

(in parenthesis)

*This is the supplementary sheet for teachers using the **Philippa Foot and the Trolley Problem** worksheet.*

*In this sheet we will discuss some of the issues in a little more detail. The main aim is to help the teacher decide how to motivate and coordinate discussion of the issues involved.*

**For Discussion:**

The first excerpt and discussion questions are intended to draw students' attention to the importance of intentions and the aims of our actions in assessing responsibility and making moral evaluations.

— The first basic set of questions is just to get students to consider the concepts of intention and ends. It is intended to draw out any pre-theoretical intuitions students may have about these notions before examining them more closely in the course of the discussion.

— We want students to see that intentions have a kind of structure: they are directed towards a goal, and they involve an idea of how to bring about that goal. This could be very simple: I intend to do well in my exams so I will study hard, such that I do indeed do well in my exams. The intention and the aim is clearly intimately related in this simple, uncomplicated case.

— Then the students' attention is drawn to the nuances of the simple example which are going to be important in more complex cases:

- In order that I intend to work hard, as well as intending to do well in my exams, which is my ultimate aim, I need to know that there is some kind of causal relationship between my working hard and doing well, and that I can have some high degree of confidence in that causal relationship. Such knowledge and confidence involves a great deal of contextual goings on which are not explicit in either my original intentions aims. So, for example, I have to know that I can attend the exam, otherwise my hard work will be pointless.

— Now the students are being encouraged to think about how a wider context of the intention and aims might be involved; such context may or may not be morally relevant.

- For example, my parents may be proud of me for doing well. This is a causal consequence of what I intend but it may not constitute any part of my intention: I work hard for my own success and reward, not their good opinion of me. That said, I don't intend that they are not proud of me, so it's of no consequence to me about working hard and doing well, that they will be pleased. Indeed, I might be very happy, independently of my working hard that they're pleased with me. Perhaps because I also value a good relationship with them and their happiness, etc.
- The above consequences are clearly foreseeable by me. I don't intend them as a goal of my working hard, but I might be happy to intend them otherwise, as suggested. Now, the students are encouraged to take note that plausibly for any (or at least a good many) intention, there will be unforeseen consequences, that neither have anything to do with my intentions nor my aims.
- For example: I my hard-work in my exams results in securing a place at a particular university. Another person would have secured that place had I not worked as hard, pushing them out. I could not have foreseen that this person who I don't know and will never meet will not get to go to the university of their choice, at least in part, due to my actions. The question is: am I responsible for it? Well, if you take responsibility to involve everything I am *causally* responsible for, yes. But surely that's not right? Even aside from causality here, it seems, at best, too thin a notion of responsibility and not really what we mean by it. More likely, we'd want to say that I'm responsible for what I can foresee and intend.
- Perhaps then, if I have a parallel intention to make my parents happy and that this is consistent with my working hard, we might say I am responsible for my parents' happiness, and I should be praised because I have their interests at heart too and that's a praiseworthy intention. If I don't have the parallel intention, I'm responsible for their happiness as a foreseeable consequence of my intentions but I'm not going to be praised for that consequence because it is an unintended consequence of my (other) intentions. So perhaps, same action, different evaluation of it given intentions?
- Regardless, of how we analyse the examples, the point is to appreciate that there is a complex relationship developing, very quickly between intentions, aims, knowledge and responsibility.

— The next example they have to come up with then pushes towards the moral issue at hand. You intend some situation; however, to bring that situation about you have to produce some action which produces an intermediary effect. That intermediary effect is itself undesirable, but is required for to make happen what you ultimately aim for. Now, crucially, you have to intend this intermediary effect, and the effect happening is

a goal in some sense of the intention. However, were it not for further consequences of the intermediary effect, you wouldn't want to do it. This is the key to Foot's analysis.

Say, I want my child to leave a happy life and part of that involves discipline. To teach my child discipline involves me telling them off on occasion which will probably upset them to some degree. Perhaps I have a duty to do this; however, it's not a moral dilemma as the trolley problems are. Having a less controversial example might help us to see the situation more clearly — also we can see that it's these issues at hand have wide-ranging importance.

My aim is that my child leads a happy, fulfilling life. I intend to discipline them as a means to that end. Crucially, I can foresee that my disciplining them will upset them; their being an upset is a foreseeable consequence of my actions. I am aware of that, and so, in a sense, I intend their being upset.

What to say about this? Presumably, we think a child's distress is a bad thing and should be avoided — obviously, it is for this reason that the nature of parental discipline is an important issue in its own right. Nevertheless, taken in isolation, I seem to be intending something bad. Some people might say that we shouldn't discipline children citing this distress reason. Perhaps its because they analyse the situation, at least in part, as "I intend to upset my children".

I think the Foot wants to say that DDE helps us out here. It is a misrepresentation of the situation to simply say that I intend to upset my children, as if *this is my sole aim*. What changes the situation is that it is a means to my actual aim which is that they lead a happy, fulfilling life.

So am I responsible for their being upset? Yes, clearly, in a causal sense. And not just as an accidental consequence, but one that I can foresee and so intend. However, am I morally responsible? Well, my behaviour is certainly one which is available for moral evaluation. But we'd be likely to say, assuming I'm not abusive or horrible, that I'm not to be thought of as a bad person because my *ultimate* aim is my child's happiness, not their distress. Of course, if I *just* intended their distress, then that same behaviour would be morally reprehensible. Likely we would not want to call it discipline either.

— There is then a really interesting issue about knowledge and foreseeability. Let's say I run a company and my ultimate aim is to maximise profits. Say, I am told by the management about some production process which is more efficient and will better maximise profits. I don't foresee some calamity in the workplace that results from the introduction of this process. I couldn't have had this causal consequence as an articulated intention, although it is a function of my bringing about my intended aims. Moreover, it was not something that couldn't have been reasonably foreseen.

I'm sure the intuition is that we'd want the person to be morally responsible in some way and to some degree in this scenario. From what's been said, so far, it might look as though they get off because they didn't foresee the calamity and they didn't intend it. Is it the same, structurally at least, as the instance my pushing someone out of the university place?

I mention this because a student might spot this possibility. Now depending on the case at hand, it might be dealt with by the issue of omissions or neglect that Foot does discuss. However, it's very plausible that the entrepreneur doesn't wilfully intend the neglect of due diligence. Had she looked done due diligence, given the foreseeability, she would learn of the calamity and not have made the production change.

Is she still responsible? Well, it's getting a little trickier. However, I think most people would think, given the stipulation of due diligence and the foreseeability of the event, she is morally responsible. The problem is that you can't really say that we are morally required to account for all possible effects of any ultimately intended action either. That said, it might be on the back of the sort of distinctions we can make with the DDE, we have some kind of epistemic-moral duty to be aware of foreseeable consequences of intended aims. This duty may even be articulated, formalised and legislated as in the case of due diligence, precisely because you don't want to collapse all intentions into final goals.

Anyway, this is perhaps getting into more advanced territory and beyond the scope of discussion here. But it's worth noting that knowledge is pretty crucial to this discussion, and for determining both culpability and moral value.

— The issue of descriptions is also crucial to the discussion. Because depending on how you describe the intention you can flatten or leave out the morally relevant information out of the scenario. The description also articulates what is known, or at least reported as being known.

For example, you might ask me in the football example, did I intend to hit the ball *at 80mph*. I might say, no. And then you might say: but you did intend to score a goal. I say yes; and then you point out that it was just this speed of kick that I needed to hit the ball to score the goal, and that this why, given my intention, that I hit the ball at just this speed. So surely I must have intended to hit the ball *at 80mph*. Am I lying or being inconsistent? Surely not! But then what to make of the situation? Answering this is pretty tricky too, and not uncontroversial!

- One thing to note is that perhaps the example is a bad one because in cases of scoring goals, I don't have complex, articulated beliefs and intentions.

- Perhaps we might point out that I have no intentions *just* about the *particular* speed of the ball. Rather, my intention is to kick the ball at any speed which results in a score; that I did intend. *80mph* is one (maybe even the only) speed that satisfies my ultimate aim to score the goal. So in this sense, I definitely did intend this particular speed. Although again, it is still in a derivative sense of my ultimate aims to score a goal.
- Anyway, whatever the answer to this issue, we note that descriptions can be used to complicate matters a great deal for the DDE theorist. What exactly are the intentions involved in a scenario? This is a problem of knowledge and of representation by way of description.

— This discussion segues nicely into Foot's own discussion of moral scenarios. A critic of DDE might say that the scenarios can be framed in such a way that a person never intends the morally reprehensible action. You can frame the problematic action in a way that only intends a morally neutral state of affairs:

- The potholers only ultimately intend to get out of the hole, blocked by their friend. Their intermediary intention is simply to make the person such that they can get out of the hole. They never intended to hurt him as any goal of their intentions.
- Foot dismisses the attack but doesn't give us much to go on. Likely the answer would involve interrelated knowledge claims involved in forming the intermediary intention. To formulate the intention to make the person into little pieces as a feasible way to meet the potholers' goal, involves enough knowledge about the nature of persons that making them into little pieces involves killing them. Hence having the intention to make them into little pieces entails the intention to kill them even if that intention is not articulated or made explicit.
- Again, whether or not this works is complicated, and we're getting into more advanced territory. But these are fantastic issues for students to explore if they are enjoying the discussion. They're issues that the teacher can suggest depending on how well the discussion is going.
- Regardless, theorists wanting to deal with complex moral cases deploying DDE will have to deal with the complications of *formulating* intentions. And Foot does acknowledge that — although she thinks it's a surmountable problem.

— Issues involved in the final set of questions should be reasonably straightforward given the discussion so far. The only really technical issue surrounds the issue of acts by omission. Foot seems, not unreasonably in my view, to be working with the assumption, that there is some moral difference between neglecting to provide aid, and actively starving someone. One might say, again, it lies in the intention, someone who actively starves someone intends to murder that person regardless of the fact that their act is an act of omission (to give food). However, the person who neglects to offer aid, doesn't have intention to murder. Whether or not this has intuitive pull, someone like Singer wouldn't be impressed by this distinction, I don't think. It seems as though it might beg the question against the hardcore consequentialist. But this is for discussion if the students are interested.

## The Balloon Scene

Background: This is from a novel by Ian McEwan called *Enduring Love*. The scenario in the clip starts off the main narrative of the book which in fact focuses on an unusual relationship which develops between Daniel Craig's and Rhys Ifans' characters.

I assume you'll watch the clip beforehand to check its appropriateness for a class environment. However, as forewarning, the clip involves a small amount of expletives, and a gruesome scene between 7.00 and 7.07. The film was given a certificate of 15. I would be inclined to stop the clip at 4.52 as that is all that's needed for discussion.

I think this is a particularly useful film for applying the themes discussed so far, and for thinking about the sort of moral dilemmas like the ones found in Foot's paper.

— The first set of questions are posed simply to get the students thinking about the specifics of how different people may, or may not, act and think in putatively moral scenarios. Students should also note how this might differ from a factive point of view. For example, people have intentions but they don't know how things are going to turn out; they don't know what other people know either. They have limited perspectives upon which to form their intentions. These differences will be of moral import when students are asked to morally evaluate the behaviour of the characters and what they think they ought to have done.

On these lines, it might be pointing out that general descriptions turn out to be nested outside of time, looking at how a scenario unfolds. We know what happens too. But descriptions from the point of view of a character are within time, and without the knowledge of what will happen. This is really crucial when you're thinking about intentions and aims because from within time, there are serious limitations and blindsides that happen — as happens in the balloon scene which is an interesting, evolving scenario.

— The moral scenario question is something like a meta-philosophical

question: how we do philosophy; how we should frame philosophical questions; and how we enquire as philosophers? This is a question that all of the women being focused on in the In Parenthesis project are concerned with. It is interesting that moral thought experiments are abstract, the conditions and variables well-framed and stipulated, and ultimately, packaged-up. Perhaps this is necessary in order for us to develop systems of ethics, for example. Even though it is rarely acknowledged in discussions of the trolley problem, Foot herself notes that were the trolley problem a real scenario, we couldn't stipulate a course of events in the way that we tend to do when we treat it as an abstract scenario. Real events are not as packaged up like this; they are fuzzy, messy, and don't come with a sign on them saying: this is a moral scenario! The balloon scene is really useful comparing with abstract thought experiments — one could even distill this scene into a thought experiment. However, arguably, you lose something essential to real life scenarios which are far more complex, messy, and ranging than their experimental representations suggest. Anyway, this is an opportunity for the students to reflect on this complexity.

The abstract version of the balloon scene is this:

A balloon is out of control, and has a boy in it. A grandfather is trying to hold down the balloon but is unable. Four strangers come to his aid. A gust of wind takes them up into the air. They then each have a choice: do they hang-on or do they let go.

Their suppositions are as follows:

They all hold-on there is more chance that the balloon comes down; at the same time, if they all hold-on, there is also more chance that more people will die if the balloon doesn't come down. They don't know which of these is more likely.

If someone lets go, the chances that the balloon does not come down goes up.

The sooner any particular person lets go, the more likely that person is to survive because they will be falling from less of a height.

What should they do?

Now even abstractly, this is a very complex scenario. All of the premises are stochastic (probabilistic), and probabilities are notoriously hard to deal with. Moreover, and crucially, it's an evolving scenario, so the probabilities values are constantly changing.

There are also two potentially competing analyses. One is pretty much a game-theoretical analysis which concerns rational decision-making theory to produce the best outcome given the probabilities. Another is a moral/normative analysis of what they ought to do.

Those two analyses may well come apart: it might be, depending on your moral view, that what you should do morally is at odds with what is the most 'rational calculation of the probabilities to produce an optimal outcome (least deaths)

Contrast this with the fictional event, which is far more like a 'real' event. Firstly, there's the fact that we see how things turn out in the book: a man does hold on, and dies; the balloon comes down a couple of miles away and the boy is safe and uninjured. Having this fictional knowledge of what actually happens within this fictional world may well change how we assess the behaviour of the protagonists.

But perhaps more than anything, the film scenario captures how this isn't a straightforward rational event which is epistemically transparent to the protagonists. Daniel Craig and Samantha Morton's characters don't know what's happening to begin with. It captures very well the initial impression of a situation in which it's simply not clear what is happening, whether or not should one should get involved, or if they are even needed. There is a moment of lag as Craig makes up his mind what to do. However, it's clear that he's initially unsure; his commitment is largely intuitive belief that the people need help. That is, he's not exactly *worked out* the situation. Another interesting distinction: his response is *to help*, not necessarily to do *the right (morally) thing*. *Helping* and *doing the right thing* might turn out to be the same thing, but they're clearly different motivations which may well involve different intellectual, existential and emotional commitments.

When everyone gets to the balloon, it's pretty chaotic. There's no plan, very little clear communication. Also, it turns out that the boy doesn't know crucial information about how to operate the balloon which they couldn't have known and which ends up exacerbating the situation.

But most importantly, when they go up into the air, the moral situation is on, and the game-theoretical situation kicks in. But how much are they actually calculating? They're clearly shocked, scared, and overwhelmed by the situation as it's unfolding. As it turns out, when Craig reflects on it, it's clear that he's not processing the situation clearly in the moment because his memory of it is confused. In fact, he was aware of the game-theoretical elements, but he didn't seem to be really be thinking them through in the moment. Moreover, he can't remember who it was that let go first — including himself. He takes this as morally important, understandably. But it's interesting as moral agents, it's very difficult to even assess our own actions and culpabilities in the very situations we're actually involved in.



The final thing to note, and this is where the fictional scenario really blows open the structure of standard thought experiments, is that one might think that the grandfather should have held on: he has a moral duty to his grandson that none of the others have. Perhaps then the person who holds on is even more of a hero demonstrating his moral commitment to strangers. Yet, in a twist, when Daniel Craig's character goes to see the man's widow to tell her what a hero her husband had been — something that he felt was his moral duty — he learns that the man who died had been cheating on his wife when the event happened.

He had been driving with the lady he was seeing. Moreover, his wife informs Craig that the man was prone to reckless showing off. Basically, if the wife is to be believed, he wasn't doing anything moral but had been trying to impress his mistress. The culmination of his actions are to nought, simply leaving behind him a broken home, a distraught and humiliated widow, and a boy who's lost his father. Craig is speechless.

I suggest you give the students this information after they make up their minds about the scenario as it's presented in the clip!



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