

Moral Obligations & Poverty Appeals

An in-depth analysis of the human reaction to poverty appeals and individual moral obligation towards resolving the global poverty crisis

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This paper looks at the differences between moral reasoning vs. moral intuition and its effects on individuals' reaction to poverty appeals. With global poverty being one of the largest issues in the world, effective fundraising measures and poverty appeals are crucial to ensure its resolution. However, issues such as compassion fatigue, and identifiable victim theory reduce the affectivity of poverty appeals. This experimental qualitative study attempted to trigger participants' response to poverty appeals through utilizing moral reasoning as opposed to moral intuition through utilizing verbal reasoning and reframing the situation. Sixty American University students participated in in-depth interviews adapted from a 2009 study by Peter Singer, responding to a poverty appeal and several situations requiring moral reasoning. The results differed from the conclusions made by the original quantitative study with the test conditions causing a change in response to the situations when compared to the control conditions and also lead to several suggestions towards creating more effective poverty appeals.

Key Words: *poverty appeals, moral intuition, moral obligation*

“Moral reasoning is not like that of an idealize scientist or judge seeking the truth, which is often useful; rather, moral reasoning is like that of a lawyer or politician seeking whatever is useful, whether or not it is true.” (Haidt, 2007)

With over half the population in the world (over three billion people) living on less than \$2.50 a day, the global poverty crisis is at its worst with the poorest 40% of the world populations earning only 5% of the wealth while 75% of it is owned by the richest 20% (Shah). In terms of consumption of resources (including food, water, education etc) the poorest 10% of the world consume a mere 0.05% while the richest 10% consumes about 59% of all that's available (Shah). In a 2006 *New York Times* article, Peter Singer questions the world's wealth gap and the value associated to human life – in particular the different values associated to the poor as opposed to the rich with such a large income gap between the rich and the poor (Singer). Singer asks his readers to think about what they, as individuals should do to bridge this gap – suggesting that while billionaires such as Bill Gates are expected to and donate millions, the job of solving the global poverty issue is one that needs to be fought by everybody and not just the extremely wealthy. He suggests that while the middle man in America is primarily responsible for earning the wealth that they do, they are able to do so solely because of the fortunate social circumstances they belong to, thus making any money they earn, not just money they earned themselves, arguing that this leaves anyone in a fortunate circumstance with a moral obligation to donate money to help the poor. Singer also discusses the act of saving a child drowning in front of us – and how most of society would insist that the child be saved regardless of the personal cost (through damage to your clothes or shoes) in doing so, because to ignore the drowning child would be immoral. The article explores the actions (and the economic choices that need to be made by the rich and super rich in America) to ensure

that the United Nation's Millenium goals towards eliminating global poverty are met and Singer points out how accomplishing these goals are well within our reach when compared to America's capacity to reach them. "We have no excuses" says Singer, and "...The target we should be setting for ourselves is not halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty, and without enough to eat, but ensuring that no one, or virtually no one, needs to live in such degrading conditions. That is a worthy goal, and it is well within our reach." (Singer).

While Singer raises some interesting ideas about poverty and the wealth gap, one of the interesting comparisons he draws is the notion of saving a drowning child. Adapted from an article he wrote over three decades ago, the drowning child refers to an individual's moral reaction towards helping a child drowning in front of them regardless of the cost of saving the child and knowing that they weren't responsible for its drowning.

My next point is this: if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally to do it. By "without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance" I mean without causing anything else comparably bad to happen, or doing something that is wrong in itself, or failing to promote some moral good, comparable in significance to the bad thing that we can prevent. (Singer, 1972)

Singer then argues that the obligation to save a child drowning in front of us or our neighbor's child should be the obligation we feel towards saving any child, regardless of proximity or relationship to that child solely because one could do so "without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance." While it can be argued that Singer's suggestion is somewhat unorthodox and asks individual to assign equal value to all human lives, and see no difference between any child, the fact that the suggestion is solely asking for a small donation, and one that is of limited cost leads one to question helps validate his idea. In spite of Singer's arguments and the knowledge that we as individuals have that all lives are worth the same, the

dire state of the poorer populations in the world, and the constantly growing wealth gap indicates that all lives are in fact not valued as equal. One of the primary obstacles is definitely the concept of mass atrocity or compassion fatigue that prevents an individual from feeling emotional affect towards every suffering person and child because our emotions are incapable of doing so. Another is society's constant exposure to a variety of issues involving children be it poverty, education issues, gender issues, labor issues, health issues that society is faced with on a constant basis. With the world becoming smaller than ever before through technological innovation, information about poverty issues surround us on a regular basis, causing individuals to be desensitized towards poverty appeals.

Past research has lead to the use of a single story to create empathy, a personal tie and an opportunity to solicit larger donations towards causes that needed funding such as the issue of global poverty and famine. With almost every charity utilizing the idea of giving a face to the problem by using a single advocate for a cause, and the increase of the sheer number of issues that individuals are bombarded with on a regular basis, the solution to the global poverty issue is yet to be determined. According to Singer's claims in his 2007 article, the financial means to solve the poverty crisis is well within the means of the more affluent populace. It's possible that the next steps we need to take are to determine innovative ways to solicit donations, that will entice individuals to see the importance of their contribution and the need for their help – to enable them to see past just the initial emotional reaction motivating a donation to understand the analytical reasons that will help solve the problem. Perhaps, utilizing verbal reasoning or reframing the situation to change how individuals perceive certain situations can be used to help trigger change and is a necessary step forward.

This research study was created to better understand individuals' moral obligations and feelings towards philanthropy, in an attempt to better understand why people donate or not donate through understanding individuals' reactions to poverty appeals through a series of in-depth interviews with sixty individuals on the American University campus. Adapting materials based on Singer's 1972 article and the story of the drowning child, as well a similar unpublished study by Paul Slovic, a social scientist and research with Decision Research, the study will attempt to analyze the pre-existing research in the arena of poverty appeals and philanthropy and better understand how they can be made more effective, in an attempt to solve the global poverty issue. Understanding the reasons why attaining the Millennium Development goals towards eradicating won't be achieved, in spite of the fact that they are within our reach is a crucial step towards resolving this issue and this study aims to look into this through a qualitative analysis and make recommendations and suggestions.

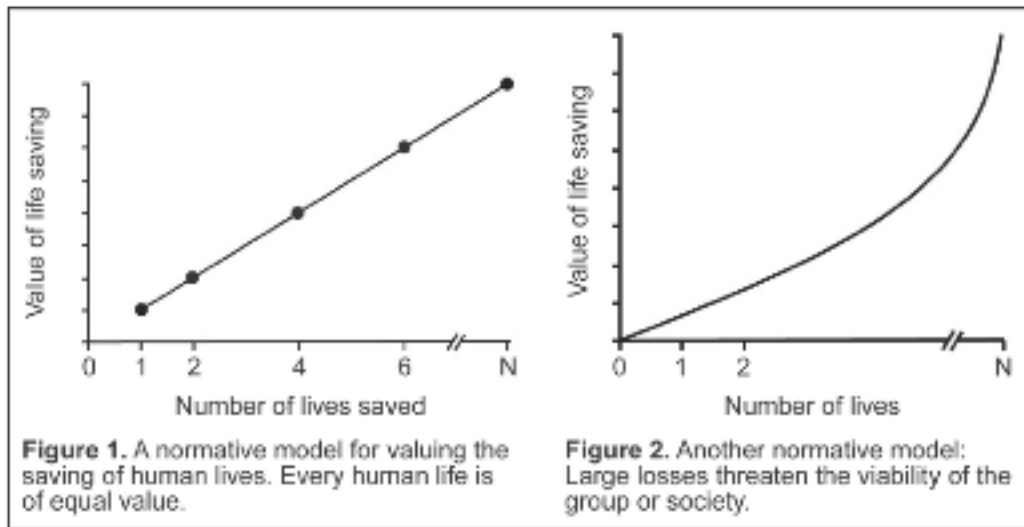
Literature Review

Research on individuals' moral obligation towards the poor, and philanthropy fall into several subcategories and explore different questions in a variety of fields including sociology, communications and psychology. In a literature review analyzing a vast number of the studies in the field of philanthropy, eight mechanisms determined to be predictors of philanthropy were identified (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2010). The mechanisms better explain the motivations towards philanthropy and include; the awareness of need, solicitation, cost and benefit analysis, altruism, reputation, psychological benefits, values and efficacy (the idea that making a donation makes a difference in someone's life) (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2010). One of the most significant sub-fields of research deals with the idea of compassion fatigue, a phenomenon

identified as “mass atrocity” by some where individuals appear to care less as the number of victims whether it’s related to philanthropy or any other instance where a large mass of individuals are affected by some form of disaster or issue. Other research has found that identification and proximity affect how an individual reaches a decision about helping someone in need.

The concept of Mass atrocity or compassion fatigue has been linked to the dual process theories presented by Epstein (1994), suggesting that human reasoning occurs in one of two ways; system 1 – an experiential or intuitive system that is automatic and based on feeling or “affect” and system 2 – a more reasoned and logical system that’s analytical and deliberative. In instances that induce an emotional response, such as being presented with a poverty appeal and being compelled to make a donation – system 1 is utilized since the poverty appeal evokes an emotional response. Assuming that every life is given an equal value figure 1 (adapted from Slovic et al, forthcoming) presents the normative and mathematical way through which an increasing number of human lives should be valued, with the value of the lives saved increasing as each additional person is saved. However, since multiplying the emotional feelings towards one child to an N^{th} degree isn’t possible when an emotional appeal is made (where the brain utilizes system 1 as opposed to 2 to process the information presented), it makes it impossible for humans to recreate the emotional reaction they direct towards a single child towards millions of such children. However, because a larger number of losses could potentially threaten the size of a society or group, an act that could save a larger proportion of a society could lead a larger value being associated with the larger proportion of lives being saved (figure

2). However, in such an instance, the value of the lives saved isn't a multiplication of the value assigned to each life, but rather solely a large value.



Because of an individual's inability to multiply their emotional feelings towards a mass of children or individuals affected by disaster or poverty, it enables humans to react to large scale atrocities such as a genocide or world poverty that affects a magnanimous number of individuals in a way that doesn't place the same value towards every human life. Slovic et al present an alternative way in which the mind does perceive the loss of life as numbers increase, after a certain point, a small change isn't capable of causing a significant difference but instead where "constant increases in the physical magnitude of a stimulus typically evoke smaller and smaller changes in response" as depicted in figure 3 where the value of the next life saved grows smaller as the number of lives at risk grows larger (Slovic et al, forthcoming). And as sensitivity towards the issue causing the large number of lives increases, with the increase in loss of life, the sensitivity towards it decreases.



Figure 3. A psychophysical model describing how the saving of human lives may actually be valued.

Historically, it's been shown over and over again that society reacts to a sole victim as opposed to many, particularly in instances where the victim is a single child; for example, in the case of Baby Jessica (Jessica McClure) who fell into a well and was rescued 58 hours later as the country watched and came together for her survival in the seventies. McClure received donations from thousands of well-wishers, that amounted to over \$80,000 by the time she reached the age of twenty-five (Celizic, 2007). In a 2005 study conducted to better understand the idea of the "Identifiable victim effect" researchers tested participants willingness to donate to an identified single victim as opposed to an identified group of victims at both a numerical level in the value difference between the two types of donations and also the emotional response triggered among the participants from the two scenarios (Kogut & Ritov, 2005). The participants were provided with a varying range of identifiers about their victims ranging from unidentified to identified with age, with age and name, with age, name and a picture. And the experiment was conducted for a single child and also a group of 8 children within these varying identification conditions. Almost 340 college students participated in the several sub-groups and the researchers found that "the effect of identification may be largely restricted to single

victims, [with the] identification of the single victim [being] more effective [and] more vivid” supporting the idea that a single victim elicits more emotional and economical value to a donor when compared to several victims. The monetary value associated with the single victim vs. group of victims was significantly different with the single victim receiving a much larger contribution than each individual within the group of 8, thus establishing the claims of the notion of mass atrocity (Kogut & Ritov, 2005).

Further research has concluded that any signs of identification or forming some form of link or bond with the victim encourage donor generosity, whether it’s knowing some information about the recipient or solely knowing that they’ve been pre-determined. Examining individuals’ attachment to “the” victim as opposed to “a” victim, Small and Lowenstein conducted several experiments to understand the degree of identification required for individuals to feel empathy towards any victim. Working towards proving that the test subjects would give more money to a determined victim over one that hadn’t been linked to the donor prior to the donation, the researchers conducted lab and field experiments; where one group was required to allocate a sum of money (they had already been provided with) to help a less fortunate individual that had already been identified and determined as the receiver (but given no information about who this could be, but provided with several possible victims who could benefit from their donation) and the second group was given the same conditions but informed that their recipient would be determined after they made the donation (Small & Lowenstein, 2003). A significant difference was found between the two groups, with the group that had the pre-determined recipient donating a much larger amount than the group that was told that their recipient would be determined later. This reaction, recognized as “Identifiable

victim effect” where donors feel more of a connection towards their ‘victim’ when even some information (be it solely the fact that they have been pre-determined) ties back to the concept of mass atrocity and an individual’s need to identify with their recipient on some level.

Haidt identifies system 1 as moral intuition and system 2 as moral reasoning, the latter being based on rationality and as being analytical and well thought out while the former is based purely on an instinct or gut feeling that isn’t as reliable (Haidt, 2007). And suggests that “moral reasoning, when it occurs, is usually a post-hoc process in which we search for evidence to support our initial intuitive reaction” (Haidt, 2007). However, the intuition based reaction can be changed in three ways; through (1) “conscious verbal reasoning” where the cost and benefit of the options available and the necessary actions are measured, utilizing system 2 instead of system 1 to react to issues of poverty; (2) through reframing the situation so that the perceiver views the situation in a different light and decides on a different set of actions; (3) through arguments with other individuals that pushes individuals to perceive things from a different point of view. (Haidt, 2007). So even though moral reasoning appears to play a secondary (post-hoc) role to moral intuition when making an emotional judgment such as responding to a poverty appeal, it may be possible to train individuals to make a morally reasoned decision as opposed to a moral intuition based one to guide their responses to large scale global poverty. One such instance changing how individuals react to poverty appeals was conducted by Small, Lowenstein and Slovic when they studied the impact of deliberative thought by attempting to trigger system 2 as the primary cognitive process as opposed to system 1 by testing donations towards identifiable and statistical victims, attempting to study the consequences of “de-biasing the identifiability by education people about the inconsistent

sympathy evoked by statistical and identifiable victims” (Small, Lowenstein & Slovic 2007). The researchers hypothesized that educating the participants and altering their initial reaction could produce two results; that the value placed on a single life would reduce, thereby decreasing the donations made towards the single victim; and the value place on multiple lives and the donations made towards them wouldn’t be affected. Both hypotheses were found to be true and the study concluded that triggering a different cognitive processing system didn’t change how individuals perceived the value on multiple lives (Small, Lowenstein, Slovic, 2007).

In the unpublished study by Decision Research, the effect of ‘conscious verbal reasoning’ was studied, through adapting the drowning child situation discussed by Singer (Slovic, 2009). Slovic studied the effects of ‘conscious verbal reasoning’ in an experimental setting, attempting to bridge the difference between the value placed on a life vs. the life of a child, attempting to bridge the gap created by geographical distance. He tested 96 marketing students by presenting them with solely a poverty appeal about a child in Africa as the control group and presenting them with an article (adapted from the 1972 Singer article) talking about the value of a child drowning in front of them and the cost of rescuing said child by damaging your personal belongings and clothes in the process, and the value of a child suffering from extreme poverty far away whose death could be prevented, by a similar cost to ones’ personal belongings or the money that could go to buy a favored CD or magazine, as well as the poverty appeal as the test conditions. The Singer article also discussed the potential qualms and concerns that could arise about making a donation to a large organization as displayed in the following excerpt from the article.

At this point the student raise various practical difficulties. Can we be sure that out donations really get to the people who need it? Doesn’t most aid get swallowed up in

administrative cost or waste, or downright corruption? Isn't the real problem the growing world population and is there a point in saving lives until the problem has been solved? (Slovic, 2009)

While the article then argues that any donation would be extremely beneficial to the victims and be of very low cost to us, thus justifying any waste that could happen since the benefit outdoes the cost. After testing both the emotional reaction (on a Likert scale) and the money that participants suggested should be donated towards helping the victim in the poverty appeal (a child named Rokia, suffering from extreme poverty), he determined that contrary to his hypothesis, the willingness to contribute, and sympathy towards the child were higher for the control condition as opposed to the test conditions. The mean for the value donated towards Rokia in the test condition was \$20 while the mean for the control condition was at \$27, a significantly higher amount. While there could be many explanations for this effect, the most likely one is the boomerang effect – where an attempt to educate and change the public's opinion about a certain subject can trigger the opposite reaction.

In an article discussing the many facets of the boomerang effect, Byrne and Hart suggests several ways through which unintended constructs can be activated where the “message recipients process harmful elements in a message at the expense of those that were intended” (Byrne & Hart, 2009). In particular, selective perception where the message receiver perceives the message to be in tune with their personal attitudes and point of view, and believes that it conforms and supports their attitudes. An example of such an instance was the popularity of the show *All in the Family*, which was perceived as promoting bigotry (in spite of the show's attempt to reduce it) by bigots who believed the show was solely “telling it like it [was]” while liberals believed that the show carried a message of tolerance (Byrne & Singer,

2009). It's possible that by exposing the participants to the differences between the initial situation of the drowning child and the second situation involving a child dying of different circumstances, and by talking through the concerns that exist about donating money to large organizations, the Singer article helped reaffirm these doubts and concerns among the participants, causing them to re-evaluate the donation they made towards Rokia, and convincing them to believe that their donation would be of no value, leading to a smaller donation being made to Rokia in the Singer condition than in the control condition.

Research Question

This study aims to gain an insight into the conclusions that emerged from Slovic's 2009 study – attempting to understand why the attempt to trigger moral reasoning as the primary response mechanism failed in the lab experiment. The study conducted by Slovic was recreated in a field situation, at the American University campus to gain a qualitative understanding of the subject matter through an in depth interview instead of a multiple choice questionnaire (as used by Slovic), with the objective of determining whether the boomerang effect was responsible for the unexpected outcome and to make recommendations for future research options. Based on Slovic's conclusions, the following hypotheses were tested.

H1 Participants exposed Singer condition (exposed to the Singer prompts) WTC (willingness to contribute) is likely to be smaller than those in the control condition (exposed solely to the poverty appeal)..

Null Hypothesis Participants in the Singer condition WTC (willingness to contribute) is equal or greater in value than the control condition's WTC.

Methodology

Sample

Sixty American University students (43 females and 17 males) were selected at random and assigned to either the Singer or control conditions. While the researchers were acquainted with approximately ten of the students, the remainder of the sample was unknown. The researcher and an assistant conducted the data collection with each collecting fifteen Singer and fifteen control sample interviews.

Control Group

The thirty participants in the control group were shown a poverty appeal recreated from the Slovic study, consisting of an image and a brief description of Rokia. The appeal also carried a picture of Rokia (Figure 4) and stated that she was aged seven years, along with the following description.

Rokia, like most other children in her country, is desperately poor, and faces a threat of severe hunger or even starvation. Her life will be changed for the better as a result of your financial gift. With your support, and the support of other caring sponsors, *Save the Children* will work with Rokia's family and other members of the community to help feed her and provide her with an education, as well as basic medical care and hygiene. (Slovic, 2009)

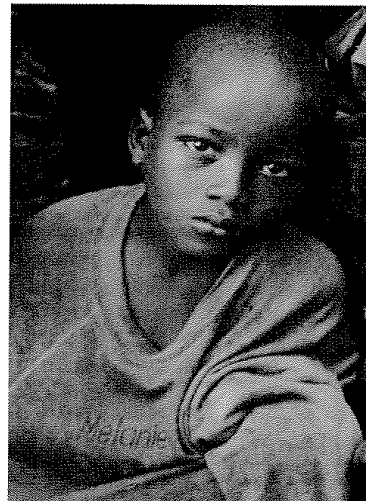


Figure 4 - Image of Rokia on the poverty appeal

Participants were then asked the following questions and their answers were recorded.

Would you be willing to donate money to help save Rokia?

How much money would you be willing to donate?

What were you thinking and feeling while reading about Rokia?

How would donating money to help Rokia make you feel?/ How would not donating money to help Rokia make you feel?

Do you think it's necessary for more fortunate individuals to donate money to help her?

Did you find the story about Rokia to be believable?

Would you like to donate any money now? (We will donate any money you give to *Save the Children*, an organization that helps children like Rokia)

Would you have wanted to donate money to Rokia if you had been told her story outside of this experiment?

Unlike in the Slovic study, where the questions were primarily multiple choices where the respondents chose from several different donation values varying from \$5 to \$50 and conveyed their reaction and emotional response to the appeal on a Likert Scale, the participants were asked open-ended questions. The decision to conduct the interviews orally, while supplying the participants with visual elements such as the poverty appeal was made to ensure that the responses collected were more intuitive and spontaneous as opposed to being thought out and analyzed. However, since the respondents had to discuss their opinions with the interviewer this lead to some limitations – due to the fact that they would attempt to provide answers that wouldn't interfere with their social desirability, given that the interviewer was a peer. Since the goal of the experiment was to attempt influence the potential intuitive reaction the individuals may have had about philanthropy and to identify the effectiveness of this, conducting the

interviews orally was deemed more appropriate than providing the recipients time to craft their answers on paper.

Singer Condition

The thirty participants exposed to the Singer condition were asked to study two prompts prior to being shown the poverty appeal about Rokia. The prompts were adapted from both the Slovic study (based on the Singer article) from 2009 and also Singer's 2007 *New York Times* article. However, unlike in the Slovic study, the test subjects weren't given an article discussing what the reaction to a child drowning in a pond in front of them as opposed to a child dying of poverty far away, rather two individual prompts were adapted from Slovic's study.

Prompt 1

Imagine that your route to get to school takes you past a shallow pond. One morning, you notice a child has fallen in the pond and appears to be drowning. To wade in and pull the child out would be easy, but it will mean that you get your clothes wet and muddy, ruining an expensive new jacket and new pair of shoes.

The participants were presented with the first prompt, followed by these questions.

Do you think you have an obligation to rescue this child?

What considerations went through your mind when you reached this decision?

Once the answers to the questions were recorded, they were presented with the second prompt:

Prompt 2

Imagine that the child isn't drowning in front of you, and you can't physically see the child drowning. Instead, the child was far away. In another country perhaps, but similarly in danger of death and equally within your means to save, at no great cost – and absolutely no danger- to yourself?

Which was followed by the same questions regarding their thoughts on the moral obligation towards saving the child as well as a follow-up question about the differences they perceived between the two situations.

The test participants were then shown the poverty appeal about Rokia and asked to respond to the same set of questions as the control group and asked an additional question about whether the two prompts influenced their reaction to the poverty appeal. The answers for both the control and Singer group were recorded anonymously, with no identifying information from the participants and were then transcribed prior to being analyzed.

Analysis

The results were analyzed quantitatively in terms of the initial value that the participants in the groups were willing to donate to help Rokia and the value they actually donated at the end of the experiment as well as the difference in mean donation between the test group and control group. The data collected was also analyzed qualitatively, since the primary goal of the experiment was to gauge a qualitative understanding of the situation, to better understand the results produced by the Singer study and also to determine any common conclusions arising from the sixty responses to each question.

Reliability and Validity

While conducting this study via an oral interview helped collect more spontaneous responses to the materials utilized, its possible that having to voice their opinions about this issue to the researcher, would have prevented the participants from sharing their honest opinions and being candid with their responses. A written interview could potentially provide

richer answers with the participants feeling a stronger sense of anonymity than when participating in an oral interview.

However this data is primarily representative of the ideas surrounding poverty appeals on the American University campus and is somewhat limited in terms of generalization. It's possible that some of the ideas expressed by the participants are shared by the larger demographic of college students in the United States, since the participants share common socio-economic background with this demographic. Analyzing the data collected qualitatively will also help determine the cause for the change in the Singer effect, and possibly help explain why utilizing the Singer prompts helped trigger a different response to the one determined via Slovic during his lab experiment. In spite of their limitation, these recommendations will help determine further research options and better understand the next steps that need to be taken in the arena of poverty appeals and philanthropy.

Since the sample group consisted solely of American University students, the possibility of the results being biased is particularly high. Recognized as the most politically active campus in the United States by the Princeton reviews, AU students are recognized for their civic engagement and community service that suggests a higher affect and emotional reaction to a poverty appeal when compared to a general college campus.

Results

The results were analyzed quantitatively, in order to determine the hypothesis that would further support the conclusions from the experimental test of the Singer study and then analyzed qualitatively in order to make recommendations towards producing more effective poverty appeals and suggesting alternate research questions to further the study of moral

reasoning vs. intuition with relation to poverty appeals and individuals' willingness to contribute to philanthropic causes.

Quantitative Analysis

The primary data sets utilized to study the results quantitatively were the projected donation amount, which was the dollar value associated to each participant's willingness to contribute towards Rokia, and the actual dollar value contributed towards *Save the Children* by each participant. A total of \$87 was collected from the sixty participants in both groups. Two of the participants (one from each condition) were removed from the sample groups prior to running tests to determine statistical significance as they both donated an outlying amount of \$20 which was explained by their previous acquaintanceship to the researcher, explaining their willingness to contribute a greater sum when compared to the remaining sample group. The other 58 participants were analyzed using descriptive analytical statistics and also a T-Test to test the hypothesis, *H1*.

In the Singer condition, the projected value varied from 0 to \$300 while the actual value donated was between 0 and \$10, as displayed in figure 5. The mean of the actual value of the participants' willingness to contribute was calculated to be \$1.37 while the mean of the projected value was at \$25 per person. In the control condition, the projected value varied from 0 to \$50 while the actual value varied from 0 to \$10 (figure 6). The mean for the projected value was calculated to be \$17 while the mean of the actual condition was found to be 27 cents. It was also determined that 1/3 of the participants in the Singer condition contributed towards Rokia while only 10% of the participants in the control condition donated towards her.

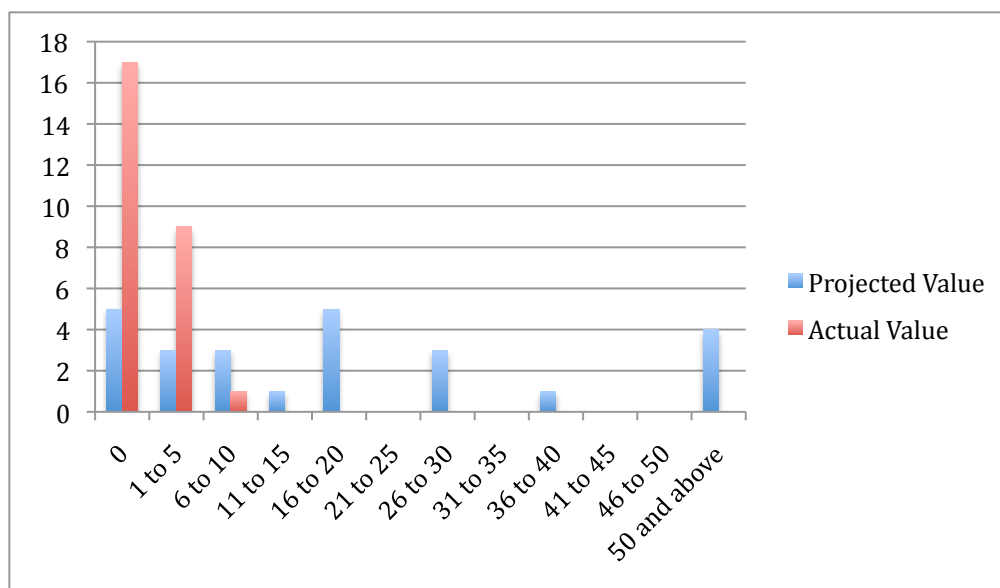


Figure 5 - Distribution of dollar value of WTC in the Singer condition

The mean difference between the dollar value of the WTC placing the mean of the Singer condition (in both the actual and projected values) at a greater value than the control condition was unexpected since the initial lab experiment by Singer concluded that the Singer condition yielded a smaller amount of donations than the control condition.

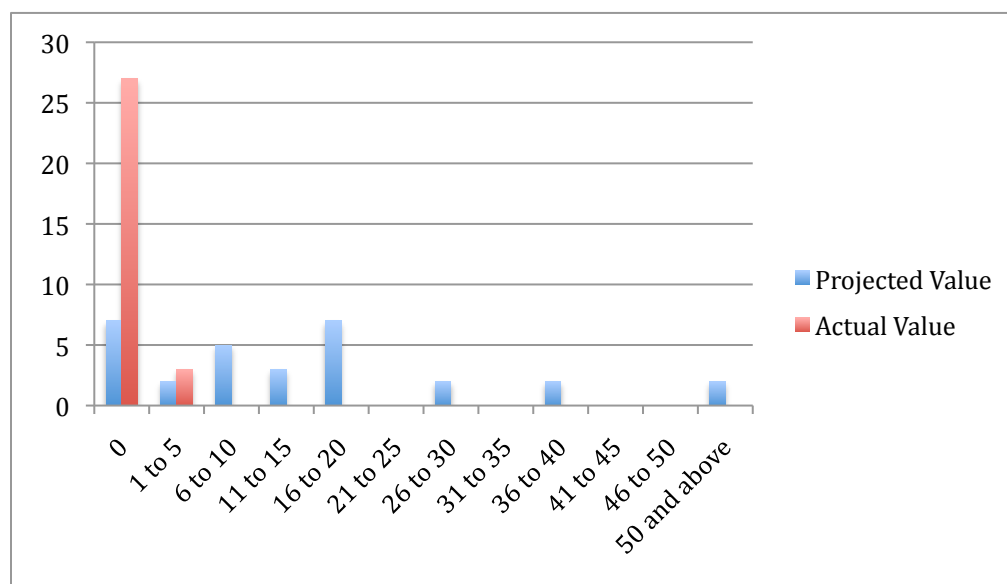


Figure 6- Distribution of dollar value of WTC in the control condition

In order to falsify the null hypothesis, an independent, two-tailed T test was then conducted between the Singer condition and the control condition. The level of significance (alpha) was determined as 0.05 and a p value was determined – figure 7. The p value was calculated to be 0.041 without assuming equal variance thus making it smaller than the level of significance, enabling us to accept the null hypothesis. Thus the initial hypothesis was rejected and the null hypothesis was accepted as the alternative hypothesis

Since the questions posed to the respondents were open ended, resulting a large variance in the projected value, the T test was conducted after cutting off the donation value at a variety of sums deemed appropriate varying from \$10 to \$50 and the results were found to be consistent with the results between the real projected value and actual value determined earlier.

While the results were unexpected, it's interesting to note, that this study appears to support the hypothesis tested by Slovic in his lab experiment, suggesting that training individuals to respond by moral reasoning as opposed to solely through their intuition to situations is a measurable possibility and a potential next step towards creating more effective poverty appeals. However, a qualitative analysis of the data was also conducted, to determine the reasons for the boomerang effect triggered in Slovic's initial experiment, the reasons for the conclusions drawn from this study and also to determine recommendations and the next steps necessary.

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Actual	Equal variances assumed	14.746	.000	-2.181	54	.034	-1.09451	.50176	-2.10047	-.08854
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.124	33.585	.041	-1.09451	.51519	-2.14197	-.04704
\$10 Cap	Equal variances assumed	1.960	.169	.626	39	.535	.37919	.60616	-.84689	1.60527
	Equal variances not assumed			.607	30.378	.548	.37919	.62438	-.89531	1.65368
\$20 Cap	Equal variances assumed	.936	.339	-.010	39	.992	-.01914	1.88092	-3.82366	3.78539
	Equal variances not assumed			-.010	35.984	.992	-.01914	1.90090	-3.87441	3.83613
\$30 Cap	Equal variances assumed	1.236	.273	-.587	39	.561	-1.71172	2.91632	-7.61054	4.18709
	Equal variances not assumed			-.578	34.945	.567	-1.71172	2.95894	-7.71902	4.29558
\$40 Cap	Equal variances assumed	1.686	.202	-.645	39	.523	-2.52512	3.91517	-10.44431	5.39407
	Equal variances not assumed			-.637	35.615	.528	-2.52512	3.96248	-10.56441	5.51417
\$50 Cap	Equal variances assumed	2.281	.139	-.790	39	.435	-3.72129	4.71285	-13.25394	5.81135
	Equal variances not assumed			-.777	34.445	.443	-3.72129	4.79027	-13.45165	6.00907
Projected	Equal variances assumed	1.919	.172	-.724	55	.472	-8.08313	11.15878	-30.44581	14.27956
	Equal variances not assumed			-.715	33.881	.480	-8.08313	11.31215	-31.07517	14.90891

Figure 7 - Independent Sample T Tests conducted to falsify null hypothesis between the actual and projected values of the donations made towards Rokia

Qualitative Analysis

The individual responses to certain key questions were separated and analyzed in order to draw general conclusions from the pool of responses. Any repetitive statements were also categorized separately to make generalizations based on the information collected.

Many donors are desensitized to poverty appeals due to constant exposure to them.

Participants claimed that the Rokia's story was no different to the many appeals and causes they are asked to support on a constant basis, claiming that many such appeals were simply just one more in a large number they saw daily, and not something they were affected by or drew an emotional connection to.

“Um, I mean I think that it’s important to give to causes and things like that but it’s, it’s also I feel like we’re given, there’s so much of it in the media today that it’s just one more ask for, asking for money.”

“Um, I feel like it’s kind of a common ploy, if you will, cause you see a lot of ads, the sort of thing that you know, pick out one individual and say, oh this is the person’s name and this is their situation. Sit’s kinda more of like a, they try to make it more personal. Um. So I mean, yeah, it hits home a little bit, but I feel like it’s really common.”

“It might be a lil synical to say but I see this so often you know world vision, save the children, Oxfam, its.. I appreciate what their doing but at the same time its hard to distinguish between groups. While I’d love to help rokia(???) theres not a whole lot oversight for these groups. Aand I’d be concerned that most the money would be funneled to administration as opposed to rokias life.”

“Um. I, I mean. Because it’s hypothetical. Um. I mean, yeah, I can feel some sympathy for her but it’s kind of a generic prompt or story.”

The donor’s removal from the situation, thus disabling them from assisting the victim directly

is a key obstacle. When asked to identify difference and similarities between the two Singer prompts presented, most participants saw no difference in moral obligation towards the situations, but believed that the distance to the child, and the inability to see the child in danger (except through secondary or tertiary sources) gave reason for doubting and not feeling the same obligation towards the situation.

“I mean there’s definitely a difference in that you’re personally acting and saving this child and I mean it’s yourself vs. it being mediated through someone else for the second case but I think they’re very parallel.”

“Definitely. I mean I would say just cause of the proximity and like what you’re doing in the first one is really physical and like you can go right to the child whereas in the second one, it’s not as obvious.”

“Morally no. The ease of...you’re more... it’s easier to take action on something that you see, right in front of your face than it is to consider something that’s half way around the world. But morally there shouldn’t be a difference.”

"A little bit because you can't physically like, see the child but I still think you should definitely save them. I think that you're still obligated to save the child."

"Yeah I think the one has the more immediate feeling where you act more without thinking whereas the other one requires you to like think about it."

"Yesss.. in the first instance its immediate and its in front of me and you don't have time to think of the situation that ur in right now where as in the second situ for u to make a meaningful impact you actually have to make a bigger effort interms of monetary resources as in sending the money of something like that."

"I mean yes and no its essentially saving peoples lives helping and doing good but one is more in ur face and the other is far away and like I said its easier to distance ur self in that situation."

The Singer prompts didn't influence how the participants reacted to the poverty appeal. In

spite of the hypothesis supporting the idea that the Singer condition triggered a different reaction to that made by the control group, the participants didn't believe that working their way through the prompts influenced their response to Rokia's story. Most of the participants believed that while the prompts helped frame the poverty appeal, their reaction to the poverty appeal wouldn't have been different if the initial Singer prompts had been taken out.

"I think it was an interesting way to frame it by going with the personal story if you were actually acting yourself to something mediated by an organization. But I don't know I've always thought of as similar that you learn about a specific child and get a connection but yeah..."

"Probably. Uhmmm Like going through the logical steps. But I hopefully, would've said I'd give money before reading it."

"I mean it definitely prompted me to think about it in a certain light but I think I would've given the same answer."

"I don't think so. But maybe on a psy... more in-depth psychological level it did. I'm not sure, But I guess since it was about a child, it was a constant theme so it seemed that seeing Rokia's picture and reading it I guess it kind of does put into perspective but I don't really feel like it really did a... make a big impact on my decision."

Donors have qualms about their money not going to the victim directly and the bureaucratic expenses of large NGOs. Many participants in both conditions had concerns about where their money would be utilized – to actually help Rokia, vs. for miscellaneous bureaucratic expenses that they didn't see as necessary. Participants also expressed distrust towards large organizations such as *Save the Children* they believed couldn't effectively utilize donations to ensure that victims such as Rokia were actually helped.

"No... Because save the children is like... It's just like a big foundation where u don't know where the money is going. If I knew I could actually help this girl then yes I would but I'm just donating money I don't even know what's going to happen"

"Again, I would have to take... you know do more research on the organization that's helping Rokia, but yes. If I feel like it's a legitimate organization that's actually using the funds that I'll be giving to help Rokia and not put most of the money in their pocket and give a small minute fund to the family, then yes, I would be willing to help. But you also have to be observant with these organizations."

"Probably not. Like I've been faced with this situation before lots of time and I mean I've heard the name save the children before and I've even worked at a building which was 3 blocks away from them, I know their a trust worthy organization still its like it seems like a ploy oh show me this picture of this poor starving child and try to get me to help, its like what do u get out of it."

"If I were certain the money would reach this child then I would definitely be more inclined to do it. Unfortunately, these things don't always seem to have the most direct forms of getting money to these children but I would be inclined to do so, yes."

"Um. Again, I mean with any organization it's important to know like where exactly the money is going, because somebody, I mean I, I worked somewhere over the summer and I know that sometimes you're asking people for money but a lot of its administrative and, so I don't know. I wouldn't really know how I felt about it until I knew exactly where the money was going."

"While I was reading it I was kind of almost skeptical. I know Save the Children is a good cause and everything and it does work, I think. But like I was wondering, will my money actually contribute to anything. Will it actually make a difference? And I was kind of curious where exactly it would go. Because I wouldn't think it would go directly to the family. And I don't know if it would actually specifically help this girl."

Donors believe that donating money to fight poverty should be done by everyone but not

necessary. While most participants claimed that they liked to help philanthropic causes, and

believed that everyone should donate money, many of them didn't believe that it should be an

obligation or considered it a necessity. Philanthropy was recognized as a "good" thing that

people should do on their own free will but shouldn't feel compelled to engage. No clear

generalization to indicate their feel towards moral obligations towards helping fight poverty

could be determined. Several participants cited religious reasons as their personal influence

towards helping the poor.

"I think that if there is something they are convicted to do then they should do it but I don't think that it should be something that is thrust upon someone to do as a necessity cause that takes away from the (it would be nice if everyone gave)"

"Oh my goodness this is a tough question. Necessary like... I don't know.. I feel like if people wanna help they should be able to help, and if I were helping I would feel like other people should help as well. But if im not helping then I cant force someone else to help. That's hard."

"Certainly not necessary for survival or necessary for the sake of humanity but it's certainly good. So no, not necessary but good."

"Um. No, I don't think it's necessary but it is good to do. Well just because it's very kind to help other people especially if you have an excess of things like money and resources but if you don't want to, it's your choice not to.

Excess= Well if you have...I don't know exactly. But if you're really really wealthy, I don't know what exactly the amount I'm saying, if you have a lot of money it would be good to help people.

"I do, I believe that not every person can help every cause but when you are, when a person is in a more fortunate circumstance, they should help those in a less fortunate circumstance."

Discussion

Accepting the Null Hypothesis as the Alternative Hypothesis

Since the independent, two-tailed T test concluded that the null hypothesis was in fact true; we adopted the null hypothesis as the alternative hypothesis, and can conclude that the Singer condition yields a higher WTC than the control condition. While this is different from the expected results (since Slovic's lab experiment concluded that the Singer condition displayed a lower WTC than the control condition, there are several reason for this significant difference.

When adapting the prompts and materials used in the Singer study for this study, the primary adjustment made was to remove the initial article discussing the hypothetical situations involving rescuing a child drowning in front of you, and the child suffering from poverty and famine far away who could be rescued at a similar cost to oneself (appendix a). In the first (lab) study, the article presented to the students discussed how a separate group of people (an arbitrary ethics class) when presented with the first situation (of the drowning child) responded that rescuing the drowning child was essential since the cost of doing so was insignificant when compared to the value of the child. The article then suggests that the ethics class was asked about their feelings towards rescuing a child they couldn't see, but who was equally at risk of death and could be easily saved with similar costs to themselves as saving the child drowning would. The ethic class's thoughts about this situation are all examined in depth ranging from their concerns about validity of the situation, the risk that the money they donate will go towards bureaucracy expenses instead of helping someone and the reliability of the source etc. The article ends by suggesting that in spite of the trickling down effect that would reduce a donation made towards the cause, the benefit of making such a donation is still much

more beneficial towards the victims, when compared to the personal cost of making such a donation. However, unlike in the Singer situation, this study adapted the initial article, utilizing two prompts – one presenting a hypothetical situation of a drowning child in front of them, followed by questioning the participant about their willingness to help the child, and the considerations they made when reaching the decision and the second prompt describing a situation involving a child dying that couldn't be seen but could still be helped at a similar (small) cost, followed by questions about their reaction, the considerations they made and the differences and similarities between the two prompts.

It's possible that the boomerang effect was triggered through suggesting how the participant should react to the prompts involving a child drowning in front of them and dying far away in the first lab setting of the study which was avoided in the second situation by enabling each participant to read and then react to each situation facing the child in their own terms, and reach their own conclusions about the validity and need for helping the child in the second situation, explaining the difference outcome. Since one of the primary goals of this study was to enable the participants in the Singer condition to utilize moral reasoning to reach their decision as opposed to reaching and intuition based decision, and justifying it utilizing reasoning, the results suggest that this is possible. The next step would be to recreate this experiment without changing the prompts from when they were initially used in the lab setting, and conducting a second exploratory study using the full article from the Singer study and disabling the participants from reaching their own conclusions to the two prompts to establish whether it explains the difference in results.

However, while the results are significant, the validity of the data is questionable, since a large portion of the sample group exposed to the Singer condition were not responsive with only 10 out of the 29 individuals in the Singer condition making an actual donation towards helping Rokia, while the remaining participants were unwilling to do so, in spite of the statistical evidence suggesting the success of utilizing the Singer condition to increase individuals' WTC. Since the primary goal of this study was to qualitative analyze the responses, to either support, decline or simply better understand the moral obligations, and decisions made by individuals with regard to poverty appeals, conducting analyzing the responses qualitatively will present more useful information for future research.

Suggestions and Recommendations based on Participant Responses

Through open-ended questions, following the two prompts adapted from Singer's suggestions and the poverty appeal about Rokia, opinions and thoughts were collected from the sixty participants in both the Singer and control conditions in order to come up with recommendations and suggestions, as well as to determine the cause for the conclusions drawn from Slovic's lab experiment in 2009.

With regard to the Singer prompts, most participants stated that going through the initial prompts didn't affect their reaction and response to the poverty appeal they would've made otherwise, but saw how the prompts framed the issue in a way that helped stand out from the daily exposure to such appeals. Participants confirmed several pre-existing notions and theories about poverty appeals, particularly proximity, finding it easier to determine why the drowning child in close proximity should be saved. Participants also claimed that helping a child far away was difficult since the information about such situations couldn't be obtained

first-hand. The responses also support the notion that participants didn't believe that philanthropy was a moral obligation – rather perceiving it to be more of a 'good' thing to do, and citing religious reasons as one of the primary motives behind their personal donations.

One of the primary concerns unearthed was the donors' caution regarding poverty appeals. Many cited compassion fatigue and the constant and continuous exposure to stories, images and advertisements such as the poverty appeal utilized for the study as reasons for their skepticism regarding such causes, and distrust towards making donations. Donating to larger, global organizations with higher bureaucratic expenses was cited as a secondary caution disheartening donors.

Very little information was found to support the identifiable victim theory, however, this could be because this study didn't attempt to understand and uncover evidence supporting or disproving this theory, and didn't have any questions dealing with the phenomenon. While a few of the participants expressed a desire to see the money they donated helping Rokia in particular, and citing the fact that it wouldn't help her but someone similar to her equally in need as a reason against making a donation, many acknowledged Rokia as a representative of the issue of global poverty, and considered her a metaphor or simile to other such children, people and the issue itself. While the identifiable victim theory has been in use for effective poverty appeals in many instances, it's possible that awareness of the existence of such a theory has helped people see past this. With more access to information, the demographic targeted for this study, is more aware of the marketing tactics (such as identifiable victim theory) utilized in poverty appeals and hence more skeptical when presented with a single representative. Further research to determine the validity of the phenomenon could help

determine whether statistics and realistic numbers would be more effective with this particular demographic.

While no insight was gained to better understand the quantitative conclusions from the Slovic study, it's possible that the adapted prompts lead to the contrasting results in this study. While several participants did raise the concern raised in the Singer article used in the Slovic study – in particular their concern about where their money would go to (as discussed above), it's possible that a majority of the actual donations were made by individuals who didn't raise these concerns. Recreating this test on a larger scale involving a larger sample group could potentially eliminate these discrepancies and provide more insight into the subject matter.

Conclusion

The unexpected conclusions drawn from this study suggest that individuals can be trained to respond to poverty appeals utilizing moral reasoning as opposed to intuition thus being compelled to make larger, more effective donations. However, since the test included only sixty participants from an extremely selective sample population (of AU students), recreating it with a larger sample group more inclusive of the population in general would be beneficial. Recreating the Slovic lab study on a field level without adapting the prompts (as was done for this study) is another option to better validate the results that emerged from this study. While the boomerang effect, and in particular the theory of selective perception could explain the results from the Slovic study, further research, possibly through recreating the Slovic study on a larger scale could substantiate this.

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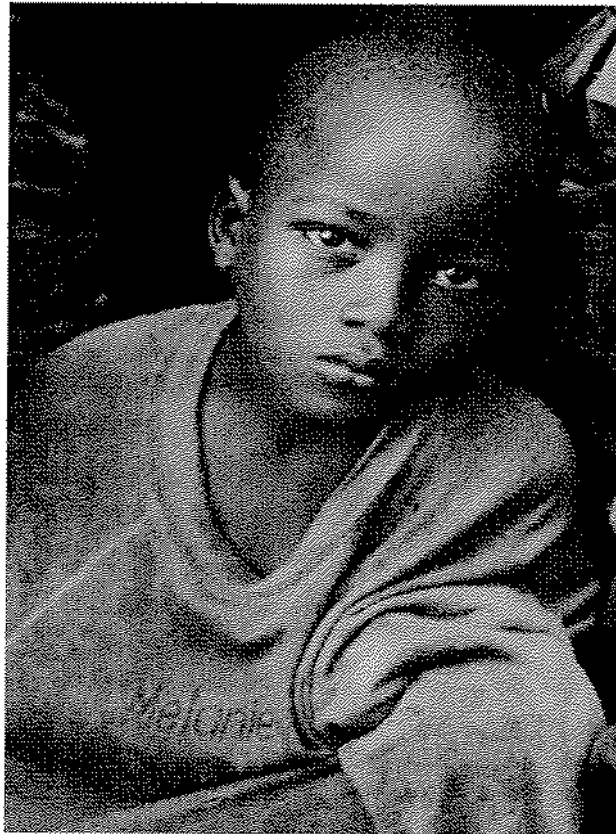
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Appendix**A: Poverty Appeal**

Rokia, 7 years old



Rokia, like most other children in her country, is desperately poor, and faces a threat of severe hunger or even starvation. Her life will be changed for the better as a result of your financial gift. With your support, and the support of other caring sponsors, *Save the Children* will work with Rokia's family and other members of the community to help feed her and provide her with an education, as well as basic medical care and hygiene.

B: Singer Article utilized in the Slovic Study

In my class on ethical thinking, I ask my students to imagine that their route to the university takes them past a shallow pond. One morning, you notice a child has fallen in the pond and appears to be drowning. To wade in and pull the child out would be easy but it will mean that you get your clothes wet and muddy, ruining an expensive new jacket and new pair of shoes.

I then ask the students: do you have any obligation to rescue the child? Unanimously, the students say they do. The importance of saving a child so far outweighs the cost of ruining one's new clothes that they refuse to consider it any kind of excuse for not saving the child.

Once we are all clear about our obligations to rescue the drowning child in front of us, I ask: would it make any difference if the child were far away, in another country perhaps, but similarly in danger of death, and equally within your means to save, at no great cost—and absolutely no danger—to yourself? Virtually all agree that distance and nationality make no moral difference to the situation. I then point out that we are all in that situation of the person passing the shallow pond: we can all save lives of people, both children and adults, who would otherwise die, and we can do so at a very small cost to us: the cost of a new CD, a shirt or a night out at a restaurant or concert, can mean the difference between life and death to more than one person somewhere in the world—and trustworthy overseas aid agencies like Oxfam overcome the problem of acting at a distance.

At this point the students raise various practical difficulties. Can we be sure that our donation will really get to the people who need it? Doesn't most aid get swallowed up in administrative costs, or waste, or downright corruption? Isn't the real problem the growing world population, and is there any point in saving lives until the problem has been solved? The questions can all be answered: but I also point out that even if a substantial proportion of our donations were wasted, the cost to us of making the donation is so small, compared to the benefits that it provides when it, or some of it, does get through to those who need our help, that we would still be saving lives at a small cost to ourselves—even if aid organizations were much less efficient than they actually are.