

TWENTY FOUR MORAL DILEMMAS

taken from (with some minor revisions): <http://psychopixi.com/uncategorized/25-moral-dilemmas/> and <https://www.theatlantic.com/newsletters/archive/2022/05/readers-offer-their-moral-dilemmas/629880/>

1. The trapped mining crew

Heather is the leader of a four-person mining expedition. While deep inside a mine, there is a cave-in and the four of them become trapped. A rock has crushed the legs of one of the members of her team, and he will die without medical attention. She has established radio contact with the rescuers, and they told her that it will take at least 36 hours to reach the space where she and the others are trapped.

She is able to calculate that the space where they are trapped has just enough oxygen for three people to survive for about 36 hours. It does not have enough oxygen for four people to survive for that length of time. The only way to save herself and the other two is to not give medical aid to the injured man.

Should Heather allow the injured person to die?

2. The runaway trolley

A runaway trolley is heading down the tracks toward five workers who will be killed if it continues on its present course. Molly is on a footbridge over the tracks, between the approaching trolley and the five workers. Next to her on this footbridge is a stranger who happens to be very large.

If she does nothing, the trolley will kill the five workers. The only way to save their lives is to push this stranger off the bridge and onto the tracks below, where his large body will stop the trolley and kill him.

Molly is confident that, with the element of surprise and her years of judo training, she will be able to push him off the footbridge. Should Molly push the stranger onto the tracks to save the five workers?

3. The deliberate infection

Ken is a doctor, and he has diagnosed one of his patients with HIV. This patient is about to receive a blood transfusion and then will be released from the hospital. He has told Ken, in the confidence of their doctor-patient relationship, that after he gets his transfusion and his medications from Ken, he intends to infect as many people as possible with HIV starting that evening.

Because Ken is bound by doctor-patient confidentiality, there is no legal way to stop this man from carrying out his plan. Even if Ken warns the police, they will not be able to arrest him, since his medical information is protected.

It occurs to Ken that he can contaminate this patient's medication with an untraceable poison that will kill him before he has a chance to infect others. Should Ken poison this man to prevent him from spreading HIV?

4. The hostage ecologists

Tom is part of a group of ecologists who are living and working in a remote jungle, far from the nearest town. The entire group, which includes eight children, has been taken hostage by paramilitary terrorists. One of the terrorists, who has taken a liking to Tom, informs him that the leader of the terrorist organization intends to kill all of the hostages, including Tom, the following morning.

This friendly terrorist is willing to help Tom and the children escape, but as an act of good faith he wants Tom to torture and kill one of the other hostages whom he happens to dislike. If Tom refuses this offer, all the hostages including the children and Tom will die. If he accepts the offer, then the other hostages will die in the morning, but Tom and the eight children will escape.

Should Tom torture and kill one of his fellow hostages so that he can escape from the terrorists and save the lives of the eight children?

5. The life insurance policy

Mary is in the waiting room at a large hospital, about to visit a sick friend. A man sitting next to her tells her that his father is very ill and the doctors believe that he has a week to live at most. He also tells Mary that his father has a substantial life insurance policy that expires at midnight tonight. If his father dies before midnight, this man will receive a very large sum of money. He says that the money would be very helpful for him and his family, and that no good will come from his father living for a few more days. After talking with him, Mary is convinced that this man is in desperate need of the insurance money to feed his family.

The man says that he would, right now, go up to his father's room and smother him with a pillow, but he knows that the doctors, nurses, and hospital security are watching him — although the room itself is not being guarded or watched especially closely. He asks Mary if she will go to his father's room and do it.

Should Mary kill this man's father so that he can collect the insurance money?

6. The baby or the townspeople

Enemy soldiers have taken over Jane's village. They have orders to kill all remaining civilians over the age of two. Jane and some of the townspeople have sought refuge in the cellar of a large house. Just as some soldiers stop right outside the house and begin talking, Jane's baby begins to cry loudly. Any moment, his crying will get the attention of the soldiers who will spare Jane's baby's life but will kill Jane and the others hiding in the cellar.

If Jane turns on the noisy furnace, it will block the sound of the crying and the soldiers will suspect nothing. If the furnace is turned on, however, the cellar will become uncomfortably hot for adults and children but deadly for infants. The only way to save herself and the others is if Jane activates the furnace, which will kill her baby.

Should Jane overheat her baby to save herself and the other townspeople?

7. The overloaded lifeboat

While Doug is on a cruise, there is a fire on board the ship, and it has to be abandoned. The lifeboats are put in the water and the passengers climb into them. All of the lifeboats are

carrying many more people than they were designed to hold. Doug's lifeboat is sitting very low in the water and is in danger of sinking.

The ocean starts to get rough, and his lifeboat begins to take on water. Suddenly he sees a group of old people who are swimming feebly in the water. They yell for Doug to throw them a rope so that they can get to his lifeboat and climb in. Doug believes that the boat will sink if it takes on any more passengers.

Should Doug throw the rope to these people or refuse?

8. The hospital ventilation

Carrie is a doctor working in a hospital. Due to an accident in the building next door, there are deadly fumes coming through the hospital's ventilation system. Four of her patients are in one room of the hospital. In another room is one of her patients. If she does nothing, the fumes will enter the room containing the four patients and kill them.

The only way to avoid the deaths of these patients is to hit a switch that will cause the fumes to bypass the room containing the four patients. This will, however, cause the fumes to enter the room containing the single patient who will then die.

Should Carrie hit the switch and save four of her patients?

9. The concentration camp

You are an inmate in a concentration camp. A sadistic guard is about to hang your son who tried to escape, and he wants you to help by pulling away the chair on which your son is standing. He says that if you refuse, he will kill your son as well as another innocent inmate. You don't have any doubt that he means what he says. What should you do?

10. The unfaithful wife

You are an emergency worker who has just been called to the scene of a car accident. When you arrive, you see that the car belongs to your wife. Fearing the worst, you rush over, only to see that she is trapped in her car with another man. He is obviously someone with whom she has been having an affair.

You reel back in shock, devastated by what you have just found. As you step back, the wreck in front of you comes into focus. You see that your wife is seriously hurt and needs attention right away. Even if she gets immediate attention, there's at least a seventy percent chance that she will die. You look at the seat next to her and see her lover. He's bleeding from a wound to the neck and you need to stem the flow of blood immediately.

If you attend to your wife, her lover will bleed to death, and you may not be able to save her anyway. If you work on the lover, you can save his life, but your wife will die. What should you do?

11. The incriminating email

You are the network administrator for a large company. You have a young family and need your job to support them. Part of your job is to monitor the emails for the organization. Usually, this just means occasionally checking on emails that may be spam.

One day you get a helpdesk request from someone asking why she has not received any emails for the past 24 hours, even though she was expecting several. The request has come from the wife of a very good friend of yours. You recognize her name and quickly look into the problem. You locate her undelivered emails on a server, and, to figure out the problem, you need to open several to ensure that they are not spam. While doing so, you notice that one of these emails is from this woman's secret lover. You scan the rest of the email and there is no doubt that she has been having an affair for some time now.

You finish the task and push all of her undelivered emails to her inbox, but you can't decide what to do next. Your initial reaction is to call your friend and tell him about the email, but you quickly realize that your company's policy is very strict. You will lose your job if your boss finds out that you revealed the contents of the email to anyone, and, if you tell your friend, your boss will eventually find out. However, you feel that, by not telling your friend, you are helping his wife carry on her affair, and this troubles you greatly.

What should you do?

12. The drowning children

You and your family are going away for the weekend. Your daughter is seven and her best friend is your niece, who is also seven. Your daughter asks if your niece can come along this weekend, and you agree.

You arrive at your destination and the house where you are staying is directly on the beach. The girls ask if they can go for a swim. You tell them that they have to wait until you have unpacked the car, but they can play on the sand. They run down to the beach, and you begin to unpack the car. After about five minutes, you hear screaming coming from the direction of the beach and it sounds like the girls.

You run down to see what the matter is, and you discover that they haven't listened to you and have gone for a swim. There is no one else on the beach, and the girls are caught in a rip tide. They are struggling to stay above water, particularly your niece who isn't a strong swimmer. You swim out quickly, but when you get to them, you realize that there is no way that you will be able to get both the girls back to the shore at the same time.

You need to decide which of the girls you will rescue first. You have enough strength and energy to rescue them both, but you can only do it one at a time. You look at the two girls. Your niece can barely keep her head above water, and you know that if you take your daughter back first, there will be very little chance that she will survive.

Your daughter is struggling also, but she is a much stronger swimmer, and you estimate that if you take your niece back to shore first, there's about a 50 percent chance that your daughter will be able to stay afloat long enough for you return.

Who should you save first?

13. The Bali drugs charge

You are on vacation in Bali with your spouse and your 18-year-old son. You have been there for a week and are about to head home. All three of you are at the airport getting ready to board your plane, when an armed officer comes around with a drug dog. All of your bags are piled on a cart, and the dog sniffs at both your bag and your spouse's and passes over them. When he gets to your son's bag, however, he begins to get more excited.

You look over at your son, and he's looking a little nervous. You know that he has, in the past, smoked a little marijuana, but, generally, he's a good kid, and you certainly didn't think that he would be stupid enough to bring any drugs back on the plane. At first, you feel angry that he would do such a thing and start planning your responsibility lecture, but then you realize that you are in Bali, and they have a zero-tolerance drug policy. If he does have illegal drugs in his bag, your son could be jailed for life or, worse, executed. You look at your spouse who has come to the same conclusion and has gone pale with fear.

The officer is beginning to look more stern with every sniff that the dog takes. He looks directly at you and asks you to open the bag. You do, and, as the officer begins taking out your son's clothing, you see to your horror that there is a small quantity of marijuana stashed in a rolled-up t-shirt.

The officer looks at you and asks, "Whose bag is this?"

You try to decide what to say. You see out of the corner of your eye that your spouse is about to step forward and claim the bag. What should you do?

14. The mad bomber

A madman who has threatened to set off several bombs in crowded areas has been apprehended. Unfortunately, he has already planted the bombs and they are scheduled to go off in a short time. It is possible that hundreds of people may die. The authorities cannot make him divulge the location of the bombs by conventional methods. He refuses to say anything and requests a lawyer to protect his fifth amendment right against self-incrimination. In exasperation, a high-level official suggests torture. This would be illegal, but the official is sure that it will make him tell the truth in just enough time for you to find and defuse the bombs.

You, however, know that the bomber will be able to withstand the torture, after all, he is quite mad. He might talk, though, if you torture his innocent wife (who is also in the building). What should you do?

15. The sinking lifeboat

You are on a cruise, and, on the second day, your ship experiences technical difficulties and the captain says that it needs to make an unscheduled stop. A couple of hours later the captain

makes another announcement. The ship's hull has been breached and everyone on board will have to abandon ship. The ship's lifeboats are lowered, and everyone gets into one.

You climb into one that hit the side of the ship while it was being lowered and now has a large hole in its side. There are ten people in this lifeboat, and soon it begins to take on water. You quickly work out that if nine people bail water with their hands while one person rests, and the person resting switches every ten minutes, you can keep the boat from sinking, at least for a while. By being able to rest one person at a time, this bailing can be kept up for about five or six hours. Maybe help will arrive by then, but if not, the lifeboat will probably sink and all ten of you will die.

While you are taking your break, you see another lifeboat not too far away. A friend of yours is in that boat and, realizing your predicament, he is waving for you to get out and swim to his boat. There is only enough room for one more person in that lifeboat, and it is moving away rapidly with the current. If you jump out, you will force the remaining nine people in your boat to bail water continuously, and, you estimate, that will reduce the total time they can stay afloat to just two hours. If you are in your friend's lifeboat, however, you will almost certainly be fine until you are rescued.

As you watch the boat with your friend drift away, you realize you have about 30 seconds to make a decision. Do you stay in your lifeboat, help keep it afloat for as long as possible, and hope that the rescue will arrive in five or six hours? Or do you go to your friend's boat, thus, ensuring your own rescue?

16. The over-crowded lifeboat

In 1842, a ship struck an iceberg, and more than 30 survivors were crowded into a lifeboat that was intended to hold seven. As a storm approached, it became obvious that the lifeboat would have to be lightened or no one would survive. The captain reasoned that the right thing to do in this situation was to force some individuals to go over the side where they would shortly drown. Such an action, he reasoned, was not unjust to those thrown overboard, for they would have drowned anyway. If he did nothing, however, he would be responsible for the deaths of those whom he could have saved. Some people opposed the captain's decision. They claimed that if nothing was done and everyone died as a result, no one would be responsible for these

deaths. On the other hand, if the captain attempted to save some, he could do so only by killing others and their deaths would be his responsibility; this would be worse than doing nothing and letting all die. The captain rejected this reasoning. Since the only possibility for rescue required strenuous rowing, the captain decided that the weakest would have to be sacrificed. In this situation, it would not do, he thought, to draw lots because that might mean that the strongest individuals would go overboard, which again might mean that everyone would end up dying. As it turned out, after many days of hard rowing, the survivors were rescued, and the captain was tried for his action.

Did the captain make the right decision?

17. The tortured child

Imagine that a powerful alien visits earth. This alien has the ability to eradicate war, famine, and much other human suffering. The alien says that he will do this, but only if a price is paid. He demands a small child be given to him so that he can perform painful scientific experiments on it. These are experiments that will eventually cause the child's death. Should you hand over the child?

18. The sick patients

You are a skilled doctor who is caring for five patients who all need different organ transplants. There are currently no organs available for them, and if they don't get their transplants soon, they will all die. You have a sixth patient, who is dying from an incurable disease. His current treatment is medicine to ease his pain and prolong his life, but it will not cure his disease. He is a compatible organ donor for your five other patients, but the medicine that he is taking will keep him alive just a day longer than they have left. If you stop giving him his medicine, then he will die before them and in a very painful way, but you will then be able to use his organs to save the others. What should you do?

19. The sick patients II

You are a skilled doctor who is caring for five patients who all need different organ transplants. There are currently no organs available for them, and if they don't get their transplants soon,

they will all die. You have a sixth patient, who has a serious, but treatable disease. At the moment, you are treating him with a medication that will, most likely, allow him to recover. But he is a compatible organ donor for your five other patients. If you stop giving him his treatment, then he will die, in a very painful way, and you will then be able to use his organs to save the others. What should you do?

20. The Robin Hood robber

You witness a man rob a bank, but instead of keeping the money for himself, he donates it to a local orphanage. You know that this orphanage has been struggling for funding, and this money will allow the children to receive proper food, clothing and medical care. If you report the crime, the money will be taken away from the orphanage and given back to the bank. What should you do?

21. The plagiarized paper

You are an English teacher at a high school. One of your pupils is a very bright and gifted girl, whom you have always enjoyed teaching. She has always made A's, and she is now in her final year and preparing to apply to college. Unfortunately, she has been very ill this term and has missed several weeks of school. She has just turned in a paper that is worth 40 percent of her final grade, but you realize that she did not write it herself—she copied an essay that you have found online and she tried to pass it off as her own work.

If you report her plagiarism to the school authorities, it will be entered on her permanent record and she will no longer be eligible to attend the prestigious university that she has dreamed of attending all through high school. If you refuse to accept the report, her final grade will be very low and may harm her chances of being selected to attend this university. If you mark the paper as though you believed it was her own work, she will do very well, and stand every chance of getting into the university that she wishes to attend.

What should you do?

22. The expensive treatment

Your partner is dying from a rare disease. Luckily, a cure has recently been invented by a doctor who happens to live nearby. This doctor is selling the cure for ten times the amount that it cost him to make. You try to raise the money, but even after borrowing from friends and taking a loan from the bank, you can only raise half the amount. You go to the doctor and beg him to sell it more cheaply because your partner will die before you can raise the full amount, but he refuses, saying that he invented the cure and is determined to make money from it. You offer to pay him half now and half later, but he still refuses.

You believe that you can break into his laboratory one night and steal the cure. This will save your partner, although you might be arrested for the crime. What should you do?

23. The different father

You are a doctor, and one day a twenty-eight-year-old man comes in with an unidentified genetic disease. You order some tests and identify the genetic variant that's causing the disease. There's a known therapy that works well, and you're excited to report this to your patient. As you look over his test results, though, you notice something surprising. The tests indicate that your patient's father is not the person listed as his father on his medical forms. Your patient came in asking for help treating an unknown disease. Should you tell him what you have discovered about his father?

24. The wrong person arrested

One afternoon while you are watching a Mississippi State versus Alabama basketball game (which Mississippi State is winning), one of your close friends calls you and tells you that she has committed a crime. A few days later, you learn that someone else has been arrested for the crime that she committed. Should you go to the police and tell them what you know?