

*“ANNULING PETER SINGER’S LIFE-SAVING ANALOGY: HOW THE ANALOGY IS SUPERFLUOUS IN THE ARGUMENT FOR WHY IT IS MORALLY WRONG NOT TO CONTRIBUTE TIME OR MONEY TO AID AGENCIES”.*

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Abstract

In the paper I argue for the case that we should not use a life-saving analogy like Peter Singer’s to ground the conclusion that it is morally wrong not to donate time and money to aid agencies. In Singer’s analogy it is stated that not saving a child who is drowning in a shallow pond, given that the sacrifice one has to give is relatively small, is morally analogous to not donating time and money to aid agencies that save the lives of the global poor. Because most people have the intuition that not saving the child is wrong then not donating time and money to aid agencies is also wrong.

The conclusion that it is morally wrong not to donate time and money to aid agencies, is morally sound but we should restate the argument for this conclusion so that we will avoid the use of Singer’s analogy. The reason why I argue that we should not use Singer’s analogy is not because I manage to show that the analogy does not hold, but because we can give a more convincing case for this conclusion via a deductive argument from beneficence:

*A general moral principle at stage one:* Failing to avert great harm to someone at a comparatively insignificant cost to oneself is wrong (other things equal).

*A premise at stage two:* Aid agencies avert great harm to people’s lives.

*A moral judgment at stage three:* Contributing nothing to aid agencies is wrong.

An important consequence of this restatement of the argument is that we avoid the discussion of the validity of the life-saving analogy: The discussion of whether we can actually liken the two cases in the analogy together. Much of the writings on the analogy have revolved around the question how analogous and disanalogous the two cases are. One of my aims in the paper is to show that we do not need to answer that question in order to reach the conclusion that it is morally wrong not to donate time and money to aid agencies: We do not need the analogy at all. If we show that we can annul the analogy then we are free from the problems and the vagueness which are a consequence of the use of analogical reasoning.

If the universal moral principle in the deductive argument above is reasonable then we owe it to the global poor, who are dying by the millions every year, to state the argument which grounds our duties to them as simply, directly and convincingly as possible. The hope is that by redesigning the argument for this conclusion then the citizens of the affluent world will rather be convinced to act according to the conclusion of such an argument than to the conclusion of the argument which contains the lifesaving analogy.