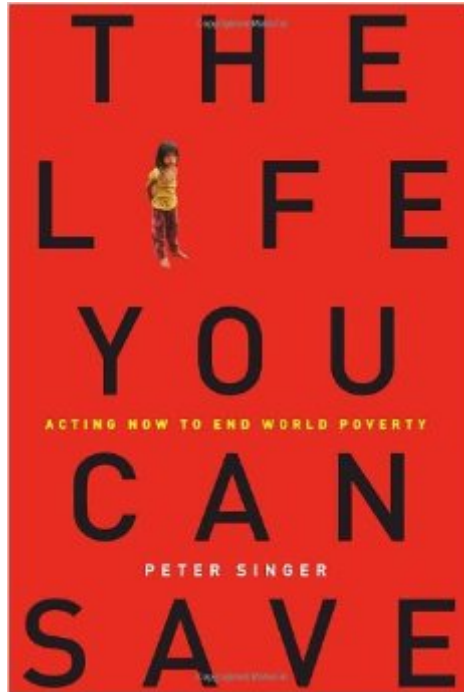


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The Life You Can Save: Acting Now To End World Poverty



Synopsis

This is the right time to ask yourself: "What should I be doing to help?" For the first time in history, it is now within our reach to eradicate world poverty and the suffering it brings. Yet around the world, a billion people struggle to live each day on less than many of us pay for bottled water. And though the number of deaths attributable to poverty worldwide has fallen dramatically in the past half-century, nearly ten million children still die unnecessarily each year. The people of the developed world face a profound choice: If we are not to turn our backs on a fifth of the world's population, we must become part of the solution. In *The Life You Can Save*, philosopher Peter Singer, named one of "The 100 Most Influential People in the World" by Time magazine, uses ethical arguments, provocative thought experiments, illuminating examples, and case studies of charitable giving to show that our current response to world poverty is not only insufficient but ethically indefensible. Singer contends that we need to change our views of what is involved in living an ethical life. To help us play our part in bringing about that change, he offers a seven-point plan that mixes personal philanthropy (figuring how much to give and how best to give it), local activism (spreading the word in your community), and political awareness (contacting your representatives to ensure that your nation's foreign aid is really directed to the world's poorest people). In *The Life You Can Save*, Singer makes the irrefutable argument that giving will make a huge difference in the lives of others, without diminishing the quality of our own. This book is an urgent call to action and a hopeful primer on the power of compassion, when mixed with rigorous investigation and careful reasoning, to lift others out of despair.

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Customer Reviews

In high school philosophy, we read Singer's brief article that has been called the "Singer Solution to Poverty," (actually entitled "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"). I first read it in 2001 but he authored it in 1971. It changed the way I think of poverty. "The Life You Can Save" is an extrapolation of the above-mentioned argument, and a response to the critics who dismissed his 1971 argument as unfair, unrealistic or simply unnecessary. His credentials: Singer has been lecturing, writing and researching world poverty for more than 30 years, and, as with his 30-year study and defense of animal rights, Singer is able to convince most any reasonable critic that his positions have unassailable merit. You can simplify this book's thesis by saying that if you fail to share the part of your income that is beyond what you need for a comfortable life, then that failure to share is a moral wrongdoing. In other words, if you can meet all of your shelter, food, education, transportation and other practical needs with \$200 weekly, then any additional dollars you make above \$200 should be given to responsible charities like Oxfam or to low-interest micro-lending institutions like Yunus's Grameen Bank. So, whom do you share your money with? With what Singer calls the "extreme poor"-- those with little access to food or clean water, health care, education, protection from guerrilla warfare, etc. (Check out sites like Give Well and Charity Navigator to help determine which groups make the most of your money.) This is in contrast to Europe's and North America's "relative poor" who are hard-off, but still usually have shelter and clean water/food. One way I like to describe his thesis is as a 'redefinition of luxury.' We may think mostly of sports cars, jewelry, iPods, plasma TVs and the like as the only luxuries, but as Singer points out, if you're drinking bottled water while you read this even though you have access to clean tap water then you are spending money on at least one thing you don't need. That said, no one, not Singer or anyone else, would argue that money solves all problems. What does help is a cultural mind-shift. If we consume fewer luxuries, we are better off, and if we share our extra wealth with organizations that feed, shelter and medicate the poor, then we are also better off, globally. In this case, money can help get things going, but it's not a panacea; our actions will change the world, not just our cash. Of course, you can spend locally as well. I prefer to donate time and labor to causes like homelessness and such, because your money gets stretched much farther in Haiti or Cameroon through Oxfam than it does in the U.S. I also think it's worth considering that U.S. shelters do get some gov't assistance from HUD and other sources, whereas a village in Belize probably doesn't get any grants at all. It's important to understand that this isn't a guilt-focused book. If I teach my children that they ought to refrain from

littering, I am not trying to guilt-trip them into environmental stewardship. It's an examination of the consequences of our actions and non-actions. If, eventually, we agree to accept a lesser degree of entertainment and comfort in order to "make poverty history," then nearly everyone will enjoy a greater quality of life. Examples: Think of the multibillion-dollar monument New York wants to build to memorialize 9/11 victims, or war monuments or on parades and athletic events. Or the billions we spend sending rockets and satellites to outer space. Or the \$5 billion spent on the 2008 election cycle. Is it possible that money for monuments, fountains, statues, public art sculptures, trips to Mars, the Moon, elections, luxurious political and celebrity parties, etc. could better be spent taking care of our world's poor? A final thought: you don't need to buy this \$14 book either. Better to rent it from your library and give the \$14 to an impoverished person. Or if you do buy it, share it with at least 10 other people before donating it to a library that doesn't have it.

In this relatively short book, Professor Singer makes an extremely compelling case for why it is morally obligatory for capable individuals to aid beings that suffer. Those that are familiar with his previous work will recognize his basic arguments on poverty, which he has been expanding upon for over three decades. For those who are unfamiliar with Peter Singer, the argument he expands upon in this book is quoted as follows...1.) "Suffering and death from lack of food, shelter and medical care are bad."2.) "If it is in your power to prevent something bad from happening, without sacrificing anything nearly as important, it is wrong not to do so."3.) "By donating to aid agencies, you can prevent suffering and death from lack of food, shelter and medical care, without sacrificing anything nearly as important." - - - - - Conclusion - "Therefore, if you do not donate to aid agencies, you are doing something wrong." This argument is valid, and I think sound, so if one is to reject the conclusion, one MUST reject one (or more) of the premises. If they accept the premises, then they MUST accept the conclusion. Professor Singer's logic is solid throughout. His writing is both lucid and entertaining, making this work accessible, absorbing and crucially important to philosophers and philosophical novices alike. This is simply a must read for everyone.

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