

On the Trolley Problem

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1 Parameters of the Trolley Problem

A runaway trolley is moving uncontrollably down a track, which separates into two paths. The reader has control of a lever that can redirect the trolley, and faces a moral decision: either pull the lever, moving the trolley onto a track where it will kill one person, or do nothing, allowing the trolley to continue on its original path and kill five people.

The "fat man" introduces a condition that the reader can push a large man off a bridge and onto the track, stopping the trolley and saving the five people.

2 Philosophical Perspectives

Given this problem, two perspectives emerge.

2.1 The Utilitarian

The utilitarian believes that an action should be judged based on their outcomes. With this, the value of a human life is treated quantitatively, such that minimizing total harm is the optimal choice.

Given that the death of one person results in less overall suffering than the death of five, a utilitarian will ultimately pull the lever. The utilitarian did not choose this position, but is otherwise obliged to reduce overall harm.

2.2 The Kantian

From a Kantian perspective, moral actions are judged by adherence to duty and universal moral principles rather than consequences. In this view, actively causing harm (such as pulling the lever or pushing the fat man) is a violation of Kantian moral obligation, a *Categorical Imperative*, which forbids using individuals as mere means to an end. Therefore, removing oneself from interference aligns with their moral duty, even if it results in a greater loss of life.

3 Opinion: The Trolley Problem is Stupid

The trolley problem explicitly excludes factors and additional moral considerations, even though very act of posing the problem invites scrutiny beyond its constructed constraints. The reader will inevitably consider real world complexities, such as the responsibility distribution and the deception of the scenario itself. Knowing this, the problem becomes less of a definitive ethical question, and more so a thought experiment; something to force one to consider their own logic and reasoning.

So what is the ultimate realization, if we disregard semantics and variables? The fact that one has been placed in such a scenario means one has already lost. Take ten for a smoke break.