

EXAMPLE

1

Peter Singer and Christian Ethics

Abstract

The ethic of Peter Singer—the renowned and controversial Ira W. Decamp Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University—and a Christian ethic—which, for purposes of the book that is the subject of this proposal, means a broadly-conceived Roman Catholic moral tradition—are thought to be diametrically opposed. Many label Singer a leader of ‘the culture of death’; he in turn rarely hesitates to criticize the Christian sanctity of life framework as a foreign and misguided import into the Western world. The thesis of my book – *Peter Singer and Christian Ethics* – is that this polarized understanding is a mistake; to the contrary, I argue that a close and charitable reading of these two ethics will show that: (1) the disagreements between them are actually quite narrow; and (2) they are similar enough for both fruitful and mutually-critical correlation.

I have a contract from Cambridge University Press for *Peter Singer and Christian Ethics*. With the help a 2010 Summer FRG I have completed all six draft chapters, received CUP’s external reviewers’ comments and made requested revisions, including embarking on an additional chapter to be completed by the date of this application. My contractual deadline with Cambridge is July 2011, but my personal deadline is even more ambitious in order to capitalize on a conference inspired by my project to be held at Oxford in May, entitled ‘Christian Ethics Engages Peter Singer’. Specifically, I’ve been asked by the conference organizers to provide an advance copy of the book manuscript for a pre-conference colloquium designed to introduce the themes of the conference and to obtain feedback from a number of critical scholars in this arena who will be in attendance. Therefore, a Fordham FRG is absolutely crucial to cover necessary costs of manuscript preparation in order to expedite completion and production of advance copy before this critical conference, as well as support my presentation and participation at Oxford in order to maximize the book’s exposure to, reception by and impact on the scholars shaping what is arguably *the* ethical discussion of our present age.

Background

No such book as *Peter Singer and Christian Ethics* exists. The books that have been written about him—*Rethinking Peter Singer*, *Singer and His Critics* and the forthcoming *Peter Singer Under Fire*—are generally not sympathetic, adopt a posture that leaves little room for constructive engagement, and as the major commentaries on his work to date, represent a string of lost opportunities to establish common ground. They have instead opted to reinforce the intense tribalism between Singer’s adherents and Christian ethics that have produced a no-man’s land filled with mutual suspicion, misreading, and the illusion of interminable moral deadlock. Therefore, *Peter Singer and Christian Ethics* will initiate a much-needed conversation between these “tribes”—a conversation that aspires to clear the conceptual space to enable a charitable and fruitful debate on the actually quite narrow territory of their respective traditions’ contention. An example of how this conversation could pave a way for these two ethics to collaborate rather than compete on several important moral issues is my January 2010 article in the *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* entitled “Common Ground on Surgical Abortion?—Engaging Peter Singer on the Moral Status of Potential Persons”, which Singer has responded to positively, meeting with me on several occasions in order to pursue this new academic trajectory. Consequently, not only will he attend the Oxford conference to reach across the aisle to his heretofore ideological opponents, but during my research he has provided me with advanced copies of two of his forthcoming books so that I can get a jump on his latest work in my book.

Contribution

Peter Singer and Christian Ethics will be a major advance in a scholarly agenda that springs from my first (and continued) love of medical ethics: to forge an ‘intellectual solidarity’ to heal the astonishing and disappointing polarization that exists between ‘moral status conservatives’ and ‘social justice liberals’ in theological discourse. I have often tried to bridge that gap with my work. My first major peer-reviewed article – the aforementioned publication in the *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* – was an attempt to show that Peter Singer and a typical anti-abortion advocate have much in common in the public

policy debate over surgical abortion. Remarkably, even those at the highest levels of this debate had wrongly assumed that conversation between the two was impossible, and missed the fact that the two agree on everything except one very technical issue: the difference between active/passive potential in the fetus.

Peter Singer and Christian Ethics expands on that article by putting Peter Singer in conversation with Christian Ethics on a much broader range of applied issues, even with regard to ethical theory. Although this project seems daunting given the preconceived biases and polarization in play (philosophy/theology, theist/non-theist, liberal/conservative), the height of those hurdles has been unduly exaggerated because they have only been viewed at a distance, with almost no one venturing close enough to both traditions to realize the rich resources inherent to each that could enable overcoming their superficial opposition: namely, a dramatic overlap on duties to the poor, ecological concern, the moral status of non-human animals, health care reform, and more.

As an example of how these obstacles could be transformed into opportunities to attain new heights in dialogue and ethical understanding, I recently presented well-received papers on my nascent engagement of Singer's ethics at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Christian Ethics in Cambridge, UK, the annual meeting of the College Theology Society in San Jose, and an interactional conference entitled 'Catholic Ethics in the World Church' in Trento, Italy. Just one of the results of this early engagement was conversation with Nigel Biggar (the director of Oxford's MacDonald Center for Theology, Ethics and Public Life) which culminated in the planning of the afore-mentioned 'Christian Ethics Engages Peter Singer' conference. Given Singer's worldwide popularity (and infamy), the weighty nature of the issues on which we overlap, and his own interest in exploring these connections, my line of research and inquiry will continue be of significant import and impact on some of the most polarizing issues in contemporary society.

Indeed, my contact with Singer (he lives in New York despite teaching at Princeton) regarding this project has already borne substantial fruit. This past October, he and I finished putting the finishing touches on a major conference at Princeton that brought academics, physicians, intellectuals, and the

educated public together for charitable discussion and debate on abortion-related topics. Inspired by the charge of President Obama's address at Notre Dame, we not only tried to find common ground (on issues like fetal pain, sex selection abortions, adoption reform, mandatory leave, etc.), but we will also tried to create a space for a rare event: actual good-faith debate on abortion-related issues. The best experts from all over the country (academics, lawyers, physicians, and even activists) gathered in the spirit of good will and cooperation to find new ways to think and speak about abortion. The conference generated a significant amount of media coverage, and the tributaries now emerging from its discussions are gathering momentum. But the Princeton conference, along with the one coming this May at Oxford, are simply the first fruits of further collaborative and constructive conversation.

Cost

As stated in the abstract section at the outset of this narrative and accompanying Budget Proposal Form, the award of an FRG would be used to support my presentation and participation in the groundbreaking conference to be held at Oxford in May 2011 that was inspired by and will provide the public launch of my forthcoming book under contract with Cambridge University Press, *Peter Singer and Christian Ethics*—for which my subject, Peter Singer himself, will be in attendance. The FRG will also be used to cover costs associated with producing an advanced copy of the manuscript for critical review by scholars at that conference. Specifically, a qualified research assistant is necessary not only for proofreading, revisions and to assist with assembling the bibliography, but also to go back over hundreds of citations I have made that may need to be changed as a consequence of Singer coming out with a third edition of his most important work in the next couple months—an edition he has been gracious enough to provide me an advance copy of as a searchable PDF. Nevertheless, this task alone will be a tremendous amount of work, even without my expedited timeline.


Conclusion

Peter Singer and Christian Ethics, especially if I can get the feedback from the ‘intellectual stars’ that wish to review my book in advance of the Oxford conference, will likely define my career—not only because it is with a first-class academic press, but also because it is a brand-new area of scholarship with the potential to make a huge impact on various polarized issues that reach far beyond the academy. If awarded, the Faculty Research Grant would be of tremendous support to my meeting the expedited timeline. Finally, let me note again that I would not be in this good position without my summer faculty research grant. I am so grateful, both for the position in which this previous award has placed me, and also the opportunity to obtain further support from Fordham at this critical juncture for my career to make a substantial and lasting contribution.

EXAMPLE

2

Infinity in Leibniz's Philosophy

Abstract

If awarded, a Fordham-funded Faculty Research Grant will provide critical proofreading, editing and indexing assistance necessary to complete my monograph, *Infinity in Leibniz's Philosophy*, in time for its expected October 1 delivery to its contracted publisher, Springer.

Despite the importance of infinity in Leibniz's philosophy, to this day there is no single monograph focused on the subject. By offering a novel interpretation of Leibniz's view of infinity and how it figures into his metaphysics, this monograph will build upon an extensive body of shorter works I have published on the subject, closing a gap in the literature, cementing my own reputation in this arena, as well as providing a platform from which to launch further research and publication concerning the infinite in the modern period.

At present I have already completed three of six chapters of an anticipated final manuscript of 220 pages. The first chapter draws on material already published in the *Leibniz Review*, and the second on my forthcoming article in the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, each of which will help promote a wide readership for the book-length work, which will appear as part of Springer Publishing Company's "Synthese New Historical Library" series, edited by Simo Knuttila.

Background

Infinity is omnipresent in Leibniz's philosophy and plays a crucial role in his philosophical system. Leibniz's philosophy has been at the center of my research on 17th century philosophy since I first presented Leibniz's approach to possibility in my Ph.D. dissertation (Columbia University, 1998). My recent publications in this field of interest include: "Leibniz on the Greatest Number and the Greatest Being," *The Leibniz Review*, December, 2005; "Leibniz and Russell: The Number of all Numbers and the Set of All Sets," in: *Leibniz and the English-Speaking World*, Pauline Phemister and Stuart Brown, (eds.), Springer, 2007; *Possibility, Agency, and Individuality in Leibniz's Metaphysics*, Springer, 2007; "Leibniz on Nested Individuals," BJHP 2007; "The Reality and Possibility of Possibilia in Leibniz 1672-76," *The Leibniz Review*, 2008; "Leibniz and the Logic of Life," *Studia Leibnitiana*, 2009 and *Machines of Nature and Corporeal Substances in Leibniz*, Springer, 2010, co-edited with Justin Smith.

However, aside from my own body of work, other scholars are contributing to a full appreciation of the role infinity played for Leibniz and the consequent ramifications it had upon his philosophy. I certainly draw on the excellent work of recent scholars, such as Richard Arthur, Gregory Brown, Ursula Goldenbaum, Douglas Jesseph, Samuel Levey, Donald Rutherford and others. Especially noteworthy is Richard Arthur's volume *G. W. Leibniz, The Labyrinth of the Continuum. Writings on the Continuum Problem, 1672-1686*, which contains a wealth of information that greatly facilitates research in this domain. At the same time, most of these recent contributions have focused on technical aspects related to Leibniz's mathematical work and the status of infinitesimals.ⁱ In my present book I take a broader approach and attempt to distinguish between the mathematical and the metaphysical contexts of infinity, examining both similarity and differences in the way Leibniz employs them in his philosophy.

Contribution

Thus *Infinity in Leibniz's Philosophy* will fill a lacuna in the field of research on Leibniz, from which scholars will be able to glimpse an expanded horizon for future exploration of his philosophy. First, my monograph will present Leibniz's view of infinity through his solution to the problem of distinguishing between the notion of infinite number, which he sees as contradictory and impossible, and the notion of an infinite and most perfect Being, which he sees as consistent and in fact necessary. This discussion will include Spinoza's view of infinity—expressed in his letter 12, which Leibniz read in 1676, making annotations that provide significant insight into the latter philosopher's early formulations on the subject—as well as Leibniz's ultimate response to the view of his rival. This interaction foreshadows my final chapter, which will provide a more comprehensive consideration of Leibniz's encounters with the philosophers and mathematicians of his time. However, prior to placing Leibniz in this context, I will elaborate on how Leibniz's idea of infinity resulting from this initial interaction with the ideas of Spinoza is involved in his distinction between qualitative and quantitative senses of infinity. The discussion of qualitative and quantitative infinity that this examination suggests will enable a new approach to some of the most discussed issues in contemporary Leibniz research. In the third chapter, I discuss the distinction between beings and non-beings, as related to the distinction between actual and potential infinity; in the fourth chapter, his distinction between artificial and natural machines, as related to the distinction between animate and inanimate beings; and in the fifth chapter I discuss Leibniz's solutions to what he calls the Labyrinth of Continuum and the Labyrinth of Human Freedom (for more details see the Table of Contents attached at the end of proposal).

Cost

The requested grant will be used to fund the work of research assistants, which is required for the completion of the book. Based on prior experience, manuscript critical reading and review (including comparing my manuscript to existing sources) should require a qualified graduate Research Assistant—obtainable at a rate of \$20/hour—approximately 80 hours to complete. Manuscript academic proofing and index preparation would require approximately 110 hours of a graduate RA's time at a slightly lower hourly rate, with undergraduate-level word-processing assistance constituting roughly 25 hours of work at \$14/hour. RAs' local traveling costs to area libraries over the course of the funding period are estimated at a total of \$50. The total cost is hence \$3,980.

Conclusion

Infinity in Leibniz's Philosophy will fill a lacuna in the field of research on Leibniz by offering a novel interpretation of the philosopher's view of infinity and how it figures into his metaphysics. The suggested discussion of qualitative and quantitative infinity will enable a new approach to some of the most discussed issues in contemporary Leibniz research. A Fordham-funded Faculty Research Grant to hire graduate and undergraduate research assistants will be an immense aid to expedite this project for its contracted publication in Springer's "Synthese New Historical Library" series, paving my way for future contributions that capitalize on the new vistas *Infinity in Leibniz's Philosophy* will open.

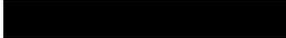


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