

Artigos de atualização

Why we need to keep giving, now Porque precisamos manter as doações agora

Peter Singer

Resumo Este artigo apresenta algumas ideias do recente livro do autor *The life you can save: Acting now to end world poverty* (ainda sem tradução em português). O autor argumenta que pessoas que estão vivendo vidas confortáveis têm a obrigação ética de dar parte de sua renda para eliminar ou reduzir a extrema pobreza e, assim, salvando vidas. É particularmente importante que nós façamos isso durante a atual crise financeira mundial.

Palavras chave: Pobreza. Valores sociais. Ética.



foto: wikipédia

Peter Singer

Professor of Bioethics at University Center for Human Values, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ/ USA and Laureate Professor at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at the University of Melbourne, Parkville, Vic/Australia

When I published *The life you can save: Acting now to end world poverty* earlier this year, I was frequently asked if this isn't the wrong time to ask affluent people to increase their effort to end poverty in other countries. Emphatically, I reply that it is not. There is no doubt that the world's economy is in trouble. But for either governments or individuals to use this as an excuse to reduce assistance to the world's poorest people would only multiply the seriousness of the problem for the world as a whole.

Without in any way minimizing the economic and psychological blow that people experience when they lose their jobs, there can be no doubt that the financial crisis has been more damaging for the poor than it has for the rich. The unemployed in affluent countries still have a safety net, in the form of social security payments, and usually free health care and free education for their children. It goes without saying that they also have sanitation and safe drinking water. The poor in developing countries have none of these benefits, and for an estimated 18 million of them each year, that proves fatal. That's a higher annual death toll than the average annual toll during World War II, and it's easier to prevent. Of those who die from avoidable, poverty-related causes, nearly ten million of them, according to Unicef, the United Nations Fund for Children, are children under five.

They die from diseases like measles, diarrhea and malaria, that are easy and inexpensive either to prevent or to treat.

We feel the pain of falling back from a level of affluence to which we have grown accustomed, but most people in developed nations are still, by historical standards, extraordinarily well off. Here's one way to appreciate that. Ask yourself: have you, in the past week, bought something to drink – a bottle of water, a beer or a coffee, perhaps – when there was tap water available at no cost at all? If you did, that's a luxury that the world's poorest billion people can't afford, because they have to live on for an entire day on what you spent on just one of those drinks.

One reason why we can afford to increase the amount of aid we give is that the amount we are giving now is insignificant in comparison to what we spend on other things. The United States government, for example, spends about \$22 billion on foreign aid, and Americans privately put in perhaps another \$10 billion, for a total of \$32 billion. Compared to the \$787 billion stimulus package signed by President Obama in February, that's trivial – and of course that particular stimulus package wasn't the end of the spending aimed at spurring recovery. U.S. aid is less than 25 cents for every \$100 Americans earn. Of course, some nations do better: Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands and Luxembourg all exceed the United Nations target of donating 0.7 percent of gross national income in foreign aid. But though these nations are the world's leaders, 70 cents in every \$100 is still

not a lot to deal with one of the great moral problems of our age.

If extreme poverty is allowed to increase, it will give rise to new problems. The annual poverty-related death toll for children under five, which according to Unicef has been falling steadily in recent years, and for the first time dipped below 10 million in 2007, could rise above that figure again. New diseases will develop in nations without the resources to provide health care, and will spread to rich nations. Poverty will lead to more refugees seeking to move, whether legally or not, to rich nations. When there is eventually an economic recovery, the global economy will be smaller than it would be, if all the world's people were able to take part in it.

Nor is the global financial crisis a justification for the world's leaders to fail to keep their word. Nearly nine years ago, at the Millennium Development Summit in New York, the leaders of 180 nations, including all the major affluent nations, promised that by 2015 they would together achieve the *Millennium Development Goals*. These goals include halving the proportion of the world's people living in poverty and ensuring that children everywhere are able to take a full course of primary school education. Since that meeting in 2000, the commitments made by most nations have fallen short of what is required, and 2015 is now only 6 years away. If we cut back on aid, we will fail to keep our promise, and the poorer nations will learn, once again, that the rich talk a good line about reducing world poverty, but their actions fall short of their words. That is not a

good basis for future cooperation between rich and poor on issues such as climate change.

Finally, we should maintain our commitment to helping the poor because if anything good comes out of this global financial crisis, it will be a reassessment of our basic values and our priorities. We need to decide what really matters, and it isn't buying more and more con-

sumer goods. It's family, friends, and knowing that we are doing something worthwhile with our lives. Helping to reduce the appalling death toll of world poverty should be part of that.

Peter Singer most recent book, The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty, was published in March. Further details are available at www.thelifeyoucansave.com

Resumen

Porque nosotros precisamos mantener la donacion, ahora

Este artículo presenta algunas ideas de lo más reciente libro del autor *The life you can save: Acting now to end world poverty* (en proceso de traducción para español). El autor argumenta que las personas que están viviendo vidas confortables tienen la obligación ética de donar parte de sus ingresos económicos para eliminar o disminuir la extrema pobreza y, así salvando vidas. Es particularmente importante que nosotros vengamos a hacer eso durante la actual crisis financiera.

Palabras-clave: Pobreza. Valores Sociales. Ética.

Abstract

Why we need to keep giving, now

This article presents some ideas from the author's recent book *The life you can save: Acting now to end world poverty*. The author argues that people living affluent lives have an ethical obligation to give some of their income to eliminate or decrease extreme poverty, and thus to save lives. It is particularly important that we do this during the current global financial crisis.

Key words: Poverty. Social values. Ethics.

Recebido: 28-3-09

Aprovado: 13-4-09

Aprovação final: 29.4.09

Contato

Peter Singer - singerp@gmail.com

Ira W. DeCamp Professor of Bioethics, University Center for Human Values, Princeton University 08544. Princeton/NJ, USA.