AN EVALUATION OF THE CONCEPT OF EFFECTIVE ALTRUISM IN PETER SINGER

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ABSTRACT

Effective Altruism differs from traditional altruism because it focuses on effectiveness of achieving its objectives. Jakub Synowice corroborates this in his work "Ethics for Everyday Heroes: From Utilitarianism to Effective Altruism." At the forefront of the emergence of this discipline is Peter Singer- an avowed utilitarian. In a sense, it is the application of utilitarian principles (especially the principle of the greatest good to the greatest number) to traditional altruism that gave rise to effective altruism. To give footing to this work therefore, We began this article with a brief excursus of altruism objecting to the objections of the egoists along the way. Next, a section was spent tracing the development of Peter Singer's thought as regards effective altruism since this work is concerned with his contribution to effective altruism. For the purpose of producing a more holistic and balanced work the key tenets of effective altruism were expounded bringing to the open the contributions of other effective altruists like Mackaskill. Once this is done, it is discovered that effective altruism has striking resemblance with Christian ethics. We trailed this point following the work of Alida Liberman who posits that there are points both of divergence and convergence between effective altruism and Christian ethics. Mackaskill in reviewing Liberman's work, observes that the point of convergence between Christian ethics and effective altruism is in the latter's first key tenet - the injunction to give. The point of divergence he observes is in the second key tenet of effective altruism namely that giving should be effective. He argues that Christian giving is limited in scope and hence not effective according to the standard of effective altruism. I agree with Liberman in the first point that both effective altruism and Christian ethics are committed to giving, however I disagree with her on the point that Christian giving is limited in scope. In fact I do not only argue that Christian giving is not limited in scope, I went ahead to argue that effective altruism as conceived by Peter Singer and other effective altruists is limited in scope. Among other critical evaluation of the positions of the effective altruists, I examined critically Peter Singers repeated admonition that one should make his giving as public as possible.

KEYWORDS: *Concept, Evaluation, Effective Altruism, Traditional altruism*

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INTRODUCTION

In the past, philosophy was perceived as purely speculative. In recent times however, the horizon is changing. A vivid example of this changing horizon; the act of combining speculation and action is found in the philosophy of effective altruism. Here (in effective altruism), philosophy not only leads to action but the action itself is thoroughly rationalized. Presently we have effective altruism both as a philosophy and a social movement; the social movement drives the philosophy to practical action while the philosophy continues to provide both the ground for it and a continuous evaluation of the action of the social movement, giving it direction. Altruism; the act of living for others have always been there with philosophers championing the rational battle either for or against it. Those who belong to the later camp are usually the egoists who think that one should live mainly for him/her self and not for others.

Philosophers such, as Peter Singer, contend that it is not just enough to live for other, to give for the good of the other, but that it (the giving) must be effective. That is to say, that care should be taken to ensure that the giving produces the best possible result. In what follows, we shall critically examine effective altruism especially as espoused by Peter singer.

From Altruism to Effective Altruism

Etymologically the term "altruism" is derived from the Latin "alter" meaning "other." The coinage of the term altruism is credited to the French philosopher [Auguste Comte](#) (who is also the founder of [Positivism](#)). He used the term to describe his ethical doctrine, which he summed up in the phrase: "Live for others".

The [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) defines altruism as behavior that is motivated by a desire to benefit someone other than oneself for that person's sake. However, sometimes the word is used more broadly to refer to behavior that benefits others, regardless of its motive. Here altruism is used in contra-distinction from such terms as "self-interested" or "selfish" or "egoistic" the later terms are used to describe behaviours that are motivated solely by the desire to benefit oneself.

[Richard Kraut](#) in his article contribution to the [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) distinguishes between acting morally and altruism. He posits that some of what we do in our interactions with other people is morally motivated but not altruistic. To drive his point home he presents the following analogy.

Suppose *A* has borrowed a book from *B* and has promised to return it within a week. When *A* returns the book by the deadline, his motive might be described as moral: he has freely made a promise, and he takes himself to have an obligation to keep such promises. His motive is simply to keep his word; this is not an example of altruism. But if *A* gives *B* a book as a gift, thinking that *B* will enjoy it and find it useful, he is acting simply out of a desire to benefit *B*. His motive in this case is altruistic.¹

Among the most prominent critics of altruism is [Friedrich Nietzsche](#) who held that the idea that it is rather degrading and demeaning to the self than virtuous to treat others as more important than oneself. He further argues that such idea hinders the individual's pursuit of self-development, excellence and creativity. In his view, altruism is an ideology fabricated by the weak for the weak. But is altruism really an Ideology fabricated by the weak for the weak? The opposite seems more plausible. It takes a person who is truly strong, to freely (free in the true sense of it; that is without compulsion or fear) choose what will benefit others above what will benefit only him/her self. Self interest (self love or selfishness) seems to be innate in humans. It is not learnt. This is apodictically seen in the case of little children. When they are given a gift (say a biscuit), if the same person who gave them that biscuit plead with them to give some to him, many of them would decline and in many cases try to hide the biscuit at their backs. This goes a long way to prove that selfishness is not learnt; it is innate. It is rather charity that needs to be learnt. Common sense tells us then that the stronger person that exhibits the character that is learnt while the weaker person continues effortlessly in the trait that is innate. In addition, it is not always true that altruism hinders the individual's pursuit of self-development, excellence and creativity. As we shall see, sometimes it even advocates it for the better you are, the more you are able to help others.

Another famous critic of altruism is the [Objectivist](#) Ayn Rand (1905 - 1982). She is notorious for her view that most problems in the world come from the doctrine of Altruism. She argues that the view that sacrificing yourself in order to serve others is morally superior to pursuing your own self-interest cannot be rationally justified. The question that Ayn Rand needs to answer is whether it is rationally justified to do or hold the opposite view, that it is morally superior to pursuing your own

self-interest over the interest of others? It is almost self evident that the cause of most problems in the world is egoism rather than altruism. Most problems are results of clash of interests. If one person or both parties altruistically value the interest of the other more, such tensions and consequent fight may be averted.

The philosophy of Altruism advocates that an action is ethically right if it brings good consequences to others; consequently, altruism is often seen as a form of [Consequentialism](#). Altruism is also similar to [Utilitarianism](#) in that utilitarianism prescribes acts that maximize good consequences for all of society; the only different being that Altruism does not necessary take into account maximizing good consequences for the actor.

It is the application of utilitarian principles to altruism that gave rise to effective altruism. Peter Singer a well known and self acclaimed utilitarian is at the fore front of the emergence of effective altruism. Worthy of note also is the fact that most proponents of effective altruism are utilitarians. Effective altruism differs from “traditional” altruism because it is focused on the effectiveness of achieving its objectives. It is effective in its selection of targets: only “cost-effective” targets are chosen as targets for Effective Altruism.²

Peter Singer and The Emergence of Effective Altruism

Effective Altruism both as a philosophy and a social movement owes a lot to Singer and utilitarian philosophy. It is however pertinent to note ab initio that Effective Altruism cannot be limited to Singer’s thinking or even to utilitarianism; the movement is much broader and open for new ideas and the idea of effective altruism is developed by people with different philosophical backgrounds.² In this piece, we shall nevertheless focus on singer’s contribution. In a sense, Singer can be said to be the greatest contributor to the development of effective altruism. Many other philosophers supporting the idea are Singer’s followers.

In Singer’s earliest works, in the very beginning of his philosophical career, he sought to make philosophical justification for eradicating pain of animals and to propose a good reasoning to convince people to improve the quality of life of those living in extreme poverty. These too topics as he admitted himself were the most important to him. The reason he gives for focusing on them is that they were (before his arrival to the scene) neglected⁴

As regards his first interest- eradicating pain of animals, Jakub Synowiec reconstructs his (Singer’s) argument thus:

A utilitarian must know the answers to questions like: what is pain, what is pleasure, whose pleasure counts and how to achieve the greatest happiness of the largest number of beings? One of the fathers of Effective Altruism and a declared utilitarian, Peter Singer, had to answer the same questions. His philosophical inquiries, presented in many books and shorter texts, reveal his answers. In his main work, *Practical Ethics*, Singer formulates the fundamentals of his philosophical thinking and claims that what counts in utilitarian calculations are interests, namely, what a being may desire (Singer, 1979, p. 12). Although he uses a genuine term, “interests”, his ethics remains hedonistic as for him the ability to feel pain is a minimum requirement for a being to be considered as having interests (Singer, 1979, p. 50). The more conscious a being is the more interests it has. But, in Singer’s ethics, all sentient beings are equal – the interest of a being is equal to the same interest of another being – says the rule of equal consideration of interests introduced by Singer (Singer, 1979, p. 19). Based on this, Singer claimed it is wrong to neglect the interests of animals for the sake of the interests of people.⁵

Singer observed to his chagrin that most people prefers what he (Singer) perceives as trivial interests of people such as better tasting or cheaper food to the crucial interests of animals (life, life without pain). He called such an attitude: speciesism; a concept he popularized by his works. His arguments convince many effective altruists to become vegans or struggle to reduce the suffering of animals.

Singer takes up the other most important topic, that is, his philosophical concern for people living in extreme poverty in his first article on practical ethics titled “Famine Affluence and Morality” which he wrote around 1972. Writing to an audience mainly of affluent developed countries, he tries to convince them to take plight and interests of people living in distant lands. In his article, Singer argues that people living in extreme poverty need help and providing this help will be cheap for those in affluent countries. He observed however that people sometimes prefer to help themselves in less important needs rather than help others in their crucial needs. To buttress this point, he sites for an example, the fact that British government gave thirty times more money to improve hypersonic transportation (the Concorde programme) than to support people living in extreme conditions after a catastrophe in Bengal in 1971. For Singer, the way we react to peoples' suffering in distant countries cannot be justified from the point of view of ethics.⁶

In this short article printed in United States by Random House, an imprint of The Random House Publishing Group, Singer formulated his famous argument that eradication of extreme poverty is a moral duty.⁷ He presents two premises from which we can draw conclusion. The first and second premises are

“Suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad.”

“If it is in your power to prevent something very bad from happening, without sacrificing anything else morally significant, we ought to do it.”

To buttress the point he is making in this second premise he presents an analogy which he repeats and further reconstructs in “the life you can save” as follows

On your way to work, you pass a small pond. On hot days, children sometimes play in the pond, which is only about knee deep. The weather’s cool today, though, and the hour is early, so you are surprised to see a child splashing about in the pond. As you get closer, you see that it is a very young child, just a toddler, who is flailing about, unable to stay upright or walk out of the pond. You look for the parents or babysitter, but there is no one else around. The child is unable to keep his head above the water for more than a few seconds at a time. If you don’t wade in and pull him out, he seems likely to drown. Wading in is easy and safe, but you will ruin the new shoes you bought only a few days ago, and get your suit wet and muddy. By the time you hand over the child to someone responsible for him, and change your clothes, you’ll be late for work. What should you do?⁸

Singer observes that whenever he presents the above question to his students they usually answer that they would go in and save the child not minding their shoes or cloths not even the prospect of going let to work would deter them. In Famine, Affluence and Morality, Singer argues that what matters is that the life is saved. It does not matter if the child is a neighbor’s child few yards away or a Bengali whose name one may never know.

The third premise which we can deduce from singer’s writings especially “the life you can save” is

In donating to aid agencies, you can prevent the suffering mentioned in premise one or the conditions stated in premise two.

The conclusion of the argument is “if you do not donate to aid agencies, you are doing something wrong”

Singer takes the conclusion of this argument to the extreme. He notes that “the outcome of this argument is that our traditional moral categories are upset. The traditional distinction between duty and charity cannot be drawn, or at least, not in the place we normally draw it.”⁹ By this singer means that giving money to aid agencies are not to be called charity because it is our duty to do so. We are morally bound to do as just as the passerby is morally bound to save the child who is drowning in the pond. The above argument contradicts and in a sense a somewhat critic of [Richard Kraut](#)’s distinction between acting morally and altruism as mentioned earlier.

The Key Tenets of Effective Altruism

In a bid to define effective altruism MacAskill states “as I and the Centre for Effective Altruism define it, effective altruism is the project of using evidence and reason to figure out how to benefit others as much as possible, and taking action on that basis.”¹⁰ Effective altruism is a philosophical idea which metamorphosed into a social movement – Effective Altruism. The aim of Effective Altruism as stated by one of its major proponents MacAskill is to make the world as good a place as is possible.¹¹ If presented from the point of view of an individual effective altruist, his/her aim can be presented as “to do the most good you can”. It is the work of philosophy and philosophers to explicate what exactly the most good means. Nevertheless, since the philosophy supporting Effective Altruism is mainly utilitarianism, many of its members understand “good” in a hedonistic sense

According to Peter Singer, Effective Altruism is “based on a very simple idea: we should do the most good we can” with our altruistic resources. For Singer, “doing the most good we can” is determined by the differential impact we can make with our altruistic resources. He insists that we should make “the most difference”, thereby having “the biggest positive impact.”¹² But how do we determine what makes the most difference or brings about the biggest impact? MacAskill asks similar questions

“If we want to claim that one course of action is, as far as we know, the most effective way of increasing the welfare of all, we simply cannot avoid making philosophical assumptions. How should we value improving quality of life compared to saving lives? How should we value alleviating non-human animal suffering compared to alleviating human suffering? How should we value mitigating risks of human extinction, with the loss of hundreds of trillions of future lives that that would involve? When it comes to small chances of doing huge amounts of good, should we simply maximize expected value, or is some other decision theory correct? How should we act in light of deep uncertainty about what the morally right thing to do is?”¹³

In the light of these, effective altruists select three major targets of their altruism. William MacAskill, enumerates these targets as

- Eradicating extreme poverty (which is also the UN millennial development goal),
- Reducing suffering of animals and
- Preventing extinction of life on Earth.¹⁴

The selection of these targets evidently has within it, the imprint of Singer’s thought pattern. Singer himself devotes a chapter of his book “The Most Good You Can” do for each of these cases, however when considering preventing life

extinction, he focuses on humans. It is important to note however that effective altruists are still debating among them as regards the targets. Luke Muehlhauser argues there are four areas of activity of Effective Altruism: poverty reduction, meta-effective altruism, the far future of people and animal suffering.¹⁵ MacAskill is not dogmatic about the targets, he calls them “our best guesses” and claims that if there is a good evidence or arguments to convince them that they could do more good by doing something else, then they would do that instead. One thing Effective altruists generally agree however is that many traditional areas of charity, like education, art, aiding victims of catastrophes or supporting the local community, are not the targets of Effective Altruism.¹⁶

Eradicating extreme poverty in the world which is the first of the targets of Effective Altruism was always a part of people's concern and was a part of practical ethics long before effective altruism was created. The two other targets were generally neglected and became treated as a major ethical problem only at the end of the 20th century. The difference that Effective Altruism brought to the table is the application of science to our emotional need of helping. They engage in research to evaluate charity programs in order to choose the most effective ones. It is usually the most effective programs that are supported by the Effective Altruists' community. Effective altruists claim that there is a great difference between the most effective organizations and just effective organizations; therefore, donating to the former and not the latter makes a significant difference. MacAskill shows an example, where “the best healthcare programme is estimated to be five hundred times more effective than the worst (which, remember, is still a good programme)”¹⁷

Effective altruists take their business of supporting organizations seriously. For William MacAskill, the act of aiding is an investment. Thus, just as we normally try to maximize the benefits when we invest our money, the benefits we get when we aid should also be maximized. He insists that we do not imitate the attitude of a careless person who entering a random shop with €100 who gives the money to the shop assistant and asks to fill their bags with food and does not look at prices, calories or even if what the shop assistant puts into the bag would really satisfy their nutritional needs. She/he does not even think about the possibility that what the bag contains might be harmful.

He observed that most people take that attitude when it comes to aiding. They give money to a random beggar without having any idea what the effects of their help would be. He notes that similar things happen when people support a random charity programme because they are convinced by talks that appeals to their emotions. He strongly stated that choosing how to help is not a matter of the heart but of mathematics. Hence, it is by comparing hard data and not by listening to talks that appeal to the emotion that the best programmes and the best aid organizations can be selected.¹⁸

The last two targets have been the source of criticism of effective altruism. It has been argued that redirecting resources from the needs of people to the needs of animals or to support research on preventing possible catastrophes is not justified. Contrarily, the Oxford philosopher Nick Bostrom argues that on the basis of calculations, the third area is also the most important one, and the highest priority should be put on preventing human extinction, because the number of people living now is very small compared to the number of their descendants that might be living in the future¹⁹

In *The Most Good You Can Do. How Effective Altruism Is Changing Ideas About Living Ethically*, Peter Singer considers a number situations to determine which make the most deference. Take for instance, the case of giving directly. One has \$1,000 and you wish to give this amount to a poor family. The two options available are.

- A. give it to an American poor family; or
- B. give it to an impoverished African family.

Singer argues that giving it to impoverished African family will be a better option because the American poor family is very likely to be already receiving aid from the government or domestic charities. He notes that that aid may not be enough to raise (this American family) out of poverty. But the American family will still be better off than the African family who is very likely getting nothing both from the government and (or) fellow-citizens. Moreover the African family remains in a much more impoverished context. Hence, “the cost of making a lasting, positive difference to the life of a poor American is far higher than the cost of making such a difference to the life of someone who is poor by global standards.”²⁰

Singer considers another situation. In this case, one has \$40,000 to donate to the best cause you can find. Again there are two options available to him/her

Option A. supply one blind person in the United States with a guide dog; or

Option B. preventing anywhere between four hundred and two thousand causes of blindness in developing countries.

In this case, the number of beneficiaries varies. Giving a guide dog to a US citizen will benefit only one person while avoiding blindness to developing countries will benefit between four hundred and two thousand people. Moreover, it is apparently more important to prevent blindness than to give a guiding dog. Hence, the option B is to be chosen for the same reason invoked in Giving directly, namely because it brings about larger benefits.²¹

Another case that Singer considers is the one that benefits the same number of people but to varying degree. In this case one has \$100,000 to donate to the best cause you can find. The options available to the person are

A. contributing to build a new museum wing, thereby giving an enhanced aesthetic experience to 100,000 visitors; or

B. contributing to restore or preserve the sight of 1,000 poor people in developing countries.

Just as in previous case, the option B is the preferred option because restoring or preserving one's own sight is a greater benefit than seeing a new museum wing. Conclusion can be drawn from this that doing the most good implies bringing about the greatest benefit to the greatest number.

Effective Altruism and Christian Ethics

MacAskill, in reviewing Alida Liberman's 'Effective altruism and Christianity: possibilities for productive collaboration' observes that there are points both of convergence and divergence when it comes to the relationship between effective altruism and Christian ethics. One of the two tenets at the core of effective altruism, namely that we should give away a significant portion of our income to assist the world's neediest people, is shared by the long-standing Christian tradition that recognizes a strong moral obligation to help the poor. (A similar point has been made by Toby Ord in his article 'Global poverty and the demands of morality'). The obligation to give away large amounts of one's surplus income to sustain the poor is firmly ensconced in church history. Some Catholic theologians demand significantly more of us than most Effective Altruists, arguing that your surplus possessions are not rightfully yours if someone else is in need of them. For example, Ambrose, the 4th century Bishop of Milan, says that when you give to charity, "You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone"²² Similarly, the *Decretum Gratiani*, a core compilation of medieval Catholic canon law, states that "a man who keeps for himself more than he needs commits theft," and "the bread that you hold back belongs to the needy,

the clothes that you store away belong to the naked.”²³ Thomas Aquinas goes even further, claiming that as a matter of natural law it does not count as stealing for a person in need to take surplus wealth from someone else.²⁴

The Protestant are not left out in this tradition as well. For example, John Wesley, the 18th century founder of the Methodist church, lived frugally and donated all of his surplus income to the poor. Wesley records that in a year when his living expenses were £28 and his income £30, he gave away £2; as his income steadily rose, he continued living on £28 and giving the rest away, even in years in which his income was over £1400.²⁵ Wesley is quoted to have said in sermon 116 “If you have any desire to escape the damnation of hell, give all you can; otherwise I can have no more hope of your salvation, than that of Judas Iscariot.” This definitely is much harsher than contemporary Effective Altruists would demand.

The other tenet of the Effective Altruists, that we should use the best available scientific tools to maximize the good done with the resources we give, seems more in tension with Christianity.²⁶ The reason he gives for the second claim (that is, that using the best available scientific tools to maximize the good done with the resources we give, seems more in tension with Christianity) is that unlike (most) effective altruists, Christians attach high value to giving aimed at supporting local churches. He argues that Many Christians give directly to their local church and/or to parachurch organizations without thinking much about whether the outcomes of their giving are as good as they could be. He also observes that most funds given to these churches and or parachurch organizations are not used to achieve typical Effective Altruist goals like improving global health and alleviating the most severe poverty in the world.

Lieberman states that since so much giving is religiously affiliated, and because there has been so little explicit discussion within Christian communities about making giving more effective, Effective Altruist outreach to Christian communities could be extremely fruitful. He therefore advocates that efforts should be put forward to the realization of this collaboration.²⁷

However, Lieberman raises two potential stumbling blocks for Effective Altruist-Christian collaboration. First, he says Christians cannot assess outcomes using a straightforward utilitarian calculus of the sort preferred by many Effective Altruists. He observed that this problem is especially pressing for non-universalist Christians who believe in heaven and hell. He argues that for them, the possibility of causing infinite bliss or avoiding infinite pain becomes a swamping consideration that leads to morally perverse results when weighing utilities. Lieberman therefore argues that Christians must adopt some non-utilitarian standard of goodness that includes deontic side constraints on permissible human ends and acknowledges non-human goods, such as the goodness of God.

The second stumbling block Lieberman pointed out is that cause allocation is more difficult for a Christian Effective Altruist than it is for a secular Effective Altruist, as the goods that Christians aim to support are not easily commensurable. He asks how does one weigh the importance of alleviating human suffering against the importance of leading others to eternal salvation, or the importance of worshipping an infinitely good God?²⁸

Despite these obstacles enumerated by Lieberman, it is arguable that Christianity and effective Altruism are more in agreement than in disagreement. It has been argued that Christians are not only in agreement with effective Altruists in their demand to give radically in quantity but also to give universally in scope, and to be generous not only to your near neighbors, but to poor and needy people wherever they happen to be. The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25 – 37)—in which Jesus answers the question “Who is my neighbor?” by telling the story of a cultural outsider who helps an injured man when the

members of his own group ignore him—is often used to support the idea that our obligation to do good is universal. A contemporary Protestant theologian Eric Gregory notes:

Appeals to the Good Samaritan, taking up a Lucan emphasis on universalism and concern for the outsider, often ground a strong egalitarian ethic (known as “agapism”). In many ways, agapism parallels the morally demanding views of a consistent utilitarian like [Peter] Singer.²⁹

Similarly a contemporary Catholic theologian Charles Camosy argues that Singer and the Roman Catholic Church take similar stand in articulating our duties to the poor. Both assume that we are equally morally culpable for what we do and what we fail to do. Moreover, both have a universal focus: Camosy cites the Good Samaritan and Peter Singer’s drowning child analogy in tandem as narratives that make similar points about the obligation to help others without regard for their proximity to you.³⁰

In addition, to those who in arguing that Christianity cannot agree with effective Altruism because their giving is mainly to church or parachurch organizations Cortines and Baumer has this to say

As we studied Scripture, we became increasingly convinced that this [reaching into the world as God calls us to] means reaching out to help the poor and the marginalized. Helping our high-income church to construct a new wing or retreat center is wonderful, but we became convinced that if we did this while ignoring the neediest in our society, we would be entering some dangerous territory in the eyes of God.³¹ In short, there indeed appears to be significant overlap between Effective Altruist and Christian conceptions of the obligation to give radically in both quantity and scope.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Effective altruism seems to be a reasonable ethical approach for people living in the most affluent countries. They may follow it and sacrifice very little from their wealth, as their needs are satisfied and they do not benefit very much from additional money. Crumbs from their tables are lunches for people living in extreme poverty. And indeed, most of the authors who wrote on effective altruism had these people in affluent countries in mind. Peter Singer for instance in “Famine, Affluence and Morality” writes as a way of stating the key point of his argument in the work “in what follows, I shall argue that the way people in relatively affluent countries react to situations like that in Bengal cannot be justified; indeed, the whole way we look at moral issues- our moral conceptual scheme- needs to be altered, and with it, the way of life that has been taken for granted in our society.”³² The question that comes to mind immediately is, is the obligation of alleviating the suffering of the poor in poor countries reserved for the affluent countries alone? Is it not possible that some people living in those poor countries are living in affluence too?

It is (at least partially) based on this view of those in affluent countries helping those in poor countries that the argument of universality in scope of giving argument is based. I contend that scope of the audience targeted by the arguments of the effective altruists should at least be broadened to include the affluent in the poor countries.

Philosophers have criticized Effective Altruism but the critique most times focuses on difficulties typical for utilitarian ethics or the probability of following ethics built from the point of view of an impartial observer. Williams for instance argued that the reason that utilitarianism is incompatible with moral integrity is that it alienates people from what may matter most to them: their projects, their relations with those they care about, and so on.

In answer to that Jeff McMahan in “Philosophical Critiques of Effective Altruism” argues that It does this because it implies that their projects, commitments, attachments, and values matter no more in themselves, or from what Sidgwick called ‘the point of view of the universe’, than those of other people. One’s own projects and attachments therefore cannot have any priority or privileged role in the determination of how one ought to live or what one ought to do. He further stated that accepting Williams thought, would be to surrender all that makes one’s life worth living.

There is also a doubt about the relationship between effective altruism and consumerism. It is possible to perceive effective altruism with consumerists’ logic. As effective altruism grew on utilitarianism, motivation of the act is not important as long as it does not affect the consequences. However, it is possible to treat donating to effective charity organizations as another luxury service. Something that was never done before or something that makes us feel more trendy. Also, Singer intentionally encourages donors to “sound a trumpet when we give to the poor” as then other people would follow. He believes that we tend to do what others from our reference group do.³³ The risk is that when Effective Altruism ceases to be fashionable, the number of donations will decrease. However, even if Effective Altruism remains a part of consumerist logic, for Utilitarians it is important that it does its job – some money that would otherwise be spend to satisfy the sophisticated needs of people from affluent countries – has already been transferred to effective charities. In their view, the motivation for donors does not change the fact that they give and the lives of people living in extreme conditions significantly changes.

In addition, there is a risk of turning an effective altruist into a machine for the redistribution of wealth – a means rather than an end. This is something unacceptable to the followers of Kant, whose ideas are still very prominent in ethical debates.

Kathryn Muyskens in her work, ‘The other half of effective altruism: selective asceticism’ agrees with the ideas, central to effective altruism, that we have a duty to make the world a better place and that we should act on this principle by applying our powers of reason so as to make our efforts as effective as possible. Muyskens, however, seeks to emphasize an aspect of effective altruism that she believes has been unduly neglected: effective altruists should consider not only action, but also inaction, as an effective method of achieving social change.

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