

# The Busking Philosopher

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## OPINION

## US HAS 'CAPTURED' PRESIDENT MADURO

BY SANDER PRISTON

EXPLOSIONS have been reported in the Venezuelan capital of Caracas this morning. The US has since claimed it 'captured' Venezuela's serving president since 2013, Nicolás Maduro, and his wife.

These events follow weeks of heightened tension as President Trump ramped up pressure on President Maduro since the US launched airstrikes on speed boats allegedly carrying drugs through Venezuelan waters.

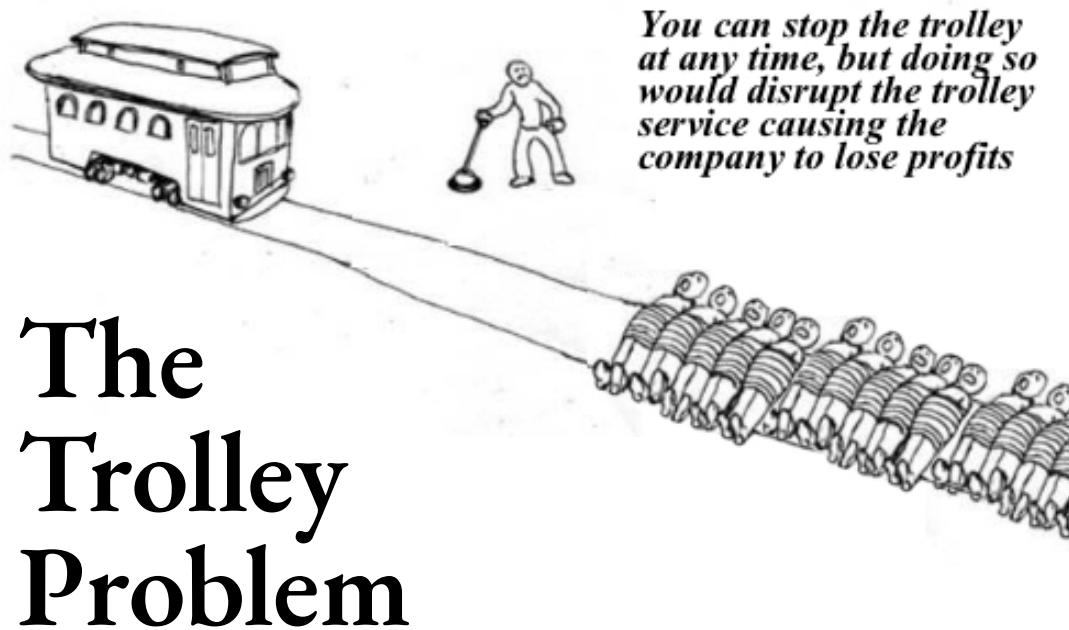
Over Christmas, Trump announced the first land strike which is believed to have taken place in Zulia, a state known for its oil reserves.

The Venezuelan government then appealed to militias and grass roots organisations throughout the country to support Maduro.

Now he has been captured, here are the arguments we are most likely going to hear repeated as justification for the extraordinary events of this morning, so you can stop them in their tracks and make up your own mind.

1. "Maduro is a criminal, not a legitimate Head of State"

Maduro is accused by US prosecutors of narco-trafficking, corruption, and conspiracy with criminal organisations. It will be said that a government headed by an indicted criminal forfeits sovereign protection and his capture is akin to apprehending an international crime boss, not overthrowing a government. Yet this argument confuses



## The Trolley Problem

### *Kamm's and Otsuka's imaginative thinking on the ethics of sacrifice*

BY SANDER PRISTON

The trolley problem is perhaps the most famous thought experiment in contemporary moral philosophy. In its simplest form, it asks us to imagine a runaway trolley hurtling down a track toward five unsuspecting workers. You stand next to a lever that can divert the trolley onto a side track, where it will kill only one worker.

Should you pull the lever?

While utilitarians often argue for the obvious solution—minimize overall harm by sacrificing one to save five—Francis Kamm doesn't believe moral reasoning can simply be a calculus of lives saved. To show this, she introduces a case in which you could stop the trolley by

pushing a large, heavy man onto the track. Kamm argues that directly using someone as a means to an end—intentionally violating their rights—is morally distinct from causing harm as a side-effect, as in the classic trolley problem case, even if the outcomes are numerically identical. This she calls the *Principle of*

*Permissible Harm.*

Michael Otsuka proposes another trolley scenario called the Loop Case in which the switch diverts the trolley onto a side track where a large, heavy man stands; this person blocks the trolley, stopping it from hitting the five on the main track as it loops back around.

Otsuka argues that in the loop case, the death of the one person is integral to saving the five, making it a case of intending harm (as a means) rather than just foreseeing it, even though it seems causally similar to the standard switch case where many find it permissible to pull the lever.

For more imaginative thought experiments like these, see Kamm's book *The Trolley Problem Mysteries*.



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jurisdiction with justice. US criminal charges do not constitute international legal authority so their unilateral indictment is not

adjudication. Think Noriega in Panama, 1989, for a comparison, one which was widely regarded as a violation of international law.

2. "Humanitarian intervention was necessary"

We will hear it said that Venezuela has long suffered economic collapse, repression and mass emigration. Since Maduro's government has failed its people, external intervention became a moral obligation.

However, the US is a

principle contributor to Venezuela's humanitarian crisis through sanctions, financial isolation and asset seizures. You cannot claim moral urgency to put out a fire if you are actively restricting access to water. The US positions itself as both arsonist and firefighter, then demands credit for the rescue.

Humanitarian intervention, if genuine, requires (i) multilateral authorisation, (ii) civilian protection guarantees, and (iii) clear post-intervention plans. None of these are credibly demonstrated.

3. "Regional security

required action"

Portrayal as a hub for narcotics trafficking is misleading. Drug flows to the US overwhelmingly originate elsewhere. Even if they were, drug trafficking is not a casus belli under international law. If it were, half the world would be subject to invasion.

Selectivity reveals motive: allies with equal or worse records face no such action.

Expect to hear these and many more arguments dominate the news channels over the next few days. Look out to see if anyone offers up any of these obvious rebuttals. I suspect not.

## PUZZLE

*Answer revealed next week*



The Dodo says the Hatter tells lies.

The Hatter says the March Hare tells lies.

The March Hare says both the Dodo and the Hatter tell lies.

Who is telling the truth?