|  |
| --- |
|  |
| Hunger & Poverty |
| Applied Ethics |
|  |
| *Francy Rios* |
| **12/12/2013** |

|  |
| --- |
|  |

World hunger and poverty is perhaps one of the most controversial issues that have caused many debates. Scholars and ethical thinkers from all over the world have put their many different opinions out in the open and have provided possible solutions for the issue. World hunger and poverty is a critically serious matter, millions of people are dying of malnutrition and poverty and as the years go by the statistics drastically increase. Larry May, author of *Applied Ethics*, states that poverty does not only lead to death, but it can also lead to over population, war, and violence. May states that poor and uneducated women tend to have more children and that birth rates tend to drop when poverty is alleviated. May states that in a research done by Oxford economist Paul Collier it is suggested that poverty is the most important contributing factor to civil war. Collier quotes, if a country’s per capita income doubles, its risk of conflict drops by roughly half. May asks, “What, then are we to do? What is the proper response to world poverty? Does the suffering of others impose any duties on us? How straightening are these duties?” (204). To help answer these questions, Larry May uses six scholar and philosophical thinkers’ different ideas and perspectives.

Garrett Hardin, author of *Carrying Capacity as an Ethical Concept*, discusses how supplying only food worsens political and economic strife, agricultural dependency, over population, and environmental degradation. Hardin argues that there’s much more than just providing food, which can be done to help alleviate the hungry. “To send food only to a country already populated beyond the carrying capacity of its land is to collaborate in the further destruction of the land and the further impoverishment of its people.” (212) Nonetheless the more you feed the hungry, the more hungry they will get. Not only so, but it will eventually end up affecting the land over all and worsen the economy. Hardin then goes on to explain that people are selfishly benefiting from the act of feeding the hungry. For example, how the P.L. 480 system that has become a huge benefit for American farmers. American farmers are growing crops, selling it to the government which then is sold to the poor and lesser price. But who is really benefiting of this act? Not the poor. Hardin explains that the P.L 480 allows the farmers to act in self-interest. This system was also beneficial to stockholders, railroad employees, grain elevator operators, and even agricultural research scientist. If many benefit from the P.L. 480, then who is sacrificed? The citizens of the United States; nearly two hundred million people are directly or indirectly giving money to this system. Garrett Hardin emphasizes that we can “never merely do one thing.” (206) In other words, there has to be a collaboration of acts that can equally and positively alleviate nutritional, political, and economic issues.

In his essay, *Feeding the Hungry*, Jan Narveson argues that we are not obligated to feed the hungry whom we did not make hungry. Narveson starts his argument by defining the word “starve”, he goes on to explain that the word can function as a passive verb which indicates that something happens to one, and it can function as an active verb which indicates something inflicted by one person on another. From this definition Narveson concludes that starvation is a form of killing, although Narveson completely disagrees with that it. He believes that unless one is responsible for another person’s suffering then one shouldn’t have to alleviate that person’s suffering. In order to be held liable for a person’s death one must have committed an act which lead to the person’s death. Narveson believes that letting someone die for a reason that they would have still died from if another person didn’t exist is not the same as killing. In his essay Narveson goes on to explaining the differences between charity and justice. According to Narveson *charity* means an emotionally tinged desire to benefit other people just because they need it, and on the contrary *justice* is when something is forcibly compelled upon people to do. Narveson believes that people shouldn’t be obligated to feed the hungry if they do not want to; instead it should be something that comes from within and not forced upon. Narveson also explains what the ethics of *hair shirt* is and why is also disagrees with it. Hair shirt expects you to “benefit others, at the expense of yourself –and keep doing it until you are as poor and miserable as those whose poverty and misery you are supposed to be relieving.” (216) Narveson believes that this view makes us slaves of the (supposedly) well off, he states that”legally and morally, both [the rich and the poor] are held to the same strict requirement, to refrain from inflicting evils on anyone, rich or poor.” (217) Retracting back to the main point of the essay, starving and allowing to starve are nevertheless morally equivalent, just as people shouldn’t demanded to feed the hungry nor held responsible for the deaths of those who die of starvation.

In his essay, *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*, Peter Singer argues that every dollar spent on luxuries is an unjustified use of our money. Singer explains that industrialized and developed countries have an obligation to help alleviate third world countries of poverty and hunger. The decisions and actions of those whom have power can prevent suffering of others. In his article Singer expresses that we should step outside of the box and not only helps the poor in our own country but other underdeveloped countries. Unlike Jan Narveson, Singer believes that there is no distinction between duty (justice) and charity. “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.” (221) Singer claims that neither the people nor the government can deny being aware of what is happening around the world. Millions of people in many parts of the world are dying from malnutrition and lack of food and if wealthy people make decisions and tale actions to help the poor, there will be less suffering for the less fortunate.

In his essay, *A Cosmopolitan Perspective on the Global Economic Order*, Thomas Pogge takes the same stand as Peter Singer on poverty and hunger. Pogge demands that alleviating global poverty is not a choice, it is a mandate. According to Pogge, the well off are in fact responsible for the poverty and hunger that exist in the world. Next, he argues that we actually do have duties to help the poor. “By shaping and enforcing the social condition that, foreseeable and avoidably, cause the monumental suffering of global poverty, we are harming the global poor –or to put it more descriptively, we are active participants in the largest, though not the gravest, crime against humanity ever committed.” (228) Billions of people around the world are suffering from hunger, malnutrition, child labor and trafficking, deprivation of clean water, lack of education and much more; yet little is being done by those who have the power to do so. Pogge believes that the advantages and actions of the wealthy harm the poor. Later on in his essay, Pogge goes on to explain that the historical background of a nation is primarily the reason why that nation is either rich or poor. Pogge also explains how radical inequality is also a major factor in the enormous living differences between the rich and the poor. Radical inequality is the cause of the stereotyping of people by race, gender, and economic standing. Pogge believes that the reason why wealthy people are harming the poor is because they are taking all the natural resources in which the poor are entitled to. These resources should be distributed equally amongst every nation and region. Using these arguments, Pogge supports his claims that the wealthy are entitled to help alleviate the less fortunate from hunger and poverty.

In her essay, *Sex & Consequences: World Population Growth vs. Reproduction*, Margaret P. Battin takes a different outlook on what can be a possible solution to world over-population. In her essay, Battin addresses to major problems which are global population and reproductive rights. Battin proposes that the best way to prevent excessive population growth is by providing women with automatic and reversible contraception’s which can prevent unwanted pregnancies. Battin goes on to explain that overpopulation doesn’t exist because women are purposely conceiving children, but because many women of low resources are getting pregnant accidentally. Battin expresses that there have been many different forms of contraception. We have gone from using roots, herbs, potions, arsenic, and much more to using douches, diaphragms, pills, injections and more. There can and will always be a form of contraception. Battin discusses how feminist critics have been examining the nature of the programs designed to control population growth. These feminist critics believe that these programs are specifically designed to control women. Ironically, these programs were designed by men. Feminist believe that the population policy is racist, sexist, and classist; by the way it blames women of rapid reproduction. Battin proposes that contraception’s’ such as subdermal implants, which is reversible, that can prevent pregnancy up to eight years. Batting argues that this solution to overpopulation can be ethical and effective as long every woman who isn’t ready for pregnancy complies and uses the contraception.

In *Perils Amid Promises of Genetically Modified Foods* Mae-Wan Ho argues that agricultural biotechnologies cause irreparable harm to biodiversity, human, and animal health. For many people agricultural biotechnology is a big business in which many people can benefit from. For example, it is known for providing food for the hungry. Ho strongly believes that this type of food cannot alleviate the existing food crisis. Although it is seem that agricultural biotechnologies can be beneficial for some people, Ho discusses that on the contrary the problem with agricultural biotechnologies is that it would be providing food of low quality and will cause problems for farmers who would have difficulties selling their crops. Ho expresses that people who eat food made from agricultural biotechnologies can be harmed by the chemicals used to make the food. Although agricultural biotechnology food is cheap affordable, it depletes the value of food. “In order to counteract the crisis of environmental destruction, loss of agricultural land, and indigenous biodiversity created by decades of intensive farming, there has been a global move toward holistic organic farming methods that revive traditional practices.” (251) Mae-Wan Ho believes that a drastic change of direction is required; she believes that one of the best way to secure the peoples’ safety is by providing diversity within the food source and a return to sustainable traditional agriculture.

John Stuart Mills had many beliefs which tied back to the greatest principle of happiness. Mills believed that a person has the liberty to do as they please as long as they don’t harm others. Mills also believed that a person may set a bad example for others by their actions and in that way do harms to others. In relation to hunger and poverty, the right thing to do is what will make a person happy. For example if a person is wealthy and helps the poor because it makes both of them happy then it is the right thing to do. Also, one person who is genuinely charitable can set a positive example for others. Socrates and Plato are two rationalist philosophers whom believed that the moral life is what brings happiness. Both philosophical thinkers believed that a good act is not a good act because God says that it is, but because it is useful to us in our efforts to be better and happier people. Taking a stand on hunger and poverty with this perspective it is safe to say that it relates Jan Narveson’s perspective. Both Socrates and Plato would agree that people shouldn’t do charity or feed the hungry because it is what they are *supposed* to do, but because it is something that is moral and can bring happiness to people. Philosopher Immanuel Kant believes that morality is derived from rationality. Kant believed that an action is good not by the ends achieved or on the basis of its consequences but solely by the will that determines the action. In other words, people shouldn’t feed the hungry because it will alleviate and bring happiness to them but because feeding the hungry is the moral and rational thing to do.

World hunger and poverty is a very controversial issue which may never be fully solved. The issue raises many arguments and debates. Many believe that it is because of the wealthy that the poor are suffering, and others believe that the wealthy have nothing to do with the deaths of those who die of starvation. Personally, I believe that there will never really be a solution to this problem. It is merely impossible to alleviate the millions of poor people around the world. The essay in which I can relate the most was Jan Narveson’s *Feeding the Hungry* because I completely agree with this argument. I strongly believe that it should not be an obligation to feed the hungry and that the wealthy or well-off people shouldn’t be held responsible for the death of worse-off people who die across the world. Also, I believe that it’s not charity if it’s not from the heart. People should *want* to volunteer and feed the hungry, not be forced to do so. This issue will continue to raise arguments and debates because of fact that it is an issue which despite the many solutions, may not ever be solved.