

## **A psychological obstacle to posing the all-or-nothing problem**

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*Abstract.* I introduce an argument for rejecting Joe Horton's all-or-nothing problem on the grounds that saving one child is not a genuine option for most people.

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*Crookedly he smiled*

*Who saved just one child*

Joe Horton takes an example from Derek Parfit and puts it to different use, in order to develop his all-or-nothing problem. Two children are about to be crushed by a building on the verge of collapse. Owing to the danger involved in trying to save them, it is morally acceptable for you to not save any and just leave them to die. If you try to save them, your options are save one or save two. But as Horton presents the example, with both options the cost is the same: your arms will be broken in the process. Since the cost is the same, it seems that if you choose to save, you should save two. It would be morally wrong to save just one. But then it seems that saving none is better than saving one, because saving none is morally acceptable and saving one is not. Either none or two. But that is counterintuitive. Surely there is something good about saving one. What has gone wrong in the argument for saving none being better than saving one?

I anticipate that someone will reject the puzzle on these grounds: "Assuming they know the immediate physical cost, for most people the long-term cost of saving only one child is large

– they are going to feel very guilty afterwards – and actually they cannot bring themselves to save only one, whether calculating long-term costs or not. So the puzzle ought to be rejected because saving one is not an option.” The person who thinks this might concede “Saving one is an option for some people, but it is unclear how they relate to this entire framework of option-A-is-morally-acceptable and B-is-not. Their relationship to morality is very different. A normal upbringing closes off certain options for us as practically available ones.”

I think some people will not accept this line of argument and maybe I don't either. Can there not be ordinary people who can save one child but not another, when the other is a foreigner? But still there is a question of how such an “ordinary” person relates to morality? (What kind of person is this?!) There is a worry that you can only briefly set up the problem as Horton does, arguing that saving none is morally acceptable and saving only one is not, for quite a nice person in relation to whom saving only one, when they can save two, is not a genuine option anyway. This is a dodgy-looking solution, or dissolution, but it may not so easily go away.

## Reference

Horton, J. 2017. The All-or-nothing Problem. *Journal of Philosophy* 114: 94-102.