

The Trolley Problem

You see a runaway trolley moving toward five tied-up people lying on the tracks. You are standing next to a lever that controls a switch. If you pull the lever, the trolley will be redirected onto a side track, and the five people on the main track will be saved. However, there is a single person lying on the side track. You have two options:

1. Do nothing and allow the trolley to kill the five people on the main track.
2. Pull the lever, diverting the trolley onto the side track where it will kill one person.

Which is the more ethical option? Why?

Now, imagine this scenario:

As before, a trolley is hurtling down a track towards five people. This time, you are on a bridge under which it will pass, and you can stop it by putting something very heavy in front of it. As it happens, there is a very fat man next to you – your only way to stop the trolley is to push him over the bridge and onto the track, killing him to save five. How do you proceed?

How did you solve these moral dilemmas - were your answers instinctual or the result of moral reasoning? Would your solutions be evidence of Kohlberg or of Haidt's theory of moral development?