

The Needs of Strangers and the Will to Act – Peter Singer, John Rawls, Thomas Pogge



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It's late in the evening, and you are outside enjoying an early autumn walk. Suddenly you hear a sharp scream from the small lake beside you. In the shallow, waist-high water of Singer Pond you see a young child slowly drowning. You can easily wade-in to rescue the boy, but the water is thick with a horrible dark mud. Your new shoes will be ruined – there is no time to undo the laces and take them off. And so you have a choice to make: save the drowning child, or pretend that you don't see him, keep walking, and save a little money...

Feeling slightly guilty for not saving the young boy, the next evening you decide to take another walk to clear your head. Your shoes fit so well, and are so comfortable that you quickly forget what was sacrificed for them yesterday. To avoid Singer Pond, and perhaps a return of conscience, you take a different route this time. Soon you are walking beside another small lake, Rawls Pond. Then you hear it again, another scream, and you see another person drowning in the water. Their head and flailing arms barely visible through a low fog, you can't tell if it is a boy or girl, child or adult. There is nothing to go on. Like yesterday it might be a stranger, but it might just as easily be your son, your daughter, your wife, mother, father, brother, or sister. You won't know until you have actually saved them. Either way, it is going to cost you those shoes...

Having let two people die in the past two days, you decide the next evening to skip your stroll and instead take a calming nap. After an hour or so, you are startled awake from an eventful sleepwalk. You are kneeling down beside yet another small lake, Pogge Pond, this time with no shoes in sight. Elbow deep in the water, you realise that you are holding something under the surface. As you look closer you begin to make out the wet form of another young child, kicking, scratching and clawing to escape your grip on the back of his head. You can either let go and allow him to breathe, or continue with what you have started...

You will have to think about it...