

PHI 202 | Precept on lectures 1 and 2

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Readings:

Shaw, W. (2006). The Consequentialist Perspective.

Singer, P. (1972). Famine, Affluence, and Morality.

Discussion questions:

(1) In the first lecture, Prof. Frick presented a number of hypothetical scenarios such as *Grenade*, *Organ Transplant*, and *Trolley*. He then asked you whether you think that particular actions are required, permissible, or impermissible. He was not asking you to report what ethical theory you subscribe to. Instead, he was asking you what *intuitions* you have. What are intuitions? What role do they play in ethical theorizing?

(2) Is there a *morally relevant* difference between (a) saving a child drowning in a shallow pond and (b) donating money to charitable organisations to save lives and alleviate suffering of people in need in distant countries?

(3) Singer imagines that the pond in which the child is drowning is shallow. Why is this feature important?

(4) Consider the following case due to Shelly Kagan (1989):

A building across the street is on fire. You know that there is a child trapped inside. You take the risk and enter the building. Inside, you find the child as well as a beautiful parrot. As it happens, you are a lover of birds and saving this parrot would bring you a lot of joy. Unfortunately, you can only save either the child or else the parrot. Is it permissible for you to save the parrot?

What does this case have in common with giving to charitable organisations?

(5) Which charitable organisations should we donate to if we want to do the most good? Note that some causes may be more important than others and that some organisations may be more effective than others. Compare your intuitive responses with the recommendations of Give Well.

(6) You will spend roughly 80,000 hours at work in your life. This will be the single most time-consuming activity in your life. In most cases, you will choose a career early on and stick to it until retirement. Thus, your career choice is really important. What career should you choose if you want to do the most good?