

## Appiah on Singer

### The Difference between the Cases

Singer gave us two principles:

**Strong:** if it is in your power to prevent something very bad from happening without sacrificing anything of *comparable* moral worth, you ought to do it.

**Moderate:** if it is in your power to prevent something very bad from happening without sacrificing *anything* morally significant, you ought to do it.

These predict no difference between not saving the drowning child and not giving to charity. What principle could?

Appiah suggests this principle:

**Emergency Principle:** If you are the person in the best position to prevent something truly awful from happening, you ought to do it.

What if those best placed to do something do nothing? Maybe we need a different principle:

**Emergency Principle\*:** If, among those who are willing to do something, you are in the best position to prevent something truly awful from happening you ought to do it.

But does this give us a distinction between the cases?

### How Much is Expected of Us?

It's still true that people have basic needs and they have a right to have their needs be met. What obligation does that put on us?

Appiah gives a partial answer:

1. the nation state should be the primary mechanism for meeting these needs;
2. our obligations can only ask of us our fair share: we can only be asked to give so much;
3. it should be possible to be partial to those closest to us;
4. our obligations should recognise that there are many different kinds of value, that other things are worthwhile besides just saving lives.

These offer further ways to block Singer's argument:

1. If there's only so much we can be expected to give, then we can't iterate the application of the Singer principles.
2. It's not obvious that Singer's principles allow for partiality: they require us to give and give, regardless of the fact that we may be making worse the lives of those close to us and who depend on us.