

## ENGLISH: LANGUAGE ANALYSIS

### Are we too soft on beggars?

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The public reaction to beggars, and the laws surrounding these individuals, is often debated in the media. As the rates of homelessness and beggars increase in Victoria, whether or not they should have harsher punishments for begging in public places is debatable. In Rita Panahi's opinion piece titled "Are we too soft on beggars? – Yes" (Herald Sun, March 24, 2013), she contends that Melbournians are too soft on beggars, and a "tough-love approach" is necessary to reduce the rates of begging in Victoria. Her viewpoint is in stark contrast to that of Chris Povey, who is manager and principal lawyer at PILCH Homeless Person's Legal Clinic. In his opinion piece titled "Are we too soft on beggars? – No" (Herald Sun, March 24, 2013), he asserts that beggars are faced with a wide range of mental and physical issues and Melbournians should be able to "put up with begging", especially considering "as a community [we] can put up with poverty."

Both authors target Melbournians and the government to convince them of their opposing viewpoints in the debate of how much compassion beggars should receive. Panahi convinces her audience that the money given to beggars from the public "is not spent on food or shelter", but instead contributes to their addictions with drugs and alcohol, resulting in more problems for these individuals. On the other hand, Povey persuades his readers to feel compassion for the beggars, who often come from unstable backgrounds, which results in their current situation, rather than it being their decision to be homeless and beg for money.

Panahi's article alerts readers to her argument that the "misguided bleeding hearts opposing" the measures for beggars to find work are "part of the problem" and contribute to "this persistent problem...remain[ing]...a blight on the city". In a disappointed tone, Panahi uses a comparison to convince Melbournians that "giving money to beggars is akin to voting for the Greens – it only encourages them, and prevents them from doing something useful with their lives." After reading Panahi's article, Melbournians may be more willing to believe that if the beggars "genuinely want help to find work and get [their] live[s] on track," they would be able to find "good people willing to help [them]." Contrastingly, Povey's tone is ashamed that Melbournians can find excuses for their reaction to begging in an attempt to conceal the underlying reason that begging "represents a political and policy failure to prevent homelessness and poverty." Povey's use of statistics shows readers that "90 per cent" of "people begging in Melbourne's CBD...were homeless and sleeping rough or in shelters". This is reiterated in the visual support, a photograph of a young female huddled in a blanket with a hat of coins in front of her. The Melbournians in suits walking in front of her represent the rich members of society who show no compassion for beggars and try to ignore the problem that "confronts us on our way to work or doing our shopping". The photograph reminds readers that many beggars are homeless and it is too big an issue for society to ignore. This may result in the government providing more funding into housing for the homeless to reduce the impact of this issue in Victoria.

Panahi draws on emotive language to convince Melbournians and the government that beggars are a threat to public safety, whereas Povey uses evidence to highlight the measures being taken by police to reduce begging. Panahi uses an alarmed tone to stress to Melbournians that beggars who "loiter on the streets all day or harass drivers at intersections with unwanted windscreen washes" are "not just a nuisance but a threat to public safety". This may evoke a sense of fear in the public, especially if they have experienced being confronted by a homeless individual begging for money. In comparison to Panahi's argument, Povey uses statistics in a blunt tone to show that "there is no evidence to suggest we are at risk of a wave of begging-related assaults and intimidation" regardless of the public fear of being attacked. Not only this, but Povey also makes it evident that "police [do not] ignore begging", shown by "recent sentencing statistics [that] show hundreds of people were charged with begging during a two-year period". This may come as a shock to Melbournians who were unaware of these charges, and may encourage them to feel more compassion for beggars, who are only trying to make a life for themselves as best they can.

While Panahi uses generalisations to convince Melbournians and the government that the money given to the beggars from the public isn't used for food and shelter, Povey uses the personal experiences of beggars to highlight the humility experienced when asking for money. In an annoyed tone, Panahi generalises that "if you give money to beggars then you...are contributing to a desperate person's drug and/or alcohol troubles", rather than helping them spend the money on "food and shelter", as they claim it is for. Some Melbournians may share this sense of irritation if they have given their hard-earned cash to a homeless beggar, only to help pay for drugs or alcohol. However, Povey firmly advocates that most beggars "have often experienced violence and have physical or mental health issues" that contribute to their homelessness. Using a disappointed tone and shameful tone, Povey writes that "the [beggars] we've spoken with feel humiliated when they beg" because of the "poverty" surrounding the issue, and Melbournians should be ashamed of themselves for turning a blind eye to these individuals who are begging for help.

While Panahi's repeated message of beggars being a threat to the community and the need for them to stop "plagu[ing] our streets" will remain with Melbournians, Povey's sense of morality behind beggars will leave some doubts in the reader's minds of what measures should be taken to improve life for the homeless. Povey addresses the impacts begging have on those who undertake this behaviour and the health issues surrounding those who are homeless. Povey has made this case, he is able to consider the humanity behind beggars and accept poverty as a political failure rather than solely the result of the beggar's situation.