

Task 2

“Helping is not, as conventionally thought, a charitable act that is praiseworthy to do but not wrong to omit. It is something that everyone ought to do” – Peter Singer

In his quote from *Practical Ethics*, Peter Singer invites us to rethink the notion of help. He writes that help is no longer something one is participating in freely, rather help is something that one is ethically obliged to do. To be and act ethically in this world, we must help each other. In this essay, I will argue that in order even to act and be in this world, we are reliant on help. I will argue, with Singer, that there is no other option than to participate in helping. In order to do so, I will categorize help into a threefold structure: helping-up, helping-together and helping-down. The fundamental thesis of this essay is that help is not only a part of the world, but constitutive in the way the world lays itself out.

Helping-up, helping-together and helping down

When encountering the word help, the first thing which comes to mind is the notion of charity. One might imagine the ethical act of giving a stray dog food. In this example, the giver is giving something away to the dog. This presupposes that the giver has food. So, we might say then that helping is an act of sacrificing something you have for someone who needs it. I will call this *helping-down*. Despite, this being the common notion of help, *helping-down* does not encompass the full scope of helping. There is also the idea of *helping-together*. An example of this is sharing: two people might share their thoughts in order to achieve a greater overall understanding. Or friends might share a house to more efficiently pay off the loans. Helping-together is an act of creation, a constructive act. This is because things often work in a synergistic way together, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Lastly, there is a notion of help which we often forget culturally—namely *helping-up*. An example, albeit brutal, of this is participating in a war. Only through the laying down of one’s life for a nation, or an idea, can one participate in the glory of that nation or idea. In this manner, the one who has less can still help those who have more. The stray dog can become loyal to its helper, and thereby through participation improve the life of its helper despite its lack of resources. The act of loyalty and submission is in itself valuable.

The inability to abstain from choosing

Now, as we’ve established the 3-fold structure of helping: *helping-down*, *helping-together*, and *helping-up*. Let us explore the Singer’s notion of the obligation to help. We often think that

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helping is something we choose to participate in. This presupposes that there is a state of being which does not require help to sustain itself. In a sense, it requires us to presuppose an independent identity which is not touched by anything. It is something akin to the Cartesian theatre, where one could just lie down and watch the drama play out.

However, we do not have the privilege of being disembodied and static perceivers in an everchanging world. Rather, we are thrown in this world and exist within a series of events. The event of being born, of writing an essay, the event of death. We are not endowed to a position of non-position – at least not in our day-to-day life. Life progresses eternally forward and if we perceive ourselves to stand still, we are moving backwards – we must run only to keep still. Therefore, we only have the option; to help or negate help – to hinder.

The ontological necessity of help

I will now argue that the world can only exist through help. You, me nor the chair could exist without the threefold structure of helping. *Helping-down* is the building block of all sustainability, all continuation throughout time. To demonstrate this, we might imagine the opposite – *hindering-down*. The world of *hindering-down* is a world of tyranny: the king which steals and the state which lies. Eventually, these systems collapse in on itself. The king has only the power endowed to him by the people – without helping-down history becomes a series of class-revolutions. *Helping-down*, however, strengthens both the people and the state. Ontologically, we might also say, lessening the anthropomorphism of the argument, that any object in the world must *help-down*. Any biological system, with a set of genes, must obey the laws of its components: I must eat so that my cells have energy, and if I eat something which is poisonous to my organs I will die.

Helping-together creates the movement within time. If all things *hinder-together*, being will not lay itself out. *Hindering-together* would entail abstaining from all contact, all speak, all thought – and fundamentally all being itself. The millions of chemical reactions occurring within my body allowing me to be dynamic and act within time. Without helping-together, there would be no energy in the universe – no flow from hot to cold.

Lastly, helping-up binds and creates different layers of being and abstraction. If a collection of people only would *hinder-up*, there would be no concept of the state. Atoms and molecules would lay themselves out as identities, as things. For the chair you sit on to be, the atoms and molecules must participate and subjugate themselves to the structure of the chair. The identity of the chair informs, in a sense, the boundary condition through within which the atoms can be manifest. And so,

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to *hinder-up* would be suicide. It would mean losing the ability to participate in identity through higher order levels of being and abstraction.

Finishing remarks

Conclusively, we've expanded the definition of help as *helping-up, helping-down and helping-together*. We've seen how, through the rejection of the Cartesian theatre, we cannot abstain from the question to help or to hinder. Thirdly, we've seen the fundamental impotency of hindering. Ontologically, the activity of helping binds the world together, so that we too can be and act in being. We might say that this 3-fold structure is the structure of: emanation (*helping-down*), love (*helping-together*) and emergence (*helping-up*). The threefold structure of the state, the lover and of the poet. These are interlinked, and love is always the answer. Only through the mutual reliance and togetherness can the parts unite to form a whole. And only through love can the whole emanate down its structure and empower the parts with its identity. And the choice of hinderance is only a pseudo-option – a bad trick. Even suicide would not work, for the option and identity of suicide exists only within being through help. There is a deep continuity between all things. And those who hinder will be burnt by its painful impotency. Those who hinder will suffer only from their inability to hinder.