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The limits of moral responsibility for global poverty*

Abstract

Most people, especially in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, suffer and die from lack of food, shelter, and medical care, whereas other people in rich countries are extremely well-off. Because of the globalization process neither individuals nor governments can claim to be unaware of what is happening in the Third World. In this paper I defend the claim that, since we are living in a “global village”, we have greater moral responsibility for poverty. Thus, our moral responsibility is less limited than it usually seems to be.

However, we do not have to be extremely impartial, which is recommended by utilitarianism (Garrett Hardin, Peter Singer), concentrating only on the consequences of action and its utility (agent-neutral evaluation). Yet, what we can include in our moral evaluation of poverty are human rights and an individual point of view, which are defended by Amartya Sen’s capability approach and Thomist framework (agent-relative evaluation).

Keywords: global poverty, moral responsibility, utilitarianism, capability approach

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1. Introduction

Although in 1990–2015 an unprecedented progress was achieved in the fight against global poverty—while the global population grew by 2 billion people, over 1 billion emerged from extreme poverty—11 out of 100 people still endure in the conditions referred to as “mass poverty” (J. K. Galbraith), “absolute poverty” (P. Singer), “irreducible core of poverty” (A. Sen), or “the poverty that kills” (J. Sachs). Deprivation of this type is usually determined by an income that is equal to or lower than US\$1.9 per person per day. Currently, about 767 million inhabitants of our planet face such a situation,¹ not being able to meet their own basic needs. In the Third World countries, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, population is dealing with chronic hunger, lack of basic medical care, lack of drinking water and sanitary equipment, lack of shelter and clothing, and finally, lack of primary education.²

The said state of affairs coexists with the affluence of highly developed countries and with the processes of globalization, which are mostly occurring between these countries. What is globalization and why does it stir up such extreme opinions? Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize laureate in Economics, gives the following answer:

It is the closer integration of the countries and peoples of the world which has been brought about by the enormous reduction of costs of transportation and communication, and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flows of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and (to a lesser extent) people across borders. Globalization has been accompanied by the creation of new institutions that have joined with existing ones³ to work across borders. (2002, p. 9)⁴

The issue to be addressed here concerns the question to what extent we, the inhabitants of developed countries (especially of Europe and the North America) living in the times when all the socioeconomic processes known as globalization are taking place, are morally responsible for the occurrence of global poverty?⁵ Where do the citizens of affluent countries draw the line of moral responsibility

¹ The literature on the subject provides many definitions of poverty and ways of measuring it (identification and aggregation). The commonly used terms are: poverty as a lack of income, poverty as a failure to satisfy basic needs, and poverty as a lack of capabilities. An overview of various concepts of poverty is presented in Amartya Sen (1982).

² The information on global poverty can be found in the United Nations databases, in the materials of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), for example in the issued annually *Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone*. See also World Bank (2016, pp. 3–7). The grave situation that populations of impoverished countries must face is also examined by J.D. Sachs (2005).

³ Among these organizations are: the UN, the IMF, the WB, the WHO, the ILO. The international corporations that move goods and services as well as technologies across borders also stimulate the globalization process.

⁴ An interesting analysis of globalization from the sociological perspective is presented by Zygmunt Bauman (2000).

⁵ The matter falls within the scope of so-called “development ethics”. An overview of issues from this field is offered by David A. Crocker (1998, pp. 39–44).

for “the poverty that kills”? The question formulated this way implies that the main subject with whom moral responsibility for global poverty rests and on whom these considerations will concentrate is each resident of highly developed countries. Therefore, the focus will be on an individual, though the issue of the responsibility of a state (government) as well as of international organizations and corporations will be also addressed indirectly.

For the purposes of this article, “the limit of moral responsibility for global poverty” will be defined as the level of aid that we give to the inhabitants of impoverished countries, which if reduced will make us morally responsible for deaths of these people. In other words, the limit of moral responsibility is established when, for moral reasons, i.e. because of our obligation to aid the poor, we cannot help any less, and at the same time, we cannot be expected to help more.⁶

The central thesis, which the author will seek to support in the further considerations, is that with the globalization processes taking place, the limit of moral responsibility for global poverty is reaching further, i.e. the scope of the moral duty to take control of the situation is being expanded. To confirm the validity of the thesis, the article will examine a line of arguments of the supporters and the opponents of providing the inhabitants of poor countries with assistance. Let us begin with considering the extreme views which are expressed by the utilitarians or the consequentialists.

2. Should we do all it takes to alleviate poverty?

The most extreme thesis based on the utilitarian premises relating to the aid to the impoverished might have been proposed by the biologist Garrett Hardin in the 1970s, stating that, bearing in mind the moral reasons, we should not give any help to the poor at all (1974, pp. 38–43, 123–126). To support his radical view, which establishes tighter limits of moral responsibility for global poverty (if not denies the existence of such responsibility altogether), Hardin employs the metaphor of a “lifeboat”:

So here we sit, say 50 people in our lifeboat. To be generous, let us assume it has room for 10 more, making a total capacity of 60. Suppose the 50 of us in the lifeboat see 100 others swimming in the water outside, begging for admission to our boat or for handouts. We have several options: we may be tempted to try to live by the Christian ideal of being “our brother’s keeper,” or by the Marxist ideal of “to each according to his needs.” Since the needs of all in the water are the same, and since they can all be seen as “our brothers,” we could take them all into our boat, making a total of 150 in a boat designed for 60. The boat swamps, everyone drowns. Complete justice, complete catastrophe. (1974, p. 38)

⁶ In the context of global poverty, three types of aid are usually distinguished: (1) humanitarian aid, which is sent in the case of natural disasters or catastrophes, (2) the aid provided through charitable organizations, and (3) development aid extended by highly developed countries (see: Moyo, 2009).

Working on the assumptions of Malthusianism, according to which the world population increase is disproportionate to the existing possibilities of supplying everyone with food, Hardin asserts that any action to alleviate the situation of the poor undertaken by affluent countries will bring an inevitable disaster to all. The scholar believes that the metaphor is a great analogy to the current states of affairs: the passengers of the lifeboat are inhabitants of affluent countries, while those who swim nearby and ask to get onto the boat are the numerous inhabitants of the Third World. If we decide to help them, it will result in an imminent catastrophe on a global scale since the activities aimed at bringing help to developing countries will lead to a large increase in the poor population, and consequently, these short-term benefits will bring about even more severe poverty in the future. In addition, if the poor rely on the help from other countries, they will stop worrying about securing their own future, stop saving money and lose their ability to predict disasters. Such a policy, along with the influx of poor emigrants, will impoverish significantly the countries that are rich today, making them even more incapable of overcoming the future crisis. The inhabitants of affluent countries owe an obligation to their fellow citizens and their descendants (their own children). They cannot generously give away the resources which belong to succeeding generations. Supposing that Hardin's arguments are well founded, it is still necessary to consider whether we should help at least some of those in need, even if we cannot afford to help them all. Hardin's premises and the metaphor of the lifeboat reveal that we should also reject the duty of helping in such a limited way, because we do not have a good rule to distinguish between those who should be saved and those who should not.

Peter Singer, the acclaimed ethicist, argues with Hardin's reasoning. Though also examining the issue of global poverty from the utilitarian perspective, he arrives at entirely different conclusions. To present his view on the obligation to help the inhabitants of impoverished countries, Singer (1999) draws an example of a shallow pond.

The path from the library at my university to the humanities lecture theatre passes a shallow ornamental pond. Suppose that on my way to give a lecture I notice that a small child has fallen in and is in danger of drowning. Would anyone deny that I ought to wade in and pull the child out? This will mean getting my clothes muddy and either cancelling my lecture or delaying it until I can find something dry to change into; but compared with the avoidable death of a child this is insignificant. (p. 229)

Singer insists that in the given instance, we should help the drowning child since what we must sacrifice (clothing, time) does not compare to the value of human life. Likewise, we should help the people of developing countries as long as it does not involve sacrificing something of similar moral significance. To convey even the essence of the problem of helping the poor more clearly, let us refer to another example—the example of an envelope, formulated by Peter Unger (1996), which elaborates on Singer's idea:

In your mailbox, there's something from UNICEF. After reading it through, you correctly believe that, unless you soon send in a check for \$100, then, instead of each living many more years, over thirty more children will die soon. But, you throw the material in your trash basket, including the convenient return envelope provided. You send nothing, and, instead of living many years, over thirty more children soon die than would have had you sent in the requested \$100. (p. 9)

What makes these two instances so different—asks Unger—that in the case of saving the child's life we are inclined to say that it would be cruel not to do so, but we do not have the same conviction when it comes to sending a cheque for \$100, which could save far more lives? Singer would reply that there are no morally significant differences between the two given instances that could justify not helping the poor.

To explain the obligation (duty) to help the poor and thus, the acceptance of greater moral responsibility for global poverty, Singer (1999, pp. 230–231) presents the following reasoning:

Zeroth premise: The principle of equal consideration of interests (the principle of impartiality),⁷ which says that “we give equal weight in our moral deliberations to the like interests of all those affected by our actions” (Singer, 1999, p. 21; Singer, 2002, p. 147).⁸

First premise: If we can prevent something bad without sacrificing anything of comparable significance, we ought to do it.⁹

Second premise: Absolute poverty is bad.

Third premise: There is some absolute poverty we can prevent without sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance.

Conclusion: We ought to prevent some absolute poverty.

Let us analyse briefly the above reasoning in terms of how it limits to the obligation of helping the poor. Premise 1 is of key importance when discussing the limits to the moral obligation to help the poor and the narrowing down of the scope of moral responsibility for global poverty. To clarify what these limitations really are, the premise can be reformulated as follows: we should prevent something bad from happening, provided that (a) we can prevent it and (b) we do not have to sacrifice anything of similar moral significance. Out of the limits ac-

⁷ According to Singer (2002, p. 147), the principle of universalisation, or the equality principle, may play a similar role in the given context.

⁸ I refer to it as “Zeroth premise” because it stems from Singer's reasoning, though the scholar did not name it directly himself while constructing his line of argument. Singer starts his considerations with Premise 1.

⁹ Unger believes Premise 1 put forward by Singer may be interpreted in a more restrictive way—as an obligation to help only certain people, and not as a general obligation to help people in need. For this reason, he suggests reformulating Premise 1, for instance as: “Other things being even nearly equal, if your behaving in a certain way will result in the number of people who very prematurely lose their lives being less than the number who'll do so if you don't so behave and if even, so you'll still be at least reasonably well off, then it's seriously wrong for you not to so behave” (Unger, 1996, p. 58).

cepted by Singer, the condition (a) involves a limitation saying that ought implies can, i.e. I ought to provide assistance as long as I can do it, while the condition (b) imposes restrictions regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of helping, its counterproductivity and the minimum partiality that a person providing the aid maintains (Singer, 1999, pp. 231–234).

The close connection between the obligation to provide help and the possibility of such an action, which seems to be the case when adhering to the “ought implies can” principle, allows to support the claim that if I cannot help, I am not obliged to help as well as the assertion that if I can help, I have a duty to do so.¹⁰ Therefore, the principle in question may serve not to limit moral responsibility for global poverty, but to maximally increase it. Singer’s argument seems to lead into the same direction. Looking at the principle of impartiality (Premise 0), the ethicist writes:

When we have money to spend on luxuries and others are starving, however, it is clear that we can all give much more than we do give [...]. (Singer, 1999, p. 243)

Hence, only the condition (b) of Premise 1 discloses the limits to the obligation of helping the poor, and they are: effectiveness and efficiency of aid, its counterproductivity and the minimum partiality of the people who provide it.

Singer’s belief that the provided help should be efficient and used effectively is associated with probably one of the most controversial claims of this author related to the issue of global poverty. He believes that due to the problem of global overpopulation, we should stop giving assistance to the countries that refuse to introduce an effective birth control program, e.g. they do not agree to the promotion of contraception and sterilization or make the provided aid ineffective in any other way. The issue of counterproductivity consists in the fact that setting the level of aid too high is considered undesirable since it will be perceived as too difficult to achieve by those who are meant to provide it, and many of them will get discouraged.¹¹ Finally, the limitation regarding the minimum partiality lies in the fact that if someone close to me is in the situation similar to those of the inhabitant of the countries that are receiving help, namely in “absolute poverty”, then I can help this person first (Singer, 1999, pp. 231–234).

To better understand Singer’s ideas and to look at other possibilities that may justify limiting the obligation to help the impoverished, let us present a list of limitations Singer does not agree to. It is unacceptable, according to Singer, to refuse to help the poor for the following reasons: (1) belief that we are morally

¹⁰ Both claims are controversial as the duties to take an action cannot be based solely on the possibility of its implementation. Similar remarks regarding the principle of “ought implies can” are made by, among others, Kekes (1984, pp. 459–467).

¹¹ Owing to possible counterproductivity, Singer proposes to publicly support the obligation to allocate no more than 10% of our income for helping the poor. The ethicist can tell the difference between the consequences of the principles he proclaims (virtually unlimited obligation to help the poor) and of advocating them in public (Singer, 1999, p. 234).

responsible only for what we do, not for what we omit to do¹², (2) lack of awareness of poverty, lack of information on the subject, (3) physical distance between people who can help and those who need help, and special obligations to care for our relatives, (4) duty to look after ourselves first, (5) focus on property rights, (6) belief that aid is a praiseworthy act (supererogation¹³) and not our obligation, (7) belief that the provided assistance will only escalate the problem of poverty in the affected countries, (8) existence of a large number of people who can help instead of us, (9) conviction that the issue of help should be tackled only by the governments of developed countries (Singer, 1999, pp. 222–234).

The thesis that omission of action (allowing) resulting in someone's death is equivalent to killing someone¹⁴ brings Singer to conclusion that when we refuse to help the poor, "we are all murderers" (1999, p. 213). Does it mean that not sending the \$100 cheque is the same as going to Africa and killing natives? Singer's stance is not that extreme. Yet, he asserts that

an ethic that put saving all one possibly can on the same footing as not killing would be an ethic for saints or heroes should not lead us to assume that the alternative must be an ethic that makes it obligatory not to kill but puts us under no obligation to save anyone. (Singer, 1999, p. 228)

Singer, therefore, attempts to work out an intermediate position pursuant to which we should help the poor if it does not require us to sacrifice something of similar moral value. In fact, the only limit on the obligation of assisting the poor that Singer deems well-founded is conveyed in Premise 1.

What he disapproves of is justifying oneself by claiming the lack of available information on the subject and the resources necessary to help (Singer, 2002, pp. 147–148). At this point, it is worth recalling the definition of globalization provided in the introduction. Not only does it describe the present situation in developed countries, but it also supports Singer's claim that we can no longer blame our omission to assist the poor on the lack of information¹⁵ or lack of technical means to bring effective assistance. One must admit that living in the era of globalization, i.e. with the free flow of information, capital and technology, the lack of knowledge on the issue cannot justify our passivity towards the impoverished. Nowadays, we are one mouse click away from sending \$100 to charity. In Singer's view, due to the ongoing processes of globalization and the applied principle of impartiality (Premise 0), the distance between us and the poor or the special connection to those near us cannot reduce our responsibility for global poverty

¹² In this context, Singer compares allowing someone to die with an act of killing. Yet, the meaning of the term "allowing" overlaps with the meaning of the term "omitting" (Singer, 1999, pp. 213–219).

¹³ The analysis of the issue of supererogation is presented by Chyrowicz (2004).

¹⁴ To support the thesis that we are equally responsible when we perform an action and we omit to take an action (allowing), Singer refers to the case of euthanasia. He states that since the consequences of both active (causing death) and passive euthanasia (omitting to act, i.e. allowing to die) are the same, the moral evaluation of these two practices should not differ either (Singer, 1999, pp. 170–208).

¹⁵ One could ask whether it is our duty to seek information on the situation of the poor. Let us agree, however, that in the era of global media, we simply have this type of information.

either. He also states that we are equally responsible for the drowning child (the case of the shallow pond) and for the people dying of hunger in the Third World (the envelope case). In both cases, we are equally aware of the harm that is being done and we have equally effective means to counteract. In a similar manner, the property rights to material goods also do not limit our moral responsibility for the deaths of people in remote parts of the world. These rights cannot be put on a par with human life.

Apart from the claims about the existence of many other people who can help instead of us and the delegation of obligations to the government—which will be addressed in the last part of the article, Singer discusses the issue of overpopulation by referring to Hardin's theses. He maintains that the problem of feeding the growing population of our planet does not lie in the production of goods, as asserted by Hardin, but rather in their distribution. According to the ethicist, we have enough food to save people from starvation. All we need to do is to share and use these resources in a rational and fair way.

When it comes to the uncontrolled population growth, Singer believes it can be solved not only by increasing the death rate, i.e. allowing some part of our population to die of hunger and poverty, which is the solution suggested by Hardin, but also by reducing the birth rate. The scholar recalls his postulates of popularizing contraception and sterilization in developing countries. In the further part of the discussion, however, the other, less drastic measures of solving the overpopulation problem in poor countries will be presented. As for Hardin's thesis that helping the poor will only lead to the escalation of the situation in the future, Singer explains that such a reasoning may be rejected on the utilitarian grounds. According to the principles of utilitarian calculation, unlikely future losses (more deaths of starvation in the future caused by the population growth) cannot outweigh the misery of the present day (allowing the death of the poor people living now) (Singer, 1999, pp. 224–230).

Then, should we do all it takes to combat poverty? Even though the two authors accept the principles of utilitarianism, think that poverty is evil and point out that overpopulation is a serious problem of modern times, they answer this question in a completely different way. Hardin argues that we should stop sending aid to poor countries, whereas Singers asserts we should help them as much as possible. Therefore, the first one advocates limiting our moral responsibility for global poverty (we do not bear any responsibility for it at all), while the latter wants us to assume responsibility in its extreme version (comparing the omission to assist with the act of homicide). Let us now look at more moderate views on this matter.

3. To what extent can we put our own objectives before the fight against poverty?

Nowadays, utilitarian theories are strongly criticized for various reasons. Amartya Sen, an American philosopher and economist (the Nobel prize laureate in Economics) of Indian origin is an insightful critic, who most of all draws attention to

an extremely poor information base that these theories use. Defining his own position as broadly understood consequentialism¹⁶, he claims that the information which is crucial to the moral evaluation of an action is omitted in the utilitarian analysis. For example, neither the rights, capabilities nor freedoms of an individual are considered as a value in itself. The information about anything else than the utility of actions is included in the utilitarian analysis only if it affects the utility of these actions. Thus, it becomes largely instrumental. In addition, the utilitarian approach is, by definition, extremely impartial (as shown in Premise 0 of Singer's reasoning), so in the moral evaluation it does not consider the perspective of the subject (*agent relative*) (Sen, 1982, pp. 19–39).¹⁷ The two above-mentioned issues, i.e. allowing for the rights of individuals and a point of view of the subject, are of great importance to the poverty question.

It is usually believed that the rights of some people must be correlated with the duties of others. In terms of poverty, it would mean that if we recognize that a poor person has the right to a certain standard of food, clothing and residence, then we should be able to point at another, specific person who is under an obligation to enforce this right and who should use his or her resources to comply with it. About a wide range of so-called human rights, which for instance state that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of themselves and of their family (Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), it is impossible to specify the person responsible for their implementation. Consequently, some would say that human rights are pseudo-rights as they cannot be effectively enforced. Sen opposes such a view, insisting that although the human rights, including the right to a proper standard of life, do not indicate a specific person obliged to execute them, they indicate the capabilities (freedoms) that a person claiming these rights should have. Human rights—to which Sen refers to as the rights of imperfect obligation since no specific obligation is associated with them—also draw attention to the fact that a person claiming a given right should be assisted in exercising that right. Everyone, be it a government or an individual, who can give help should do it. And as the globalization offers great possibilities of providing help, the scope of our moral responsibility for global poverty remains quite broad (Sen, 2002, pp. 244–264).

Nevertheless, we are entitled to develop our own approach to a given phenomenon—in this case poverty. The rejection of the theoretical attitude of an impartial observer, which is typical of utilitarianism, does not mean a direct transition to the position of subjectivism. Sen (1982, pp. 33–38) upholds that people who find themselves in the same situation, looking from the same perspective, will make similar moral judgments, even though such phenomenon as poverty must be, according to the philosopher, assessed negatively from the perspective of each

¹⁶ Although the terms “consequentialism” and “utilitarianism” are often used interchangeably, Sen (1999, pp. 70–78; 2000, pp. 477–502; 2002, pp. 73–74), draws a sharp distinction between the two. In his view, the utilitarian theories have the following components: (1) consequentialism, (2) focus on the welfare (welfarism), (3) sum-ranking. Consequentialism does not have to be combined with the other two components of utilitarianism. Yet, it can be combined with the concept of rights.

¹⁷ It should be stressed that Sen does not utterly reject impartiality, yet he opposes its radical interpretation, which eliminates any subjective perspective in the moral evaluation of an action.

subject. If we accept the validity of the subject's perspective, it allows for limiting moral responsibility for global poverty than while taking the utilitarian positions discussed above. As stated by Sen, I should help to execute the rights of the poor as much as I can, but I can consider special relationships (e.g. family) in which I am involved. Therefore, it appears that I should help the poor without neglecting my family and other people that are close to me. I do not have to, however, interpret the act of neglecting in line with utilitarianism, i.e. putting my dear ones in the same position as the poor that I am helping (to utilitarians, only then the equivalent value is disturbed). After all, the stance adopted by Sen reduces our moral responsibility for global poverty more than Singer's depiction of the matter.

Similarly, the Thomistic approach permits a more balanced assessment of the issue than the utilitarian interpretation. Instead of Singer's "ought to imply can" principle (condition (a) of Premise 1), pursuant to which our obligation to act is conditioned by the possibility of performing the action, the Thomistic framework cites the conjunction of three separate conditions.

According to the Thomistic standpoint, we bear moral responsibility for omitting to act (which Singer has in mind while speaking of allowing poverty to happen) if the effects of this action:

- (1) have been predicted in any way (nothing can be wanted if it is not the subject of cognition), (2) could have been avoided (the effect should not be more intended than its cause), and (3) are to be avoided under an obligation. (Chyrowicz, 1997, pp. 85–86)

Hence, it is not the possibility of acting alone that determines our duty of doing so. We are held morally responsible only for omission of an action that was undertaken with the awareness of its bad consequences—the consequences that we can and should prevent. The first and second conditions seem to be largely fulfilled these days owing to the ongoing globalization processes. Most frequently, we can no longer claim that we have not heard of "absolute poverty" or that we do not have the resources to fight it. From the Thomists' perspective, the duty to avoid bad consequences that are caused by not providing the poor with aid does not assume, however, such an impartial point of view as in the case of utilitarianism.¹⁸

Can we put our own objectives before the fight against poverty? In the light of the presented standpoints, it seems that our own objectives, and especially the concern for our relatives, may be considered while making decisions about the assistance to the poor. Nevertheless, due to the imperfect obligations and the globalization processes that bring about the fulfilment of the first two Thomistic conditions, the scope of moral responsibility for global poverty remains quite broad.

¹⁸ A Thomistic description of the obligation to help the poor should most probably be founded on an analysis of the virtue of justice. It would be necessary to determine what we rightly owe to our relatives and what to impoverished people with whom we have no special bonds. Some suggestions are provided in Ślipko's analysis of pauperism and charity (2005, pp. 387–389).

4. How can we face up to our responsibility for global poverty?

Firstly, Singer (2002, pp. 148, 153) makes a point saying that transferring the responsibility on the government or other citizens does not solve the issue. Regardless of other numerous reasons that can be cited to show that each resident of a developed country is personally responsible for world poverty, the presented arguments already point to a wide scope of responsibility that fall directly on individuals. Each of us should feel a sense of responsibility for solving this problem.

Secondly, one must agree with Singer (2002, p. 153) that the undertaken actions should be performed comprehensively, i.e. with the involvement of individuals, the support for non-governmental organizations, and the pressure placed on governments and international corporations. What is more, the analysis, the identification and the measurement of poverty as well the explanation of its causes¹⁹ should also be carried out in a thorough manner. As Sen's research demonstrates (2002), focusing solely on the financial aspect of poverty makes us overlook the pieces of information that are essential to properly assess the scope of the phenomenon and to fight against it. In their analyses, both Sen and John Kenneth Galbraith (1987) prove that the causes of impoverishment are extremely diverse. Individual efforts to help the starving people are not enough to eradicate poverty. It can only be achieved with a large-scale aid operation, which is adapted to the needs and capabilities of poor people, and which is preceded by an economic and social analysis of their situation. The mentioned authors (Sen, Galbraith) unanimously declare that a universal access to education, elementary education in particular, is the basic condition to combat "mass poverty" in the Third World countries. Another idea for the fight with poverty is also the so-called "effective altruism" – a social movement initiated by Singer, grounded in the utilitarian belief that we should do as much good as we possibly can. Putting ideas into practice, the proponents of effective altruism argue that we should, for example, pursue a career path that will allow us to provide the most help to the needy. Also, we should choose for the role of mediators only those non-governmental institutions that have proven the most effective in the implementation of aid projects (Singer, 2015).²⁰

Thirdly, while the problem of overpopulation emphasized by Hardin and Singer is indeed extremely important, it does not have to be solved following the recommendations made by the two scholars. The research conducted by Sen (2002, pp. 207–243) reveals that providing universal access to education among the poor (especially among young women) is at least as effective at slowing down the birth rate as applying a restrictive birth policy.

¹⁹ More on the causes of poverty cf. Kwarciński (2006, pp. 31–51).

²⁰ The critique of effective altruism is presented by Skelton (2016). See also Gabriel (2017).

5. Final comments

This article attempts to support the thesis that as the globalization processes continue, the scope of moral responsibility for global poverty becomes wider. The utilitarian stance turns out to be too extreme since it suggests that we should either not help the poor at all (Hardin), or offer them almost unlimited help (Singer). The moderate approaches to the subject (Sen, Thomists) prove to be more acceptable: allocating responsibility for global poverty, they consider subjective perspective and a wider range of information (e.g. human rights). Basing on these approaches and on the thesis about the existence of globalization processes, one can arrive at the valid conclusion that we should attach considerable weight to assisting the poor, while still respecting our own objectives and values. The scope of moral responsibility for global poverty is neither exceptionally narrow nor wide, yet today it might be broader than we tend to think.

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