

THE TRAIN PROBLEM EXPOSES OUR TRUE SENSE OF "MORALITY"

Here is something akin to the famous trolley problem.

The train is coming.

You are in charge of the lever and thus in charge of what track the train goes along.

There is one person on the sidetrack.

There are five people on the main track.

Do you pull the lever and divert the train so that the person walking the side track will be killed?

Do you let the train go along and kill the five people?

The question asks if you let things run their course or do you take action to take one life to spare five?

The question asks if the number of lives matters? If it does not then you cannot say one life is worth taking to save five even if there is no choice. Do you have the right to judge five lives as more valuable than one life? Is that not comparing something totally valuable and thus denying it really is totally valuable?

Can you compare lives even when the five people are murderous paedophiles and the person on the side track is your beloved and noble spouse? Or the other way around?

The question asks that if you say you have no choice but to send the train at the one person then is it really true you have no choice?

The reality is that 999 out of a 1000 people will pull the lever if we are talking about ordinary five people on the main track and one ordinary person on the side track. 999 out of a 1000 will NOT pull the lever if its the killer child abusers on the main track with a saintly spouse on the side track.

We see that those who are saying five lives weigh more than one do not really value lives and persons as much as they say.

Why stop there? Why not capture a healthy or dying person so that their organs might be harvested to save the lives of one child or ten children? Say there really is no other way? Say there is no alternative to letting the child or children die horribly?

We wonder if the reason you would not agree with the person being taken is that you could be seen as offering yourself for that purpose! Or you could be the one taken. That may be unlikely but it shows how selfish you are for you don't even want a small risk of that happening to you.

If you knowingly derail a train so it kills one person on a side track but spares five on the main track most people will intuit that you are behaving morally. But if you select a fat person, a sick person or a child to throw them on the track to stop the train and save the lives you are intuited as evil or immoral. Many people - not all! - will judge this action as despicable despite the fact that in both cases you are saving five lives by sacrificing one. Many would do what you did. There is no consistency.

This problem exposes us. It shows that morality is more about feeling you are a good person than any real concern for good or bad. Either way somebody is dead and that does not matter as much as your wish to see yourself as moral.

You may judge a person as moral if they derail the train and judge them as vile if they send it at the fat person/sick person/child. These days if it is a beautiful dog on the side track you will be despised too.

The pious say that sending the train at the fat person/sick person/child is wrong is because it is using a person as a means to an end.

They tell us it does not matter if it is a the fat person/sick person/child. But that alarms us too for we would say killing the

child is worse.

Either way you are killing. You are the one sending the train to kill five people. Not acting is acting. You are the one who sends it to the side track. The derailing is condemned because we are more hypocritical than we are moral. You have a weapon and it is going to kill either way.

Our love and goodness are not as squeaky-clean as we want to think and want others to think. That goodness is what we offer to God which shows that we think he is as morally dubious as us and we don't truly want a proper loving God but one that is on our side even if it is wrong.

What if it is one person on the track and sidetrack? The same debate happens and shows you are clearly regarding one person as being of lesser value.

The trolley dilemma is used in two disciplines. The one it was thought of for is social psychology. It was used as test to see that if we have a moral philosophy, if we are consistent with it in times of grave decision-making. It is a test to see if human nature will keep shifting from worrying about principles and mere consequences. You may say it is never right to accuse the innocent even to do huge good but you will do that when swayed by the good results of doing so. You may say it is wrong to sacrifice one innocent person for saving many as in the trolley dilemma but when you get the chance you will sacrifice that person. You will feel "moral" about it. The dilemma is used in philosophy as well to help decide if morality should be about consequences or principles when there is a conflict.

Imagine you could kill God. God is on the side track...most of us would kill him wouldn't we? What if Jesus was on it? This shows the inherent extremism of saying God comes first. It shows the cruelty if it is just man saying God is real and it is man's word you are taking. It is only mans' word you can take which shows the cruelty.

Imagine you could kill Satan? What if five Satans are on the main track and one on the side. What if Satan is only on the side track and good people are on the main?

The problem shows that carry tension in us about morality all the time even if we are not aware. Train problems happen all the time - it could be just between giving five people money or giving one money. Who is valuable enough for the gift?

Life is one big train problem of the extreme variety. The poor starve so we can have bread. We pretend to be good people and we get angry when challenged for we think if we rage and rant the true nature of what we are like will not be seen. We think our raging forcefulness shows that we are so good that nobody should suggest we are fakes.

It shows what we must really feel about morality. It shows why we hate those who do evil things for when doing the right thing can be hideous and terrible they are just doing terrible things. It makes us fear what dilemmas are going to have to be faced next over them!