Ideas and Suggestions for Solving Poverty

Poverty is a long-standing problem that can be traced at the start of the discovery of private property at the beginning of human race. Though the history, there have been a lot of philosophers such as Plato and Confucius, who want to solve this problem. But poverty still exist now. According to Anup Shah, “At least 80% of humanity lives on less than $10 a day.” (2013). Therefore, a lot of current philosophers and professors want to share their opinion about changing world poverty. For example, in the article named “Changing the Face of Poverty,” Diana George claims that the current visual representation of poverty needs to be changed. And in the article named “The Singer Solution to World Poverty,” Peter Singer, an Australian philosopher, suggests that people should donate all the money that is not necessary. This essay will briefly summarize and discuss both George and Singer’s idea, and also personal suggestion about solving poverty will be provided.

First of all, Singer’s idea focused on what individuals can do to solve poverty. He believes that the poverty exists because the money people donate is not enough. According to Singer’s article, the money that the United States contribute to world poverty is at 0.09 percent of the total national product, which is much less than some of the small countries. So he suggested that “Whatever money you’re spending on luxuries, not necessities, should be given away”
(1999). He also point out that people usually refuse to donate money because the others do not donate money either. And he believe that such action is wrong and will not be forgiven.

In contract, George’s statement point out the problem in representation of poverty. She believes that the visual representation used by non-profit organization, such as Habitat for Humanity, can give people a stereotype of poverty. In George’s (2001) article, “In such images, poverty is dirt and rags and helplessness.” Such stereotype can make people feel that poverty is easy to see and then ignore those poor people who need help but don’t look poor. So the way people represent poverty, which is using poor people’s photos and videos, must change. Then it will be easier for all poor people to get help.

Both statements seems reasonable. I, however, believe that Singer’s proposal is hard to achieve in modern society and George’s idea is more excitable. Singer’s statement is just like those ancient philosophers’ idea, which is to equalize everyone’s income. Actually if this method is executed worldwide, the poverty problem will be solved. But, in my opinion, such suggestion will not work for two reasons. First of all, due to Singer’s calculation, the necessities should be 30,000$ per year for an American citizen. But the citizen should also save some money for an emergency. If a citizen donates all his money that is not “necessary”, then a car accident happened, the citizen would fall into a really serious problem. So the saved money for emergency is also necessary. This amount of money should be decided by the citizen. Secondly, people’s perspective of luxuries is different from each other. For example, if a computer programmer wants to buy a laptop, it is not luxurious for him to buy a high-functional laptop because it improves his working efficiency. So it is impossible to define “luxuries” with a fixed amount of money. All in all, people can sacrifice some money on luxuries for donation, but most people can’t do what Singer expected.
Compared to Singer’s idea, I would more likely agree with George’s statement. When the poor look happy and wearing clean clothes, people begin to wonder if they are really poor. This is because current visual representation of poverty created a stereotype which makes people believe that poor people are all in deep despair. But some organizations have already realized the problem and began to use animations instead of poor people’s photos and videos. For example, World Vision Australia has posted some animations which explain poverty to people. In those animations, poor people are symbolized as sketch people. And usually there is a voice-over which explains all the data and trying to convince you. Those animations can show people the current poverty status and the cause. Some of them even offer some suggestions about what individuals can do to reduce poverty. As media technology continues to develop, one day we might see that photos of those in poverty are completely replaced by new representation method like animation.

Both George and Singer provide thoughtful suggestions for dealing with the world’s poverty. But it is very difficult for individuals or non-profit organization to really solve that problem. What we can do is try our best to reduce the amount of poor people. In my opinion, individuals and non-profit organization should use the donation to focus on building school for kids in poor areas. This is because schools can provide both safety and education to children. And when kids grow up, they are more likely to find a higher income job with a higher education level. In the long round, those relatively educated kids may bring their family out of the circle of poverty. In William Parrett’s (2016) article, he provides a basic template for setting up a High-Poverty School. Also he gave a story about a boy Luis, Luis learned English from High-Poverty School and then taught his family English. So if those High-Poverty Schools were build all over the world, it actually reduce world poverty.
Nowadays, poverty is still a serious global issue. A lot of people had already given some suggestion for reducing poverty. Singer suggest that people should donate all their money they spend on luxuries. But it is hard for people to really do that. However, George’s idea about changing the current visual representation of poverty is more likely to work. And people had already developed a new media representation method which is animation. Personally, I believe that building schools in poor areas can reduce poverty to a certain extent. But it is hard to against poverty in this world. Each individual, organization and even government need to work together to solve it.
Reference


