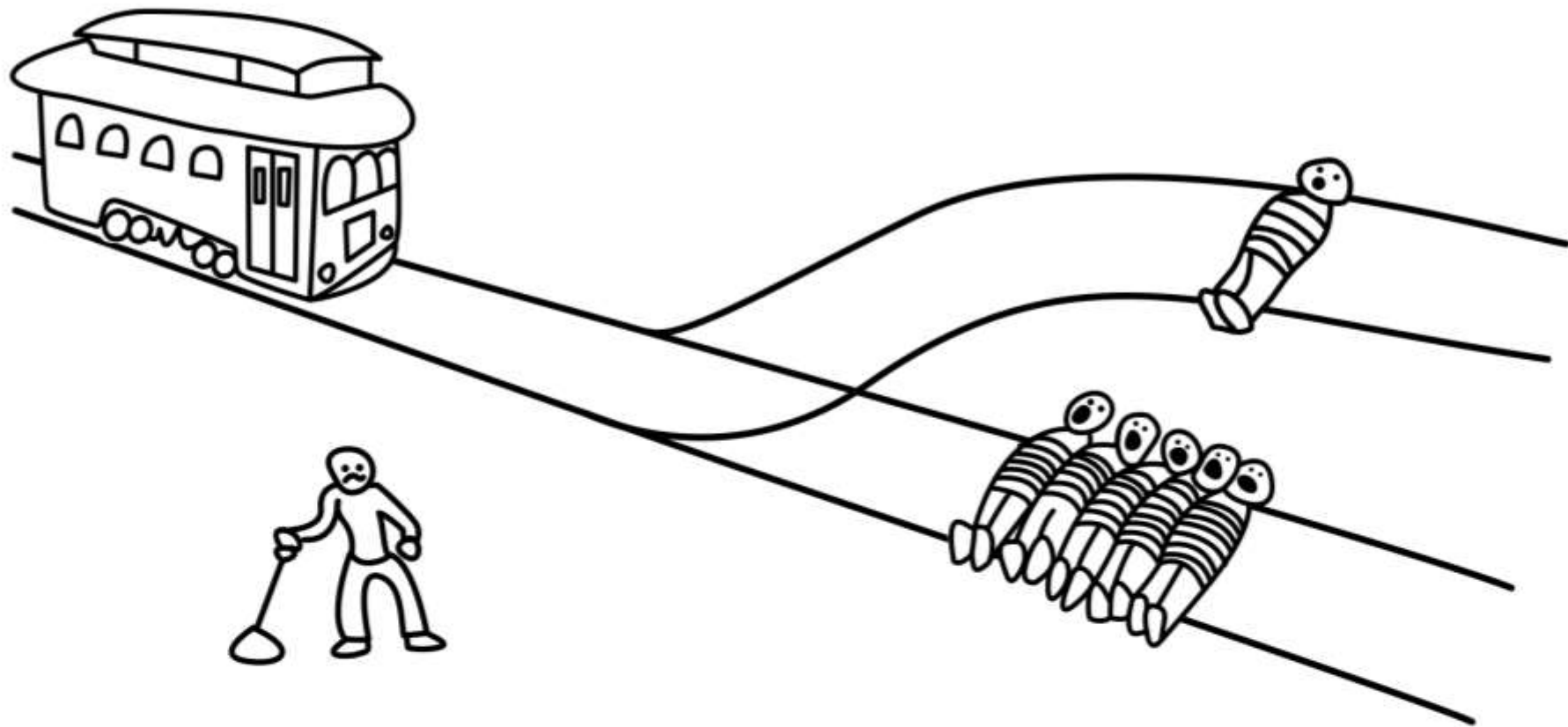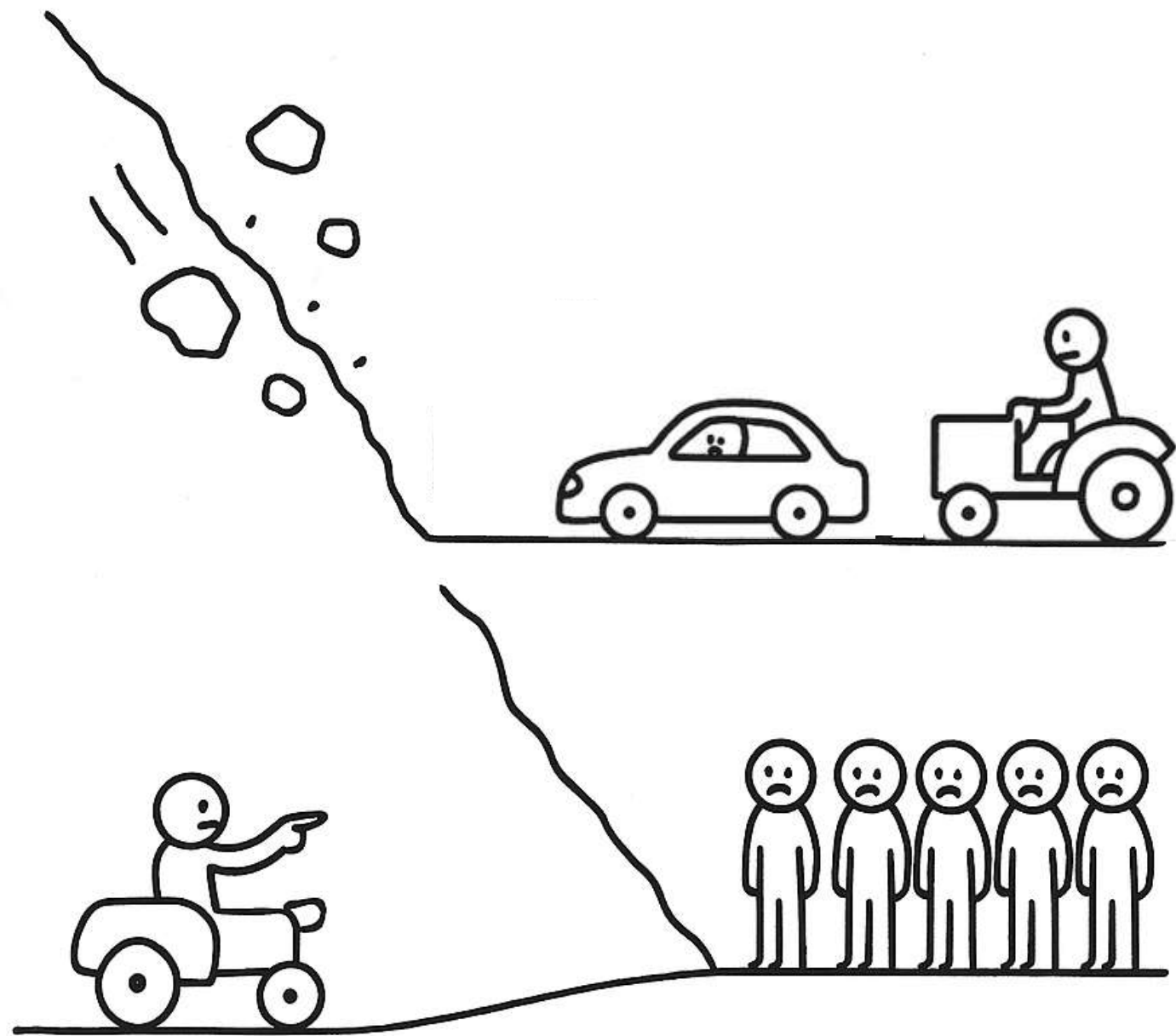# Islamic Ethics

Comparison with Ethical Theories

Oh no! A trolley is heading towards 5 people. You can pull the lever to divert it to the other track, killing 1 person instead. What do you do?

Pull the lever   Do nothing

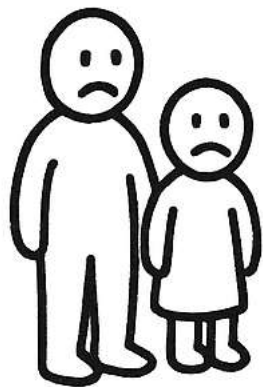In Islam, **you cannot deliberately kill one innocent person to save others**.

"Do not kill the soul which Allah has made sacred — except by right." **(Qur'an 17:33)**
"Whoever kills a soul... it is as if he killed all of mankind." **(Qur'an 5:32)**
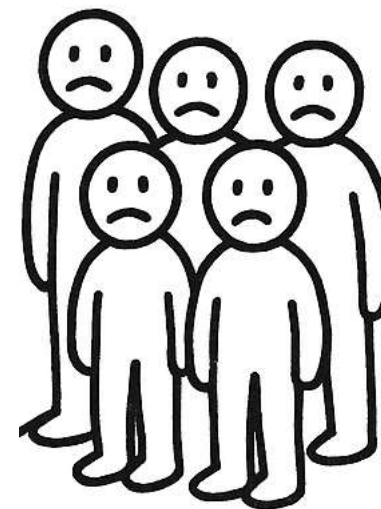
- If you push the car, you become the **direct cause** of that person's death, this is forbidden.
- If you stay, the rocks fall by **Allah's decree**, it is a natural disaster, not caused by your choice. You are not sinful for not intervening in a haram way.

In Islam, every life is sacred. You can't push the car, because that means you are killing someone with your own hands. But if you stay and the rocks fall, that's Allah's test, and you are not guilty. You should try to find another way to warn the 5 people, shout to them, or get help, but you cannot choose to kill.
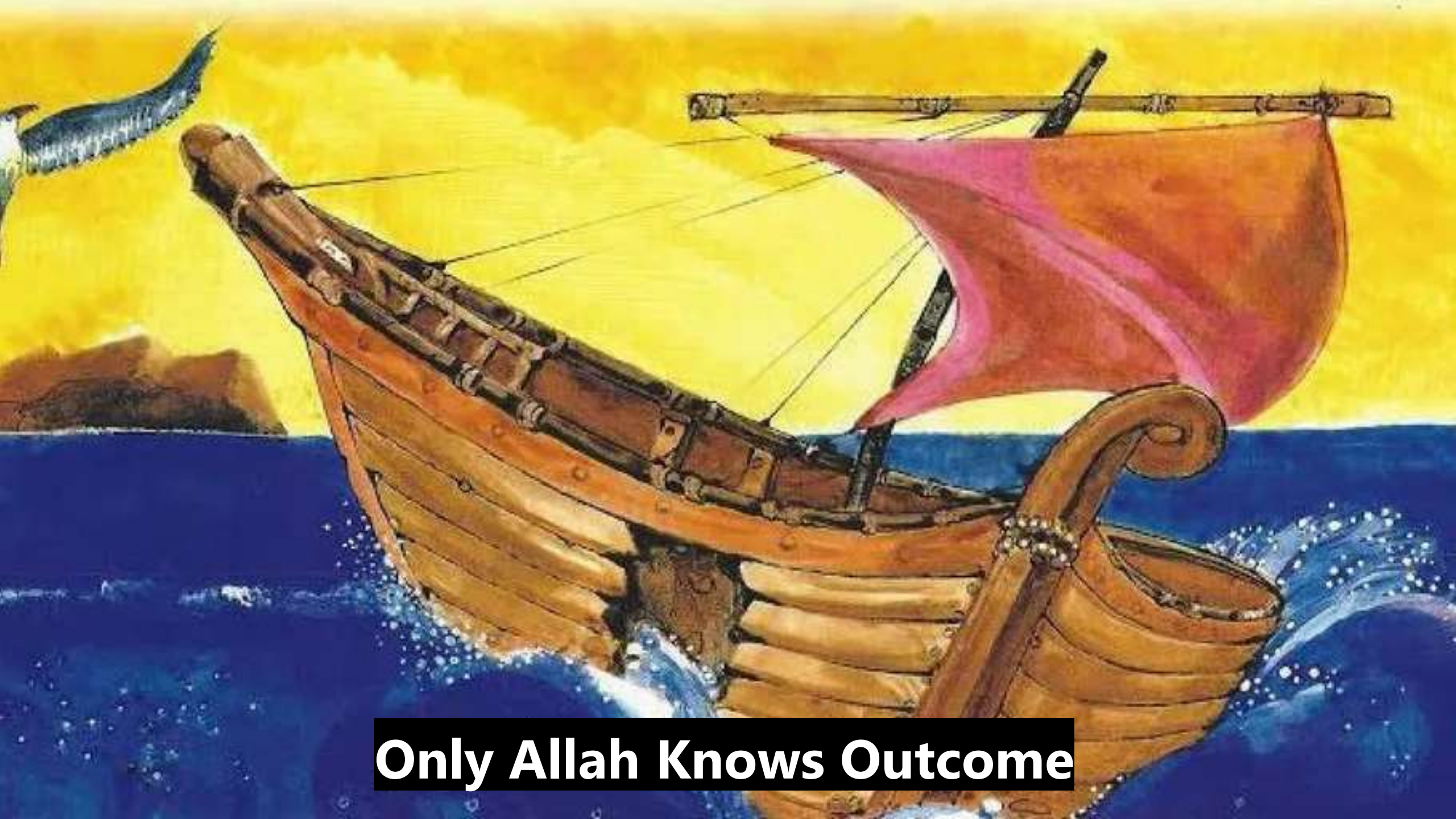
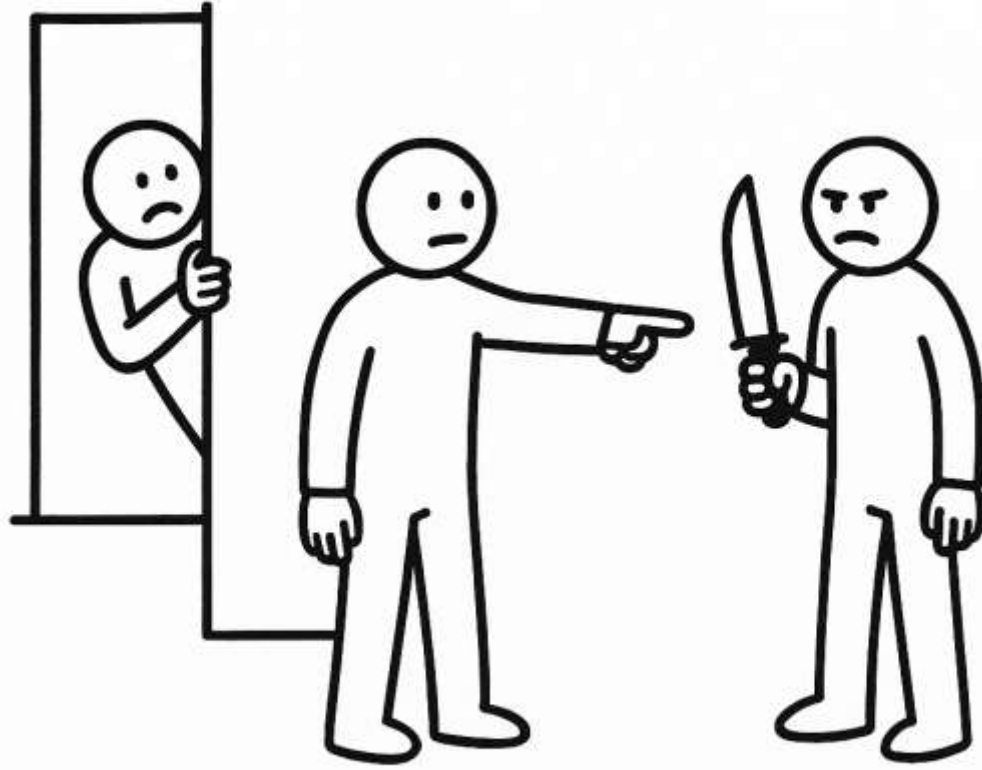**Help 1 family** in extreme crisis (e.g., they have no food at all).

Help 5 families in moderate difficulty (e.g., they are struggling but not starving).

Islamic Ethics vs Utilitarianism

Aspect	Islamic Ethics	Utilitarianism
Main Difference	Right and wrong are based on Allah's commands. Some actions (like killing innocents, injustice) are always forbidden.	Right and wrong depend only on outcomes – whatever brings the most happiness for the majority is considered right.
Example	**Organ transplant case:** Islam forbids killing one healthy person to save five sick people, because life is sacred and cannot be unjustly taken.	**Organ transplant case:** Killing one healthy person is justified if it saves five others, because the result brings more overall happiness.

Only Allah Knows Outcome

A murderer asks you where a victim is hiding; you can tell the truth and endanger them, or lie to protect their life, what do you do?

Tell the Truth   Lie

Islamic Ethics vs Deontology

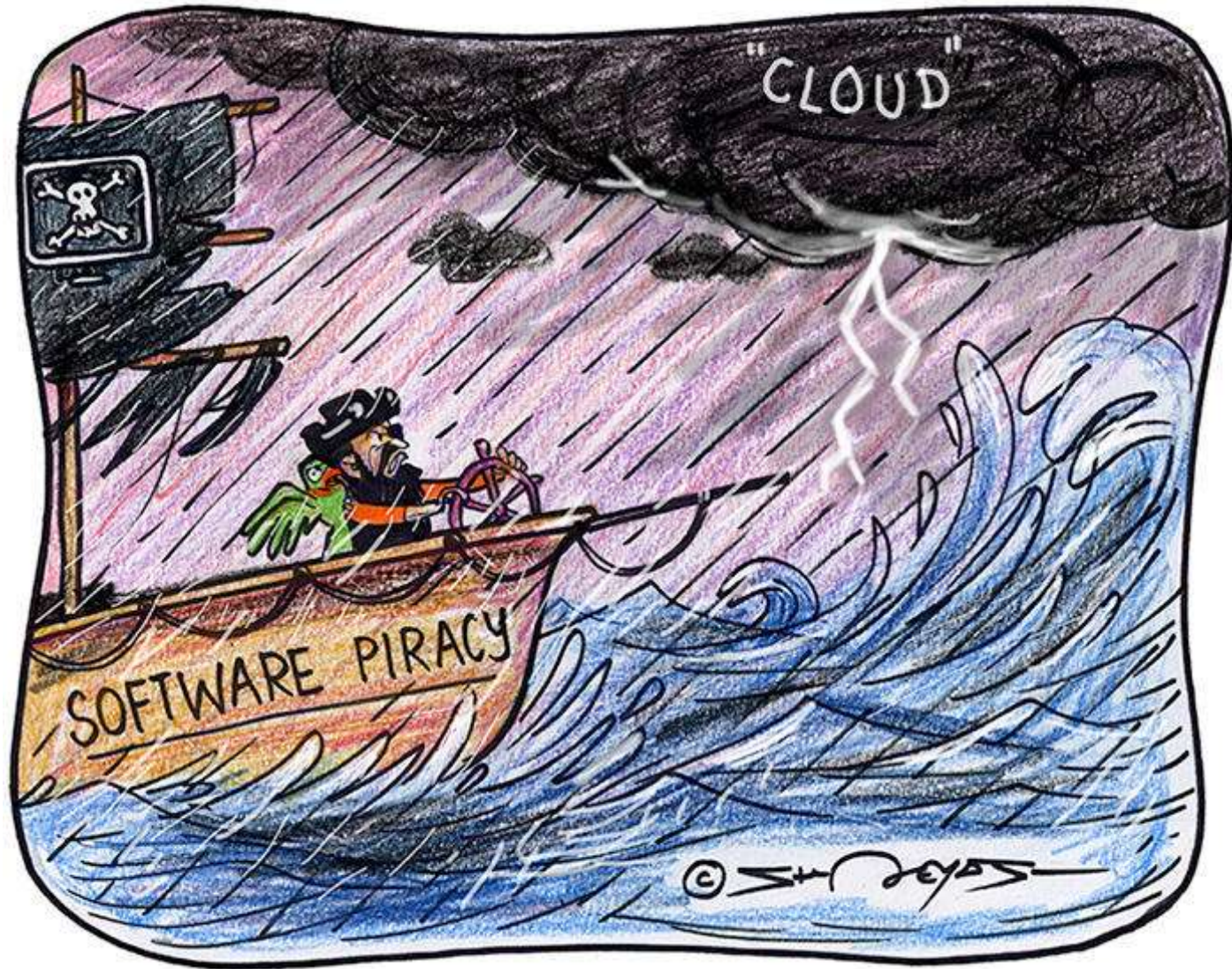| Aspect	Islamic Ethics	Deontology
Main Difference	Morality is based on Allah's commands. Rules are firm but allow limited exceptions (e.g., lying permitted in reconciliation, war, or between spouses for harmony). (Sahih Muslim 6633)	Morality is based on universal reason. Rules are absolute – lying is always wrong, with no exceptions, even if telling the truth causes harm.
Example	**Lying:** If a murderer asks where someone is hiding, you should not tell the truth. You may lie, divert, or use ambiguous speech to protect the innocent life.	**Lying:** Even if a murderer asks where someone is hiding, you must tell the truth, because lying is never allowed.

Islamic Ethics vs Virtue Ethics

Aspect	Islamic Ethics	Virtue Ethics
Main Difference	Good character (ṣabr, shukr, tawakkul, humility, honesty) is essential, but always within Allah's commands, the Prophet ﷺ as the role model, and accountability in the Hereafter.	Focus is on cultivating virtues like courage, justice, temperance to achieve happiness (eudaimonia) in this life, guided by reason.
Example	**Generosity:** Islam teaches giving charity (zakāt and ṣadaqah) as both an obligation and a virtue, with reward in the Hereafter. Courage = defending truth, justice, and the weak. Bound by divine rules of mercy and justice.	**Generosity:** Considered a personal virtue, but no divine obligation or afterlife accountability – guided by balance and rational moderation. Courage = the balance between fear and recklessness, defined only by reason, regardless of cause.

Believers! Do not devour one another's possessions wrongfully; rather than that, let there be trading by mutual consent. **(4:29)**

Islamic Ethics vs Relativism

Aspect	Islamic Ethics	Relativism
Main Difference	Right and wrong are defined by Allah through Qur'an and Sunnah, universal and timeless for all people.	Morality depends on culture, society, or individual opinion – no universal standard.
Example	**Pre-Islamic Arabia:** Burying baby girls was "culturally acceptable," but Islam declared it murder and strictly forbade it (Qur'an 81:8–9).	**Example:** A society may accept a practice like infanticide, slavery, or corruption as "normal," and relativism offers no basis to say it is wrong.

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Islamic Ethics vs Hedonism

Aspect	Islamic Ethics	Hedonism
Main Difference	Life's goal is obedience to Allah, cultivating good character, and preparing for the Hereafter. Pleasure is allowed but only within halal limits and never as the ultimate aim.	Life's goal is maximizing personal pleasure and minimizing pain, even if it ignores moral or spiritual duties.
Example	**Food & Drink:** Islam allows enjoyment of halal food but forbids excess, intoxication, or harm. Gratitude (shukr) turns it into worship. Eat in moderation.	**Food & Drink:** Pursue maximum taste and indulgence, even if it leads to harm (e.g., drunkenness, gluttony).

Why Islamic Ethics is Superior and Practical

Divine Anchor and Consistency:

- **Grounded in Divine Wisdom:** Islamic ethics is rooted in the wisdom of an All-Knowing, All-Merciful God, providing objective and unchanging moral law.
- **Consistency Across Time:** What was defined as good or evil in the 7th century per the Qur'an remains so today, though applications may expand with time.
- **Moral Clarity:** This permanence gives Muslims confidence and clarity, unlike shifting human-derived ethics.
- **Benefit and Justice:** God's laws are inherently beneficial and just, so following them leads to real goodness in both individual and social life.
- **Contrast with Secular Ethics:** Secular systems can lead to:
    - Moral relativism (right and wrong change with culture).
    - Confusion (no universal standard).
    - Extremes (e.g., utilitarianism justifying harm, Kantian rules being too rigid).
- **Balanced Path:** Islam strikes the middle way, called the *"middle nation"* ethos (Qur'an 2:143), avoiding extremes or one-sided approaches.

Why Islamic Ethics is Superior and Practical

Comprehensiveness – Molding Both Person and Society:

- Islamic ethics integrates inward character *and* outward action, covering both personal and social dimensions.
- Unlike secular theories that emphasize only one aspect (virtue, utility, or rules), Islam commands all of them harmoniously.

- **Expectations from a Muslim:** Maintain a clean heart. Do good deeds. Establish justice.
- **Scope of Guidance:**
  - **Personal habits:** honesty in speech, modesty in eating and dressing.
  - **Family responsibilities:** kindness to parents, fulfilling rights of spouses and children.
  - **Societal duties:** fairness in business, standing up for the oppressed.
  - **Knowledge ethics:** seeking truth, avoiding gossip.
  - **Environmental ethics:** not wasting resources, kindness to animals.
- **Holistic Nature:** No sphere of life is outside moral consideration.
  - Ethical and spiritual life are not separated, every role (student, professional, family member) becomes worship when done morally.
  - This creates an **integrated life** where goodness permeates all roles, rather than ethics being abstract or limited to specific contexts.

Why Islamic Ethics is Superior and Practical

Balance of Dunya and Akhira (This World and the Next)

- **Unique Motivation in Islam:**
  - Ethical behavior is tied not only to social benefit or personal satisfaction, but also to **belief in the afterlife**.
  - Muslims act ethically out of **hope for Paradise** and **fear of divine accountability**.
- **Ultimate Justice Beyond This World:**
  - Secular ethics struggle when good people suffer and wrongdoers prosper.
  - Islam teaches that the story does not end here. Every good deed is rewarded, every wrong is punished or forgiven in the Hereafter.
  - This belief **consoles the oppressed**, assuring them that justice will ultimately be served.
- **Strong Incentive for Morality:**
  - Believers uphold ethics even when it is difficult, or when society offers no support.
  - Patience in hardship and selfless kindness are always rewarded by Allah.
- **Worldly Benefits Too:**
  - Following God's guidance brings blessings in this life as well, inner peace, harmony in society, and protection from corruption.

Why Islamic Ethics is Superior and Practical

Integration of Spirituality and Ethics

- Being ethical is part of being spiritual, and being spiritual is inherently ethical.
- **Ethical Dimensions in Worship:**
  - **Prayer (ṣalāh):** teaches unity and equality (standing shoulder to shoulder).
  - **Fasting (ṣawm):** develops empathy by feeling the hunger of others.
  - **Pilgrimage (ḥajj):** builds discipline, humility, and global brotherhood.
- **Everyday Acts as Worship:**
  - Smiling is considered charity.
  - Earning an honest living is virtuous.
  - Caring for family is a godly act.
  - This blurs the line between "sacred" and "secular" life.
- **Continuous Spiritual Practice:**
  - Ethical life in Islam is a form of ongoing worship, not an abstract or occasional concept.
  - Turns morality into a **living faith**, not a dry duty.
- **Motivation Beyond Rules:**
  - A spiritually motivated person resists temptation out of **love and fear of Allah**, not just logic.
  - Addresses the weakness of systems like **deontology**, which prescribe rules but don't explain why people should care deeply about following them.

Why Islamic Ethics is Superior and Practical

Successful Historical Model

- **Practical Proof of Islamic Ethics:**
  - Islam's ethical system succeeded in practice, not just in theory.
  - The Prophet ﷺ transformed a tribal society full of feuds and vices into one marked by love, justice, and piety.
- **Historical Observations:**
  - Islam encouraged strong ethical conduct admired even by outsiders.
  - **Waqf (charitable endowments):** provided social services across generations.
  - **Rules of war:** the Prophet ﷺ forbade harming civilians, destroying crops, or needless cruelty.
  - **Personal conduct:** Muslims were known for piety, honesty, and charity.
- **Social Reforms Brought by Islam:**
  - Abolition of harmful practices like burying infant daughters.
  - Establishment of rights for women, orphans, and the poor — revolutionary at that time.
  - A strong tradition of seeking knowledge and truth, rejecting deceit and ignorance.
- **Summary Insight:**
  - Islamic ethics is **not utopian or impractical**.
  - It has been implemented successfully, unlike many secular theories that stay abstract or fail to resolve moral conflicts.

What is Islamic Ethics (Akhlaq)?

- Islamic ethics (akhlaq) is grounded in **the Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah**.

- The very term akhlaq (morality/character) in Arabic is related to **Al-Khaliq (The Creator)** and **makhluq (the created being)**, highlighting that good character in Islam is about a proper relationship with God and with other people.

- Moral values are not based on human whims or cultural norms alone; rather, right and wrong are ultimately defined by God's guidance.

- Muslims believe an action is morally right because Allah (God) or His Prophet commanded it, and wrong if they forbade it.

- Human beings, with their limited understanding and biases, are not left to determine all moral truths by themselves. (people would tend to justify whatever suits their desires)

Sources of Islamic Ethics

Primary Sources

1. **Qur'an**
   - The ultimate and foundational source of all ethics.
   - Provides clear commands, prohibitions, and principles of justice, mercy, honesty, etc.

2. **Sunnah (Hadith & Seerah of Prophet (ﷺ))**
   - The Prophet's sayings, actions, and approvals that explain and exemplify Qur'anic teachings.
   - Shows ethics in practice, making abstract principles actionable.
   - "You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful example [of conduct] for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day" (33:21)
   - HE stated: "I have been sent only to perfect righteous character" (Narrated by al-Bukhari in al-Adab al-Mufrad (273))

Sources of Islamic Ethics

Derived Sources (within Shariah framework)

1. **Ijma' (Consensus of Scholars)**
   - Agreement of qualified scholars on an issue not explicitly addressed in Qur'an or Sunnah. Ensures unity and authenticity in moral rulings.
   - **Example:** Scholars have ijmāʿ that digital scams and Ponzi schemes are haram, extending classical rulings of gharar (excessive uncertainty) and riba.

2. **Qiyas (Analogical Reasoning)**
   - Applying Qur'an/Sunnah rulings to new cases by analogy.
   - **Example:** prohibition of modern drugs by analogy with alcohol (both intoxicate).

3. **Ijtihad (Independent Reasoning)**
   - Scholarly reasoning to address new or complex issues while remaining faithful to Qur'an and Sunnah. Keeps Islamic ethics adaptable for modern times (AI, bioethics, finance).
   - **Example:** the permissibility of organ transplantation or IVF, scholars use Qur'an, Sunnah, principles of saving life to reach an ethical decision.

Sources of Islamic Ethics

Supporting Sources

1. **Custom ('Urf)**
   - Accepted cultural practices, provided they do not contradict Qur'an and Sunnah.
   - **Example:** Local wedding traditions are permissible as long as they don't include haram practices like extravagance or shirk.

2. **Maslahah (Public Interest / Common Good)**
   - Ethical decisions based on welfare of the community when not explicitly covered in primary texts.
   - **Example:** traffic laws, environmental protection.

3. **Shariah Law (Fiqh rulings)**
   - The practical legal-ethical framework built by scholars from the above sources.
   - **Example:** Inheritance shares: the Qur'an gives principles, but Shariah law systematizes exact shares (e.g. daughter inherits half the share of son in some cases, parents get fixed shares, etc.)

Core Ethical Principles in Islam

1. **Taqwa (God-Consciousness)**
   - Being mindful that Allah is always watching.
   - Acts as the inner compass guiding ethical behavior even in private.

2. **Justice & Fairness (`Adl)**
   - "Indeed, Allah commands justice…"(16:90).
   - Be fair even against yourself, family, or powerful people (4:135).

3. **Mercy & Compassion (Rahmah)**
   - Prophet ﷺ described as "a mercy to the worlds" (21:107).
   - Includes kindness to parents, orphans, neighbors, even animals.

4. **Honesty & Trustworthiness (Sidq, Amanah)**
   - "O believers! Be mindful of Allah and be with the truthful." (9:119).
   - Prophet ﷺ was known as **al-Ṣādiq** (Truthful) and **al-Amin** (The Trustworthy).

Core Ethical Principles in Islam

5. **Ihsan (Benevolence/Excellence)**
   - Going beyond justice, doing good with excellence.
   - "Repel evil with what is better, and your enemy may become a close friend" (41:34).

6. **Accountability & Intention (Ikhlas, Niyyah)**
   - Actions judged by intentions (Hadith: *Innamal a'mal bin-niyyāt*).
   - Each soul is accountable to Allah (6:164).

7. **Enjoining Good & Forbidding Evil (Amr bil Ma'ruf, Nahy 'anil Munkar)**
   - "Let there arise a group inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong." (3:104)
   - Creates social responsibility, not just individual piety.

8. **Human Dignity & Stewardship (Karamah, Khilafah)**
   - "We have honored the children of Adam." (17:70)
   - Humans as khalifah (trustees) of the earth, responsible for resources and justice.

Thank You