

## Interview with Peter Singer<sup>1</sup>

Henrik Ahlenius: *Your philosophical project seems to be to find an answer to the question “How are we to live?”. Do you believe that there are answers to such questions, or are they, as Wittgenstein held, misuses of language? How is one to proceed in answering this huge question?*

Peter Singer: I certainly don't think that it is a mistake, or a misuse of language, to ask how we are to live. I think it is an entirely proper question and one that we urgently need to discuss and think about. That's not at all to say that I think there is somehow *one* answer lurking somewhere that with a little bit more ethical thought we're going to find; I don't believe *that*. But I do believe that we can enlighten ourselves, understand ourselves better, understand possible answers to these questions better, and in general make some progress towards living a better life—not just for us, of course, but in the broad ethical sense a better life, by raising the questions and having this discussion.

Ahlenius: *People quite often say that ethics is only a matter of attitudes and emotions and thus that no way of living can be more well-founded than any other. What is your reply to such views?*

Singer: I would say that attitudes and emotions are a significant part of ethics, but it's not *just* that. There is scope for reasoning in ethics, and in fact that's what I've been doing during my whole academic career. I've been putting forward arguments and reasons in ethics, and they do quite often lead to people changing their views. Very many people have written to me or come up and told me that they have read one of my books and become a vegetarian, or thought more about our obligations to starving people in other countries, or changed their values in other respects. So I think that you

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*can* actually move people to change their views by what is essentially a rational process; a process of inviting them to examine their views for consistency and coherence; inviting them to test their views by applying them to other cases, either actual or hypothetical. This is a process that involves reason and it does lead to people changing their views.

Ahlenius: *Do you believe that philosophers have a special responsibility when it comes to scrutinising the values and habits of our time? And if so, what is it that the philosopher, but not the average man, "sees" when he or she looks at our world?*

Singer: I think that it is important that some people do this, and traditionally this has been part of the philosopher's role, since Socrates at least. And, yes, I think that philosophers do have a special role in making sure that this continues. If enough people were doing it anyway, perhaps we wouldn't need professional philosophers to do it, but I think it's good that philosophers do it.

What do they have to contribute specially to it? Perhaps some training in logic, in understanding arguments, in the analysis of terms, in getting clear about what is a conceptual argument, what requires some empirical information. They should have studied, in the area we are talking about, ethical theory so that they have an idea of the range of possibilities in ethical theory, the kinds of questions that need to be asked. I guess this training develops a sense of what is a good argument and what is an argument that needs to be challenged.

Ahlenius: *In a recent book entitled How Are We to Live? you say that we are faced with an "ultimate choice" between living ethically and living a self-interested life. What does this choice consist in and in what way is it ultimate?*

Singer: The choice consists, I guess, in that decision as to whether just to live in a way that accepts the standard values of many materialist cultures. I focus particularly in the book on the United States but I think that's because the United States and its culture have an influence on virtually every other culture. Other societies, the Scandinavian cultures and so on, are not immune. And this is a culture that basically says "The only

sensible thing to do is to get as much as you can of wealth and material goods for yourself." Crudely put, that's one way of living, one strand of motivation and view of what's the good life.

The other one is to say "No, you must be much more critical of that socially pushed idea, being pushed on us by so much advertising, consumption, films, and so on. Instead you must take a broader perspective and you must think 'What kind of life will I find to be a satisfying life from a long-term point of view? Is there perhaps an *ethical* life, that is, a life in which I think about what I'm doing from a more universal point of view, and then can feel that I have contributed, in some way, to trying to do what I could to make the world a better place?'" That's, briefly put, the choice that I think faces us.

You ask, Why is it ultimate? Well it is ultimate because it really goes to the bases of our values, about how we are living, and there is nothing more fundamental than saying what are your most basic values about how you're going to live your life.

*Ahlenius: Can there be ultimate choices? I imagine that the usual procedure in making a choice is that one ranks the alternatives and choose what one figures is the best. But if none of the alternatives is any better than the other, or if the values at stake are incommensurable, on what grounds should one choose? If egoism—or, for that matter, a given conception of morality—is presupposed, it is clear how to choose.*

Singer: Not quite, because you can presuppose egoism, but you may actually have taken too narrow a view of what self-interest is. If egoism says, "Pursue your own interest!", then the question still comes down to, "What *is* your own interest?" in the long run, and broadly conceived, so that we're talking about living a *satisfying* life, rather than just living a life in which you consume a lot, or earn a lot. What I'm saying is that you *can* argue from an egoistic point of view and still get to one that says that in your life you ought to be giving morality the first place in your day-to-day motivation, because, in the long run, you will find that is actually more satisfying. And part of the argument of *How Are We to Live?* is along those lines.

Another part, I suppose, is an appeal to what you may on reflection think you want to do with your life; what you may on reflection think that at the end of your life you

want to say "This is how I lived my life". I'm saying "Look, we can be much more reflective about these choices". I'm not necessarily saying that there is a way of measuring these two goals, ethics versus self-interest, if they do really come down to a clash.

Ahlenius: *If this psychological thesis is false, and it is not more satisfying to live an ethical life, would then the answer be "Well that's just too bad, but you should live an ethical life anyway"?*

Singer: What sort of "should" is that? Of course, from an ethical point of view, it is tautologous that you should live an ethical life, but that doesn't get us very far. If the psychological thesis were false, and there really were a choice between leading a life that would give you lots of pleasure and make you happy and so on, and a life that would be a better one for the world as a whole, then I think all we could say is "Think clearly about the choice". I think that at that point we probably have got beyond any further argument.

Ahlenius: *When it comes to the relation between interests, preferences and sentience, I am not quite sure I've got it all right. Isn't "interest" ambiguous? First there is the sense in which something, for instance pleasure, may be in a being's interests. That is compatible with the individual preferring another state of affairs, so interests could also be synonymous with desires or preferences. Now which of these senses is it that requires sentience or the capacity for suffering?*

Singer: I think in both senses it requires sentience, and the capacity for suffering usually goes along with sentience. I suppose you could be a sentient being and have preferences without the capacity for suffering, but it would be an unusual kind of being. I think you're right to point to the different senses of "interest", and I probably need to be fairly careful there. The sense of "interest" that is talking about preferences, well, I don't think you have preferences in the sense that I want to talk about unless you're sentient or aware. If there is no sentience, or no awareness, then life can't go well or badly for that being.

Ahlenius: *Could one not imagine beings without sentience albeit with preferences: would they count?*

Singer: It is hard to say, because our notion of wanting is so much tied up with the notions of joy and suffering and so on. What you have to imagine is a kind of a pure preference, which is not related to feelings of joy or happiness, or any of these other terms that usually go along with it; no felt frustration if the preference is not satisfied. But if you imagine that kind of clinical detached automaton, almost, then perhaps it doesn't count. I guess that's my tentative answer.

Ahlenius: *But aren't you giving in to hedonism now? For the preferentialist, what is of value is the realisation of what is desired, not the satisfaction felt from seeing it come.*

Singer: There are varieties of preferentialisms, and you're right that the pure variety is separated from hedonism in that way. I'm not totally sure what to think about that, really. I'm not sure whether I in the end do accept the kind of preferentialism that is entirely divorced from hedonism. In this version, what is important is not the satisfaction of the preference in the sense that it is known to the preferring being, it's merely *that they're satisfied*, in the sense that the state of affairs exists which satisfies this preference. I guess I've been torn over the years as to whether I think *that*, which in some way is a theoretically satisfying position, but seems to mean that we should satisfy the preferences of dead people. I have some problems with accepting that that's as important as satisfying the preferences of a being who will know that the preference has been satisfied, other things being equal. I don't know that I've ever really succeeded in totally resolving in my own mind which version of preference utilitarianism I want to hold

Ahlenius: *In your form of utilitarianism, persons have a special status in that they are given a stronger claim to life, a right to life one might perhaps say. Why is this right attributed to persons, and why to them alone?*

Singer: I use the term “person” to refer to a being who is aware of living a life over time. By that I mean someone who is aware that they have lived in the past, and that they will live in the future, at least unless they suddenly die. A person, in this sense, is a being with this sort of self-awareness, that is, not just limited to a moment to moment existence. I think that if we define person like that, which separates the term from the more biologically based expression “human being”, then we can say that a being like that has more to lose by being killed; a being like that has projects and plans for the future, which a being who lives in a moment to moment way cannot have. That’s why I think that it is more serious to take the life of such a being. Or, to put it another way, why such a being has a greater right to life than any other being.

*Ahlenius: Would it be sufficient to have preferences regarding the future or must one desire to continue life as such? If the latter, do nonhuman animals really qualify, do they know what it is to die?*

Singer: Any preferences regarding their future states would be sufficient. I would think that, probably, many animals can’t know what it is to die. But perhaps the great apes—gorillas, chimpanzees, and the orangutan—can. And I’m not just sure about whales and dolphins, or maybe even dogs or pigs. It’s much more difficult to decide that question. But then, as I’ve said, knowing what it is to die isn’t crucial. Maybe some of these animals do not know what it is to die, but do have preferences for their future states.

*Ahlenius: How may we conclude that a nonhuman animal is a person? What empirical data count as evidence for, or indicators of, personhood? You mentioned the observations by Jane Goodall, of which Michael Leahy says that they are “intellectually relaxed”.*

Singer: He has an incredible nerve. She has spent decades observing these chimpanzees; he, as far as I know, have never done any research in this field. People criticise the works of people like Jane Goodall because they want to preserve the distinction between humans and animals, and they see it as threatened by her work. In fact her work has stood up very well over the years. Other researchers have observed

similar things in apes since her earlier reports, which were greeted with some scepticism. Similar things have now been reported independently in gorillas and in orangutans.

Michael Leahy, I think, is just motivated largely by a sort of automatic Wittgensteinian view that without language you can't really think in certain ways. I see no sound philosophical bases for that, and it is now starting to fly in the face of quite a lot of empirical evidence. There is evidence of behaviour suggesting self-awareness in many animals —for example the ways in which all the great apes respond to mirrors.

*Ahlenius: According to some philosophers, e.g. Raymond Frey, a being must have a language to be self-conscious, and thus, according to this view, no nonhuman animals are persons. What is your response to such criticisms?*

Singer: Firstly, even if we were to accept that a being must have a language, the great apes have shown that they can learn languages. Certainly some of them, I'd say, have a language, that is American sign language, which they use to actually express concepts of themselves existing over time. They see photographs of themselves and say "That's me"; they say they want to do things; and maybe they even anticipate events—there's some exchanges Deborah and Roger Fouts have had with chimpanzees that seem to suggest that they anticipate future events. So even if you believe that they need a language, that doesn't show that no animals have this language.

But in fact it is doubtful to say that they need a language. There are observational accounts of chimpanzees, living in the wild in Africa, by Jane Goodall, which suggest that they think and plan ahead in a degree that implies that they must have self-awareness, even though these chimpanzees certainly do not have a language as far as humans can tell, and certainly not in the sense that Ray Frey is looking for.

*Ahlenius: Persons have beliefs, but animals do not have language, at least not in the wild, so it cannot be that you hold beliefs to be affirmations of sentences, as Frey and others do. What then are beliefs, and in what way are they ascribable to nonhuman animals?*

Singer: I think it is too narrow to say that a belief is an affirmation of a sentence. Even in our own behaviour we have lots of beliefs where we would be hard-pressed to quickly come up with a sentence that we're affirming. Dispositionally perhaps we could come up with a sentence that would express our belief.

You're peckish and find yourself drawn to the refrigerator, and someone says "Ah, you're affirming the sentence 'there is something that I can snack on in the refrigerator!'". When it's put to you like that, you can affirm it. I think that in a sense the belief comes before you're even considering that as a sentence. And I can't see why an animal can't have exactly the same sort of view. For example chimpanzees give off a certain sort of call when they find a tree with the right fruit, and other chimpanzees move in that direction. This is not terribly sophisticated behaviour, I'm sure you could find similar things with other animals. I don't think that it is implausible to say that the chimpanzees hearing that call, and moving in that direction, have a belief that there is food to be found in the direction from which the call came.

There's a difference between a sort of automatic, instinctive, response; maybe an ant receives some chemical signals and just automatically responds, and presumably ants do not have beliefs. But with beings such as chimpanzees, whose behaviour is so much more intentional, it is reasonable to say that they have beliefs.

*Ahlenius: In relation to the question of animal awareness, you say of philosophers such as Stuart Hampshire and Michael Leahy that they represent "attempts to do philosophy from the armchair, on a topic that demands investigation in the real world". But the disagreement lies not in what animals do but in how to interpret and to best explain what we see. So, though one cannot solve it all in the armchair, are there not some philosophical aspects on how to evaluate the behaviour of nonhuman animals?*

Singer: Certainly there can be a philosophical question about how to interpret the data. In the case of Michael Leahy and Stuart Hampshire, I think, they're just not looking at the data, or denying the data. That's what I object to as armchair philosophy. If they were saying, "Okay, here's the data; I accept that that's what happened, but I have an alternative explanation", then we could look at how well that alternative explanation stands up. I recall one example of Michael Leahy's—where he gives a totally



implausible explanation of some behaviour by talking about one chimp being frightened of the presence of a higher ranked chimp—which no one who understood chimp behaviour would offer, because chimps are constantly in the presence of higher ranking chimps and are not intimidated by them. You can't just say, "I can be an amateur Jane Goodall and offer my explanation", without knowing anything about chimps and how they behave.

*Ahlenius: You argue that under present conditions we ought to be vegetarians, but what means are we allowed to use in order to stop the current methods of rearing animals for food—is it all right, for example, to put slaughterhouses or transportation-lorries on fire?*

Singer: I think questions of means are partly questions of the wrongness of doing certain things in themselves, and they're partly questions about what is going to work. My view, I guess, is that these kinds of techniques are basically not going to work. If I were convinced that by burning down a slaughterhouse or two, in a way that was not going to burn the workers or anything like that, you could actually stop meat-eating, I guess I might believe it was the right thing to do. But I can't see that that's going to work. Essentially what we've got to do is change people's mind about it. If you don't change their minds, you can burn down as many slaughterhouses as you like, they'll just be rebuilt, and the cost for insurance for slaughterhouses will go up a bit. You've got to change people's minds about wanting to eat meat, or being willing to eat meat; only that way are you going to stop it.

*Ahlenius: But perhaps these crimes can work as a plea for second thoughts, and give rise to debates and so on.*

Singer: Well I'm doubtful about that, really, because I think it just makes people angry. I think *civil disobedience* can be a plea for second thoughts. I think people being prepared to sit down at the entrance of a slaughterhouse, and get arrested for it, and stand up in court and say why they've done it, may get attention and publicity. But just burning something down is probably not the way to appeal to people's reason or compassion.

Ahlenius: Swedish philosopher *Torbjörn Tännsjö*, and of course many others as well, thinks that utilitarianism is unable to yield vegetarianism. On the contrary, some of these people argue, we are obligated to eat the flesh of animals that have been well treated and would not exist had it not been for our eating them. What would you like to say to these people?

Singer: Firstly, if those people really are conscientious in following that through, they will avoid the kind of meat that they can purchase in their supermarkets, because this will have been from factory-farmed animals that did not lead these good lives and were certainly not killed in a humane way. But I welcome these standpoints, although in the end I think we have to move further.

As for saying that there's an obligation to eat meat, we must not overlook the question of what else we might be doing with the land that's being used. Either we could use it to grow more food and feed humans better; plant-food is often more efficient than animal-food. Or we could leave it for wildlife or do a lot of different things.

Ahlenius: *What about medical research, don't you think the use of animals in that field is more justified than in the case of meat-industry?*

Singer: I agree, I think the case is stronger. I've always thought that it is odd to oppose medical research on animals if you're not a vegetarian. Where you're talking about that relatively small part of animal experimentation that consists in strictly medical research that conveys some possibility of contributing to relieving a major disease, yes, the case is stronger than the case for eating meat. Which is not to say that it is necessarily sufficiently strong; but it is stronger. I'm obviously not talking about cosmetics testing, or other product testing, or psychology testing, or other things like that

Ahlenius: *When you were interviewed for The Financial Times a year ago, the journalist seemed surprised to hear you say that we are primates, apes. Why is it that, more than a*

*hundred years after Darwin, man sees himself as separated from nature and the rest of the animals?*

Singer: Although it's a hundred years after Darwin, before him we had close to 2 000 years of indoctrination in the idea that we *are* separate from nature. That went very deeply into our psyche, and our institutions, and our law, and everything about the way we conceive ourselves. It's still there and you find it in lots of people, including that highly intelligent, if rather conservative, journalist for *The Financial Times*.

Ahlenius: *A common objection to animal liberation is that man is special, divine, endowed with reason, etc. But there is another kind of objection, agreeing that humans are not special, but continuing that he therefore, like the animal he is, has no moral obligations toward other animals. Though this is rather vulgarly stated, something like this is sometimes said to be the implication of Darwinism. What is your response?*

Singer: It is a mistake to see that as the implication of Darwinism, and Darwin himself was very clear in saying that you couldn't draw any moral conclusions from his theory; he was simply describing a process. It has never been part of my position to say that there are no differences between typical humans and typical other animals. It's no problem for me to say that human beings—most humans, not intellectually disabled and infants—are different from most other animals in that they are able to reflect on their choices and are able, for example, to decide whether it is right to eat meat or not, in ways that the lion or the wolf cannot. We can't use the behaviour of other animals as alibi for continuing to do what serves our interests, but what we have a capacity to chose not to do.

Ahlenius: *Together with Helga Kuhse, in Should the Baby Live?, you defended mercy-killing of severely disabled, or otherwise suffering, infants. Not only did the two of you claim that morally it was on a par with abortion, you also asserted that the practice of infanticide could be, and indeed has been, practised in civilised societies. In your latest book, Rethinking Life and Death, there is some hesitation concerning your earlier conclusion. What is your current opinion on this difficult and perhaps infected question?*

Singer: My current opinion is still represented by that note in *Rethinking Life and Death*. The difference here is between what is a desirable public policy and what is ethically sound practice in an individual case. I still think that there would be cases in which infanticide would be justifiable for severely disabled new-born babies. And it is harder than most people realise to avoid that conclusion, given that it is standard practice to allow severely disabled babies to die in modern hospitals, where their lives could be prolonged for quite a while. If you're going allow them to die, sometimes rather slowly, isn't it better to carry out active euthanasia? I think that generally it is. My worries are doubts about where to draw a clear line; once you go beyond birth, where do you have this line? There could be public policy reasons for saying that birth does mark a significant difference, even though I think that could be hard to defend in individual cases.

Ahlenius: *In Rethinking Life and Death you reject the concept of brain death. What, in your view, is wrong with brain death and what are your suggestions as to when doctors may take organs for transplantation?*

Singer: I think brain death is a halfway house, that's the problem with it. Why do we focus on the brain, and why do we demand the cessation of *all* brain function? 25 years ago, when brain death was first being discussed, that was a useful way of saying, "Now we can be sure that there will never be a return to consciousness". One could determine the irreversible cessation of all brain function, but one couldn't determine the irreversible loss of consciousness in cases where there were still some brain function. But this halfway house is increasingly coming under pressure, in a number of directions.

Firstly we can maintain the bodily functions of people who are brain dead for much longer than we could before, as has been shown by the case of pregnant women whose bodily functions have been kept going for over three months, so that they can deliver babies. Now it's starting to look dubious to say that these people are dead, when they remain warm, breathing; their cells continue to grow and divide, and their bodies nurture a foetus.

On the other hand, we can with greater precision, in some cases, not in all cases, yet, say “This patient will never recover consciousness, even though this patient’s brain has not irreversibly ceased to function”. There we might ask, “What’s the point of keeping this patient, this organism, alive?”. The *person* known to his or her partner or friends has gone. The reasons why we moved from the classical death definition to brain death now point very strongly to moving one further step: to the irreversible loss of all consciousness. I wouldn’t want to say that that’s death, because the human organism still survives; but it is the death, or the end, of what we value in a person’s life. And this is the point at which organs should be allowed to be removed.

Ahlenius: *Do you believe that these suggestions have a chance of gaining support among other philosophers, the general public, and the physicians?*

Singer: I think it will take time still, but I expect that they will be accepted one day.

Ahlenius: *About methodology and epistemology in ethics, you reject the idea of reflective equilibrium and also foundationalism—in short: you hold that moral claims are neither true nor false. At the same time you want to find room for quite a big place for reason in ethics. How does this fit together? How can one ethical judgement be more reasonable or defensible than any other if none has a truth-value?*

Singer: I certainly reject reflective equilibrium, I’m less ready to say categorically that I reject foundationalism. The search for foundations for ethics is still an open question, and should continue to be so; there are some interesting possibilities. But let’s assume we haven’t really found a secure foundation for ethics, it’s still the case that there is a lot of reasoning and argument to do, which work from common premises. You heard my talk this morning: I believe that probably everyone in that room shared the common premise that you can’t justify slavery by saying that some humans are more rational than others. That’s a premise that you can work from. Of course someone could then say, “If that’s the conclusion [the oppression of nonhuman animals being equally unjustifiable] then I guess we’ll have to reopen the issue about slavery”. But

most people are not prepared to do that, so there is quite a lot of scope for reasoning and argument based on that premise, which is very widely shared.

*Ahlenius: Do you agree with Mackie that the thesis of universalizability, though one may call it a formal requirement, is a moral requirement, if it is to be connected with our reasons for acting? In what way is it that ethics is universal?*

Singer: What I agree with John Mackie about is that it is not simply a matter of saying, "This is a definition of a particular term, that ought necessarily carries universalizability". I think that there is a certain mode of reasoning which arises in a given situation, and carries with it the idea of universalizability. Now, is it a substantive choice whether you're going to engage in this mode of reasoning at all or not? I believe it is, and that's where I agree with Mackie. But there are costs to choosing differently; there are costs to saying, "I'm going to reason in a non-universalizable way". That means that you're deciding not to take part in a widespread human enterprise.

*Ahlenius: But what about someone who doesn't want to take part in this widespread enterprise, someone who's not prepared, nor eager to, justify his judgements and behaviour in front of others? What can you say to such a person?*

Singer: Well, you could try and say to him the sort of things that I've said in *How Are We to Live?*: "Reflect on what your life is ultimately about, will you find this a satisfying life? Don't you want to be part of a much larger tradition, that has been so important and attractive to so many figures?" But in the end, if someone just says, "Well, too bad, I'm still not interested in that kind of reasoning", there comes a point when you can't say much more I guess.

*Ahlenius: When it comes to utilitarianism and the issue of overpopulation, though the problems pointed to by Derek Parfit may seem theoretical, they do put utilitarianism to the test. How repugnant do you find the repugnant conclusion to be?*

Singer: It is pretty repugnant, I think. I don't have an answer to the problems that Derek has put about population. It's something that has baffled me for years, and in the end I've more or less despaired of getting a good answer to it. But I think that this is not specifically a problem for utilitarianism, because any ethical view is going to have to grapple with what sort of population policy we should have. Most plausible ethical theories have a principle of benevolence in them, as at least *one* among a few *prima facie* principles. You have to consider whether the meaning of benevolence is satisfied by increasing the total happiness or increasing the average happiness; or, if neither of those is satisfactory, some other alternative yet to be clearly formulated.

Ahlenius: *You have written about your horrible experiences from German-speaking countries, due largely to gross misrepresentations of what you say in Practical Ethics and Should the Baby Live?. Could you have anticipated that reaction prior to 1979? How do you view the prospects for academic freedom in general and the discussion of euthanasia in particular in these countries, now that a more balanced discussion has begun in for instance Die Zeit?*

Singer: On the question as to whether I could have anticipated these things, I don't know—I think I would have had to be very far-sighted to anticipate them. I certainly wasn't writing *Practical Ethics* with an eye to the sensitivities of people living in Germany, that's true. What I should perhaps have been more careful with was the translation that appeared. Some of the expressions used were unfortunate, in particular the use of the same language as the Nazis used, *lebensunwertes Leben*, for "a life not worth living"; it should have been avoided. The original English expression has no such connotations. But it's impossible to prevent someone taking a sentence out of context and saying "Look at what this dreadful Singer says, isn't it just what the Nazis said?". When you read it in the context of *Practical Ethics*, I think it's absurd to say something like that.

Is there now a better discussion going on there? Yes, I think actually there is, not only in *Die Zeit* and other newspapers, but also among the academic journals that deal with these areas. Initially the reaction was totally hostile; there are now some better articles appearing. But unfortunately, as my most recent visit to Germany proved again, the really militant ones, the ones who are prepared to go in to lectures and

disrupt them, and blow whistles and so on, still seem to be there and still think that Singer is a bogey man against whom they have to go and protest. All this does is ensure that my visits to Germany get far more publicity than they would have had before, and far more people read about my ideas.

*Ahlenius: Some twenty years ago, you wrote an article entitled "Philosophers Are Back on the Job" in which you welcomed the revival of normative issues in academic philosophy. Now that they're back, do you think that philosophers are doing a good job?*

Singer: They're doing a much better job than they were when they weren't on the job at all. The turn to substantive ethics—normative ethics and applied ethics—over that 20 year period has been enormously successful. I think we've contributed a lot to public debates—this conference is an example. Applied philosophy has had a positive influence in helping to raise the debates to a better level; it has shown that you can dispute ethical issues without coming from a religious background, which I think has been very important. And I think it has been good for *philosophy* in that it has sharpened the issues in ethics. It is one of the things I'll look back at with great satisfaction, that I, among many others, of course, contributed towards making applied ethics a significant part of philosophy.