



# Analysis of Famine, Affluence and Morality by Peter Singer

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## Abstract:

*This paper explains the main objective of Singer's work so as to understand his arguments regarding famine, affluence, and morality. The paper also provides the main counter arguments toward his work and his reflections and reactions to those counter arguments. Singer raises a moral argument that our moral and charity obligation is to assist and help people during hard times. As human beings we must provide shelter, food, protection and other cares to those who need them. This puts more responsibilities on Christian followers do help people in distress.*

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## 1. Introduction

Peter Singer posits in his article "Famine, Affluence and Morality" that many developed countries like the United States should be willing and ready to engage in activities that promote eradication or prevention of famine, disasters or calamities throughout the world. He believes that this can only be accomplished when United States like many developed nations realize that they there is a clarion call of ethical duty upon her to do so. It our opinion that this paper will explain the main objective of Singer's works so as to understand his arguments regarding famine, affluence, and morality. The paper will also provide the main counter arguments toward his work and his reflections and reactions to those counter arguments.

Additionally, the paper will also include Singer's idea of marginal utility and the application of principles of duty and charity in order to provide concrete arguments in support of his argument. The question is: Should the advanced nations or rich countries come to the rescue, and assistance of poorer nations in the event of disaster and calamity? I believe that everyone must make all efforts to assist and contribute in the event of disaster and calamity even if we have to be flexible in our beliefs, values and personal assumptions as long as it does not jeopardize our existence.

## 1. Discussion

First, the main objective of Singer (1972) in his article "Famine, Affluence and Morality", is Americans have the moral duty or obligation to assist and support nations that suffer disaster or calamity and not because the country is wealthy. The fact is that Americans may choose not to help or assist if they do not believe in this moral obligation. He draws his instance from the disaster in East Bengal. According to Singer (1972), he expresses frustration toward people to become refugees, but emphasis that wealthier countries still have responsibility to alleviate the agony, poverty and suffering.

Singer (1972) believes that people do not have to experience agony, pain, suffering and poverty if other people can help to prevent it. Therefore, he feels that human beings must be morally committed and responsible to adjust in order to accomplish this main objective. For instance, in Bengal the suffering of the people is on the rise due to lack of adequate medical care, pain, and poverty, and many deaths are being recorded. It is a moral torpedo not to pay attention to the suffering of the poorer nations like Bengal. As a result, his intention is to create a conviction to modify or adjust our morality to committing to helping people in distress.

## 2. Counter-argument

Singer (1972) explains through his counter-arguments by suggesting if our moral duty must be limited to distance or nearness. His purpose is to find out the essence of having to help people who live far away and suffer instead of applying the same privilege to those around us? This is why he cites the example of a drowning child. He wants to find out the importance of distance in making this decision. Singer (1972) understands that it makes no difference the type or kind of people one intends to help; if they live far in Bengal or near us. It does not matter, if we will come in contact with them or not in future. The fact of the matter is that we have the moral duty to engage in what is right.

Singer (1972) further cites an example of a drowning child and a witness. He believes that many people will like to rescue him, an action that is morally right. He feels that this action is morally justified because many people will feel that it is bad to allow a child to drown. The counter argument proposes that since I am not the only person witnessing the situation, then what is the essence and reason for saving the boy. Why is it my ethical responsibility to save this child if nobody is helping? Singer postulates that we do have moral obligation to avoid bad situation from happening regardless of if everybody is interested in doing so or not.

Furthermore, Singer (1972) postulates that “In case we accept any rule of impartiality, universability, equality, or whatever, we can’t discriminate against somebody just because he is far from us or we are far off from him” (p.232). The idea is to understand that distance must not affect our decision to help or assist people when they are experiencing agony, poverty, or suffering. Our moral obligation or duty is not to consider whether other people are contributing to alleviate these problems in the lives of many people, or do more rather than causing more pain by not doing so.

The premise of his argument about marginal utility refers to the verity that not many people will like to do as much, but as individuals we must encourage ourselves to provide substantially; or do as much as possible to go beyond the call of duty, or what is known as stage of marginal duty; so that one would inflict oneself as much ache as one would prevent in Bengal. He posits that we must attempt to do as much as possible as long it does not hinder or prevent our existence (Singer, 1972).

Additionally, Singer (1972) posits that our ethical obligations also include responsibility and charity. Our responsibility and charity is to help and assist those who need or help regardless of whether they are our relatives or not. As long as we have the potential and the resources to help; we must help people who need our assistance even those we do not know. To juxtapose this principle and the explanation, it would be morally wrong not to help. Unfortunately, in this era, many people are greedy and egoistic to perform the responsibility of duty and charity because they continually aspire for more wealth and position. Many would also feel that they work too hard to share their resources with others even when they have more than enough.

Our reflections about Singer's point of view include but not limited to the morality of helping those who need our assistance when we can do so; mostly importantly, when it does not hurt us. I believe that we must be flexible to let go of some affluence to save life when the need arises. I also believe that it is the moral thing to do. This is a clarion call that does not accept discrimination, or prejudice against those suffering. The fact is to imagine if we were in the same predicament, would we like to receive help or not? Therefore, I disagree that we should discriminate against anyone who is suffering because of his or her racial background, ethnicity, and distance. Most importantly, human life must be invaluable to us.

### 3. Conclusion

In conclusion, Singer (1972) raises a moral argument that our moral and charity obligation is to assist and help people during hard times. As human beings we must provide shelter, food, protection and other cares to those who need them. We must be willing to think about others who need our help. Many are around us who suffer and may expire if we fail to act so that they get the kinds of help or assistance they need. It is our moral duty, an act of charity and responsibility to cater for the needy especially those who continually cry for assistance regardless of the distance when we come across them or hear about them. Don't Give Up.

### 4. Acknowledgement

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