

Should Relatively Affluent People Help the Poor?

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1 As the world approaches the end of the twentieth century, the gap between rich and poor has never been wider. While some people have more money than it is possible to spend in a lifetime, no matter how lavishly they might make purchases, others are not able to provide even for their most basic needs. On all the continents of the world, people starve to death for lack of food, freeze to death for lack of shelter, die of diseases that could be prevented. The situation raises the issue of whether the affluent people of the world have a moral obligation to help the poor. I shall argue that people who are relatively affluent should give a certain fair percentage of their earnings to help reduce absolute poverty on a global scale.

Introduces topic, provides background.

Thesis statement.

2 My claim is that those who are relatively affluent, that is, people who would normally be defined as rich or wealthy in the context of a given society, have an obligation to give up a small but helpful percentage of their earnings. Peter Singer, an Australian philosopher, suggests ten percent. The money would be used to alleviate absolute poverty, a condition that Robert McNamara, the former president of the World Bank, defines as "characterized by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, squalid

Defines relevant terms.

Imparts a sense of urgency to issue.

Source is quoted.

Normally an endnote would go at end of this quotation.

surroundings, high infant mortality and low life expectancy that is beneath any reasonable definition of human decency."

Writer paraphrases critic.

An endnote would go at the end of this sentence.

3 Many people argue that wealthy people should not have to help those who are needier than they, unless they choose to do so. The strongest argument for this claim is articulated by Garrett Hardin, an ecologist from the University of Southern California. He points to the harmful results of helping people, claiming that by contributing to the increased survival rates of those who would otherwise have a relatively low life expectancy, wealthier people would increase the world's population and thus increase the rate at which natural resources are consumed and environmental problems arise. Although starvation is an evil, Hardin says, helping the poor would create an even greater evil—increased numbers of starving people and fewer resources to help them. Others argue that just because affluent people have a relatively higher income than others, it does not follow that they are morally responsible for those who do not.

Body of paper begins here.

Writer explains objections to her thesis in this paragraph.

4 I believe, in contrast, that people do have a moral obligation to help the desperately poor. For several reasons, it is not the case that helping the poor would necessarily increase population and thus increase environmental degradation. First, while monetary aid could bring medical supplies and food and thus increase population, it could also bring contraceptive devices and increased education about population control. And so, helping the poor could actually decrease the rate of population

Writer launches counterargument here.

growth and, in the end, save environmental resources. Secondly, helping to reduce absolute poverty would also bring about more people who would be in a position economically, socially, and medically to contribute to cleaning up environmental problems and helping solve overpopulation problems. Finally, from a purely practical point of view, it is important to note that people are an economic resource at least as important as firewood and fertile soil, and to allow people to sicken and die is to spoil and waste that resource.

Here is
first argument
for thesis.

5 The obligation to help the poor is, to a certain extent, simply a matter of human rights. We believe that our pets have a right to decent treatment—enough food to live, shelter from the cold, medical care when they are hurt or ill, and affluent people in America spend large amounts of income to provide for these basic needs for animals. If animals have these rights, then surely humans have at least the same basic rights. People should be treated with more respect and consideration than animals by being given the chance to live in better surroundings than those afforded to animals.

Here is
second
argument
for thesis.

6 However, the primary reason why the affluent have an obligation to help the poor has to do with the moral principle that killing another human being is wrong. If it is wrong to kill another person, then it is also morally wrong to allow someone to die, when you know they are going to die otherwise, and when it is within your means to save their lives at relatively little cost to yourself. By not acting to reduce the harmful, lethal

effects of poverty on the world's poor, affluent people are violating a primary moral principle. Therefore, it is a moral responsibility of the rich to help the poor.

7 In conclusion, affluent people should give a certain percentage of their wealth to help do away with absolute poverty in the world, because people are not only living beings who have a right to decent lives, but because it is wrong to allow people to die when helping them live is well within your means.

The paper's conclusion and a restatement of the thesis.