

Ethical Group Discussion: The Lifeboat

Discuss the following scenario, and reach a decision as a group.

Someone should be prepared to explain *how* you reached your decision. Best of luck!

Scenario

The ship is sinking and the seas are rough. All but one lifeboat has been destroyed. The lifeboat holds a maximum of six people. There are ten people that want to board the lifeboat. The four individuals who do not board the boat will certainly die.

Woman who thinks she is six weeks pregnant

Lifeguard

Two young adults who recently married

Senior citizen who has fifteen grandchildren

Elementary school teacher

Thirteen year old twins

Veteran nurse

Captain of the ship

Notes and Result of the Discussion:

Classic Ethical Dilemmas

The 'Heinz' Dilemma

Mr. Heinz is ordinarily a law-abiding man. One day, his wife becomes gravely ill. Heinz takes her to the doctor, who prescribes a medication for her. She does quite well on this medication and begins to recover. However, Heinz has no insurance and runs out of money quickly paying for this expensive medication. After a few months, he can no longer purchase the medication and his wife begins to take a turn for the worse. One day, he is in the pharmacy and notices that no one is behind the counter. The medication is in plain view. Should he steal the medication to help his sick wife?

The Old Woman in the Airport

You are in the airport, trying to catch a flight that is about to leave. As you run down the crowded corridor, an elderly woman suddenly slips in front of you and falls to the ground with a cry. Do you stop to help, if you know you will miss your flight because of it?

The 'Trolley'

Trolley Scenario 1

A trolley is running out of control down a track. In its path are 5 people who have been tied to the track by a mad philosopher. Fortunately, you can flip a switch which will lead the trolley down a different track. Unfortunately, there is a single person tied to that track. Should you flip the switch? Why?

Trolley Scenario 2

As before, a trolley is hurtling down a track towards five people. You are on a bridge under which it will pass, and you can stop it by dropping a heavy weight in front of it. As it happens, there is a 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. Should you proceed? Why? How is this case different from the first?

The Old Woman in the Airport is modified from Zimmer, C, *Whose Life Would You Save?* Discover, April 2004

The Trolley Problem originates from Philippa Foot, *The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect in Virtues and Vices* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978). It has been elaborated on by Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem*, 59 *The Monist* 204-17 (1976) and Judith Jarvis Thomson, *The Trolley Problem*, 94 *Yale Law Journal* 1395-1415 (1985). Modified from Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trolley_Problem