singer is aware of this problem. *The life you can save* dwells at length on how we can make sure that aid is given the right way. We do have a responsibility beyond writing cheques, and we must keep track of where the money goes and how it is spent, but this is not a reason for not writing them.

#### 4. Conclusion

The objections dealt with here are essentially two: one is that philanthropy involving the giving up of luxuries actually harms the poor; the other is that philanthropy is damaging because it diverts attention, funding and resources from the project of bringing about systemic, political change. In Section 2, we argued that the first of these objections is not substantiated by one of its more prominent proponents, Andrew Kuper. As we saw, Kuper points, reasonably enough, at aid programmes 'gone wrong'. However, his failure to mention that many go well makes it difficult to assess his argument.

The second objection – that philanthropy is harmful because it somehow detracts from other solutions by narrowing the discourse, and/or by removing funds and resources from these solutions – relies on the idea that we cannot *both* give philanthropy and work towards a more just economic system. This idea can be found in the work of writers including Paul Gomberg, David Schweickart and Anthony Langlois, as well as Kuper. But as we explained in Section 3, it can be challenged on both empirical and moral grounds. Empirically, figures showing global wealth distribution indicate that the well-off in the developed world could relatively easily find the funds for Singer's proposal and still have a surplus to fund systemic, political change. Morally, exclusive concentration on political change would mean ignoring our moral responsibilities to the poor living today and betting all our money and time on a very uncertain vision of the future.

The claim that while philanthropy can improve the condition of the world's poorest people, we need ultimately to bring about political change that deals with world poverty 'at source' is hardly an objection to Singer at all. It engages, not with Singer, but a straw-man imitation of Singer who is supposed to be saying that deep structural changes cannot be a part of the solution to world poverty. It is true that Singer's basic argument does not mention deep structural changes, but this does not mean that he opposes them. He is just not ready to sacrifice potential improvements in living standards for those dying here and now while waiting for the revolution.

Giving to Oxfam is doing something that helps relieve desperate poverty. Maybe it won't change the structure of things. But until I'm shown how to do that, I'll settle for making some people better off. (Singer 2002, 126)

The objections surveyed in this paper leave Singer's argument intact. For all they show, Singer is right: we the rich should be doing a lot more of what works to help the poor; we are morally obliged to do it, and are therefore acting immorally if we do not.

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### Notes

1. All four are well-established philosophers who have published their critique of Singer in international peer reviewed journals.
2. Singer's solution has been criticized from many different perspectives apart from the ones discussed in this paper. Narveson (2003) has e.g. argued that we, the affluent people, do not owe anything to people in poverty, unless we have caused their misery. Others like Wenar (2011) questions the analogy of the child in the pond by e.g. arguing that donating to charity may not save lives at all.

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