

The Trolley Problem and the Dropping of Atomic Bombs

Masahiro Morioka*

Abstract

In this paper, the ethical and spiritual aspects of the trolley problem are discussed in connection with the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. First, I show that the dropping of atomic bombs was a typical example of the events that contained the logic of the trolley problems in their decision-making processes and justifications. Second, I discuss five aspects of “the problem of the trolley problem;” that is to say, “Rarity,” “Inevitability,” “Safety Zone,” “Possibility of Becoming a Victim,” and “Lack of Perspective of the Dead Victims Who Were Deprived of Freedom of Choice,” in detail. Third, I argue that those who talk about the trolley problem are automatically placed in the sphere of the expectation of response on the spiritual level. I hope that my contribution will shed light on the trolley problem from a very different angle, which has not been made by our fellow philosophers.

1. Introduction

Brian Short writes a concise explanation of a standard type of the trolley problem in a recent issue of the *LSA Magazine*.

You’re standing next to a train track when you spot a locomotive approaching. Farther down the track are five people in the path of the train but too far away for you to shout a warning to them. A lever next to you would allow you to divert the train – saving the lives of five people – onto a track with only one person standing on it. If you knew that one person would die if you flipped the lever, would you still do it?”¹

The possibility of your choice is only two: Do nothing and let the trolley run five people over, or divert the trolley and let it run one person over.

The trolley problem was first introduced by Philippa Foot in her paper, “The

* Professor, Human Sciences, Waseda University, 2-579-15 Mikajima, Tokorozawa, Saitama, 359-1192 Japan. Email: <http://www.lifestudies.org/feedback.html>

¹ Short (2015), p.63.

Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect,” published in 1967, and it has been further developed by Judith Jarvis Thomson and other philosophers up until the present day.

However, it is worth noticing that the original logic inherent in the trolley problem had already appeared twenty years before Philippa Foot’s paper. That is to say, we can find almost the same logic in the 1947 article, “The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb,” by Henry Lewis Stimson, who served as US Secretary of War during World War II.

2. The Dropping of Atomic Bombs

In his article, Stimson recalls his and his colleagues’ decision-making process concerning the use of atomic bombs at the final stage of the Pacific War. Stimson was very pessimistic about the surrender of the Japanese government. He writes this:

We estimated that if we should be forced to carry this plan to its conclusion, the major fighting would not end until the latter part of 1946, at the earliest. I was informed that such operations might be expected to cost over a million casualties, to American forces alone. Additional large losses might be expected among our allies, and, of course, if our campaign were successful and if we could judge by previous experience, enemy casualties would be much larger than our own.²

He decides to use an atomic bomb and end the war. He thinks that an atomic bomb gives an effective shock to his enemy. He writes:

Such an effective shock would save many times the number of lives, both Americans and Japanese, that it would cost.³

This is the main logic of his decision to drop an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. He believes that without the atomic bomb the number of American and Japanese casualties would have become enormously larger.

² Stimson (1947), p.102.

³ Stimson (1947), p.101.

Had the war continued until the projected invasion on November 1, additional fire raids of B-20's would have been more destructive of life and property than the very limited number of atomic raids which we could have executed in the same period.⁴

Stimson thinks that if America does nothing special and continues its conventional battles, a huge number of American and Japanese soldiers' lives will be lost; however, if America uses an atomic bomb, the loss of lives will become much smaller. This is exactly the same logic as found in the trolley problem.⁵

This was the case not only for the Japanese, but for the US soldiers at the frontline who were then waiting for landing operations on the main islands of Japan. If the experiment of the atomic bomb had been unsuccessful, the soldiers at the frontline would have had to land on and continue disparate battles against the enemy fully prepared to die. Paul Fussell was one of those soldiers. He writes in his provocative and moving article entitled, "Thank God for the Atom Bomb," as follows:

When the atom bombs were dropped and news began to circulate that "Operation Olympic" would not, after all, be necessary, when we learned

⁴ Stimson (1947), p.105.

⁵ I have always wondered why there are so few English language articles that discuss the dropping of atomic bombs as a typical example of the trolley problem. Phil Badger talks about atomic bombs in "How to Get Off Our Trolleys," but he only discusses the outward similarities between them (Badger [2011]). In the book *The Trolley Problem or Would You Throw the Fat Guy Off the Bridge?*, the author Thomas Cathcart mentions atomic bombs on page 110, but he gives only eight lines to this topic (Cathcart [2013], p.110). In the book *Would You Kill the Fat Man?: The Trolley Problem and What Your Answer Tells Us about Right and Wrong*, David Edmonds mentions Elizabeth Anscombe's anger when hearing that Oxford University was to give an honorary degree to Harry S. Truman, who decided to drop atomic bombs on the two cities (Edmonds [2014], pp.22-25. See also Anscombe [1957]); however, Edmonds does not give any detailed discussions about the relationship between the trolley problem and atomic bombs.

In this connection, it is worthy of attention that in her 1976 paper, "Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem," Judith Jarvis Thomson proposes two imaginary cases in which Russians launch an atom bomb towards New York. In the first case, the president of the United States, whose name is Harry (the same as Truman), deflects that atom bomb toward Worcester. In the second case, the president, whose name is Irving, drops an American atom bomb on Worcester and pulverizes the Russian one by its blast. Thomson suggests that these two cases share a similar logic that is found in the trolley problem (Thomson [1976], p.208). Here Thomson hints that these two imaginary cases have some connection with Hiroshima or Nagasaki by naming one of the presidents "Harry," however, she never directly mentions these two Japanese cities so as not to be entangled with a provocative ethical debate on the dropping of atomic bombs in World War II. James M. Fisher and Mark Ravizza discuss Thomson's 1976 paper and stress the horribleness of the launching of an atomic bomb, but do not mention Hiroshima or Nagasaki in their paper (Fisher and Ravizza [1992], pp.68-69).

to our astonishment that we would not be obliged in a few months to rush up the beaches near Tokyo assault-firing while being machine-gunned, mortared, and shelled, for all the practiced phlegm of our tough facades we broke down and cried with relief and joy. We were going to live. We were going to grow to adulthood after all.⁶

Fussell was also inside the trolley problem at the time. He was among the five workers on the train track. He saw a trolley rushing down on him and suddenly the trolley was diverted and he was saved by a hair's breadth. For Fussell, the trolley problem was an actual situation he faced.

So, what happened to the other one person on the train track? Fussell refers to the destiny of his enemy on the Japanese soil in a straightforward manner. He quotes from the survivors' writings of their testimonies such as “[w]hile taking my severely wounded wife out to the river bank . . . , I was horrified indeed at the sight of a stark naked man standing in the rain with his eyeball in his palm.”⁷ Fussell writes about the drawings made by atomic bombs survivors:

These childlike drawings and paintings are of skin hanging down, breasts torn off, people bleeding and burning, dying mothers nursing dead babies. A bloody woman holds a bloody child in the ruins of a house, and the artist remembers her calling, “Please help this child! Someone, please help this child. Please help! Someone, please.”⁸

When I read articles or hear presentations on the trolley problem, such stories described above come to my mind all at once and overwhelm me.

Every year I give a talk about the trolley problem in my college class and ask the students what they would do if they were out there and only two choices were available to them. The majority of them reply to me that they would save five people by diverting the trolley to the other track. Then, I talk about the dropping of atomic bombs on Japanese cities in the summer of 1945, and point out that the

⁶ Fussell (1981), p.14.

⁷ Fussell (1981), p.18.

⁸ Fussell (1981), p.19. See also Wingfield-Hayes (2015). In the article entitled, “A Tricycle, a Toddler and an Atomic Bomb,” on the CNN website, you can see a burned tricycle for toddlers found in Hiroshima city. <<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/05/world/hiroshima-survivors-artifacts/>> (Visited August 15, 2016). You can also see the photo of a woman carrying a burnt-to-black baby in her arms on the NHK website. <<http://www.nhk.or.jp/special/detail/2015/0806/>> (Visited August 15, 2016).

decision to divert the trolley, which the majority of the students chose, shares the same logic as the US government's decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki that killed more than 200,000 Japanese people including civilians. They are shocked to hear my argument and for the first time start to rethink seriously the meaning of the trolley problem. Most Japanese do not think atomic bombs were necessary to end the war, or that the dropping of atomic bombs is morally justified to save the lives of American and Japanese people that would have been lost without them. Since the students also share that sentiment, the fact that they behaved like the US government when faced with the trolley problem places a heavy moral dilemma on their shoulders. Young students here learn the story of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at least once in their elementary or junior high school days. At the time of the bombing on August 6 and 9, people in the Japanese islands offer silent prayers for the victims of the atomic bombs. For the Japanese, the dropping of atomic bombs is a symbol of peace and prayer. During these two days, many Japanese people yearn for peace, non-killing, and non-violence.

3. The Problem of the Trolley Problem

Before going on to our analysis of the ethical dimension of the trolley problem, let us first examine whether the dropping of an atomic bomb on Hiroshima is really an appropriate example for discussing the trolley problem. Looking back on history, we could say that there was a third alternative for the allied forces, that is, withdrawing the army from the front line and seeing how the Japanese government would react to it, while continuing tough diplomatic negotiations with them. This choice was possible because the Japanese army was almost beginning to collapse after the battle of Okinawa, and Japan would have had no other way but to surrender even if the allied forces had not done anything to the Japanese mainland. If this is true, this means that the trolley's brake was not actually broken. If the allied forces had stopped fighting, the Japanese army might have fought them back using their remaining aircraft and warships. This means that the Japanese army was not actually bound to the track.

Of course, there are historians who doubt a third possibility of this kind. For example, Francis Winters, following Barton Bernstein and other scholars' discussions, argues that if the allied forces had continued conventional bombings and a blockade of Japanese ports, and had sent the message that the role of the emperor would be unchanged in post-war Japanese society, the dropping of

atomic bombs would not have been necessary; however, in that case, we would have witnessed the army of Soviet Union entering the mainland of Japan instead, which was not good news for Truman.⁹ The actual situation was far more complicated than the standard trolley problem cases.

Considering all these things, it can be concluded that the historical event of dropping atomic bombs itself should not be regarded as the event that *literally embodied* the trolley problem. However, at the same time, we can say that the *decision* of dropping the bombs was made according to the way of thinking inherent in the *logic* of the trolley problem, and hence, in this sense, the historical event of dropping atomic bombs contained the *logic* of the trolley problem in its *decision-making* process. We should clearly distinguish between these two concepts. Hiroshima is considered to be an appropriate example of the trolley problem in the latter context.

The way of thinking inherent in the logic of the trolley problem was crystalized in Stimson's type of *justification* of atomic bombs. The possibility is either landing or atomic bombs. The advancement of the allied forces toward the Japanese mainland was taken for granted. The brake of the allied forces was completely broken. The lever was in the hands of Stimson and Truman, who were sitting in the safety zone far from the Far East.

The trolley problem in which a bystander pulls the lever was invented by Thomson in her article, "Trolley Problem," published in 1985. Interestingly, in the original trolley case proposed by Foot in 1967, the person who pulls the lever is not a "bystander," but the "driver" of the trolley. Thomson sees a sharp difference between these two cases. She says, "[T]he trolley driver is, after all, captain of the trolley. He is charged by the trolley company with responsibility for the safety of his passengers and anyone else who might be harmed by the trolley he drives. The bystander at the switch, on the other hand, is a private person who just happens to be there."¹⁰ According to Thomson, the driver is responsible for the people who might be harmed, but a bystander does not have such responsibility.¹¹ In the atomic bomb case, Stimson and Truman were considered to be the persons who should take responsibility of the people who might be harmed by the then ongoing war. Hence, Stimson's type of *justification* of the

⁹ Winters (2009), pp.182-192.

¹⁰ Thomson (1985), p.1397.

¹¹ At the same time, Thomson argues that it is permissible for a bystander to take responsibility (p.1398).

dropping of atomic bombs should be regarded as a “driver” version of the trolley problem.

Hence, my conclusion is that the dropping of atomic bombs was a typical example of the events that contained the *logic* of the trolley problems both in their *decision-making* processes and *justifications*

Reading articles and books on the trolley problem from the perspective of the dropping of atomic bombs, I have gradually realized that the discussions of the trolley problem share a series of fundamental problems, which I call “the problem of the trolley problem.” This problem has five aspects. Let us examine them one by one.¹²

The First Aspect: “Rarity”

The first aspect is that the trolley problem is often considered to be a rarely occurring problem although in reality there have been many events in human history that contained the logic of trolley problem in their decision-making processes.

In the paper, “Revisiting External Validity: Concerns about Trolley Problems and Other Sacrificial Dilemmas in Moral Psychology,” Christopher W. Bauman et al. write as follows:

In sum, philosophers developed trolley problems as *rhetorical devices* that could help them articulate the implications of moral principles in concrete, albeit highly unusual, situations. Although others have criticized the use of trolley problems in philosophy (e.g., Hare, 1981; Pincoffs, 1986; Singer, 1999), our purpose is to point out the potential limitations of using such unrealistic scenarios in empirical science.¹³

They seem to think that the trolley problem is a rhetorical device invented in a highly unusual situation, but their presentation sounds fairly misleading. We have to distinguish between following four notions: the logic of the trolley problem, the event that literally embodies that logic, the event that contains that logic in its

¹² When hearing the trolley problem, what comes to our minds first is that in this thought experiment the information about the victims’ names, gender, ages, and their relationships to us are all missing. This characteristic of “anonymity” is certainly an important feature of the trolley problem; however, this is shared with many other thought experiments in philosophy, not peculiar to the trolley problem. Thus, I do not include it in the list of the problem of the trolley problem.

¹³ Bauman et al. (2014), p.539.

decision-making process, and the discourse that depicts that logic. It is of course possible that five people are actually bound to the track and one person to the other track and the brakes of a running trolley are broken, but this is surely a highly rare scenario as Bauman et al. correctly point out. However, as we can easily imagine, there have been many historical events that contained that logic in their decision-making processes, especially in the time of war, and there must be other small size events or incidents that contain the logic similar to that of the trolley problem in our society, such as the case of a rushing car with broken brakes into a group of pedestrians, in which if the driver turns left or right a very small number of pedestrians are to be run over (or the recent question of whether a self-driving car's artificial intelligence should be equipped with the ability to make moral decisions in such a situation may be a better example of this). The command of Kamikaze suicidal attacks or the command of the work of extinguishment inside a blasted nuclear power plant might be another example. Thus, it is paralogism to think that because the events that *literally embody* the trolley problem rarely occur, the events that contain the *logic* of the trolley problem in their decision-making processes rarely occur.

Barbara H. Fried expresses the same point as this: “[T]he trolley literature has inadvertently led both authors and consumers of that literature to regard tragic choices *themselves* as rarely occurring and freakish in nature. But they are neither of these things. They are ubiquitous and for the most part quotidian”¹⁴

Although the logic of the trolley problem can be found in many historical events and in our current society, we are often inclined to think that because the trolley problem is based on a highly unrealistic scenario, we rarely encounter it in the real world, with the exception of armchair philosophers' thought experiments. This is the first aspect of the problem of the trolley problem.

The Second Aspect: “Inevitability”

In the standard trolley problem, it is strongly postulated that the brakes of a running trolley are broken and we do not have any means to stop the trolley before it runs over people on the track. The choices left to us are only two: to pull the lever and kill one person, or to do nothing to let five people die. However, when it is applied to actual events, this way of thinking sometimes leads to a problematic result.

¹⁴ Fried (2012), p.7. Italics by Fried.

For instance, Stimson's interpretation, which is a typical example of the trolley problem, took it for granted that the advancement of the then ongoing war was inevitable and there were no other ways but to either land on the main islands or drop an atomic bomb. However, in reality, as I discussed earlier, there might have been a third alternative—that the US withdraw their forces from the frontline and wait for the surrender of the Japanese government, no matter how small that possibility would have been. Hence, we must say that Stimson's interpretation worked as a device to turn our eyes away from this third possibility and to make us believe that there were actually only two choices, landing or dropping.

Once we look at actual social events from the perspective of the trolley problem, we are naturally inclined to think that it is utterly impossible for us to stop the running trolley no matter what measures we would take, and the idea that we might still be able to stop the trolley in some way gradually disappears from our consciousness. This is the second aspect of the problem.

Allen Wood explains the same point in a different manner. The trolley problem cuts out various important factors from a given situation and tries to narrow its scope; however, in the real world, those discarded factors can play a decisive role when making a difficult decision. Wood argues that “[i]n the process, an important range of considerations that are, should be, and in real life would be absolutely decisive in our moral thinking about these cases in the real world is systematically abstracted out. The philosophical consequences of doing this seem to me utterly disastrous, and to render trolley problems far worse than useless for moral philosophy.”¹⁵

The Third Aspect: “Safety Zone”

In the trolley problem it is usually supposed that we are standing next to the track or driving inside the trolley, completely protected from what is to occur on the tracks. We are inside a safety zone. Those who are going to be killed are the people on the tracks, not us. While being protected inside a safety zone, we are discussing who should be saved, or killed—people on the right track, or people on the left track.

In the case of atomic bombs, the top commanders (Stimson, Truman, and others) were discussing whether or not to drop them inside a safety zone, located far from the battle field, where their lives were completely protected from direct,

¹⁵ Wood (2011), p.70. He concludes that the principle of human dignity “may give us reasons [for] refusing to look at the world in the way trolley problems tend to induce us to look at it” (p.80).

lethal effects caused by the landing or the dropping of atomic bombs. The third aspect of the problem is that the lives of people who discuss the trolley problem are protected inside a safety zone and that they can discuss it without being bothered by the possibility that their lives might be threatened by an actual trolley. Of course, this is a characteristic found not only in the trolley problem. Many other ethical dilemmas also share this problem. But I want to stress this aspect here because sometimes we tend to forget the fact that we are situated in a privileged position when thinking about this kind of armchair thought experiment.

At the same time, we have to pay special attention to the trolley problems in which the life of the person who decides whether or not to pull the lever is to be taken away as the result of her own decision making. Let us take an example from Thomson's 2008 paper.

In this paper, Thomson proposes two new variations of the trolley problem, namely, the "Bystander's Three Options" case and the "Driver's Three Options" case. In the Bystander's Three Options case, when the bystander does nothing five people die, when he throw the switch to the right one person dies, and when he throw the switch to the left the trolley kills himself standing on the left track. Similarly, in the Driver's Three Options case, when the driver does nothing five people die, when he turns it to the right one person dies, and when he turns it to the left the trolley crashes onto a stone wall and he dies.¹⁶

In both cases, the person who decides whether or not to turn the trolley is under threat to be killed by his own decision making, and hence in this sense, the person is not considered to be located in a safety zone. He is not in a privileged position anymore. His life can be taken away. Thus, the third aspect of the problem does not seem to exist here.

However, I want to add an important point. In the above two cases, while the person who decides the direction of the trolley is not located in a safety zone, the person who proposes these cases, namely Judith Jarvis Thomson herself, is still located in a safety zone, and the same thing holds true with those who discuss Thomson's variations, including the reader, you, and the author of this paper, me. Almost all of us who are now thinking about Thomson's cases in which the person deciding the direction of the trolley is not located in a safety zone are actually located in a safety zone. In most cases, professors or students who are discussing the life of the bystander or the driver who is not in a safety zone are in fact within

¹⁶ Thomson (2008), pp.364, 369.

a safety zone and protected from the threat the trolley might cause to them. Furthermore, most of us usually forget the fact that we are in a safety zone and protected from dangers even when we are seriously thinking about a person who is under threat outside a safety zone.

Let us take another example from moral psychology. In 2008 and 2009, Bryce Huebner and Marc D. Hauser conducted questionnaire research on “altruistic self-sacrifice,” using Thomson’s trolley case, through the Moral Sense Test website. They presented two scenarios to participants. In the first scenario, a bystander, whose name is Jesse, is at the switch point. A voluntary participant was asked what Jesse should do in the situation. In the second scenario, instead, a voluntary participant herself “was asked what she or he should do rather than being asked what Jesse should do.”¹⁷ The participant has to answer with what her own decision would be if she were at the switch point, and if she turns the switch to the left it means that the trolley rushes to kill her. Hence, in the second scenario, it might seem that the participant is under threat and put outside a safety zone, but this is not the case. It is no doubt clear that the participant continues to stay inside a safety zone because she is never under threat to be killed by the rushing trolley in her actual situation looking at a computer screen on her desk. Jesse might be killed but the participant is not. The participant is protected and safe.

Hence, it seems to me that we have two kinds of safety zones in the trolley problem. The first kind of safety zone is the place where the person who decides the direction of the trolley is situated, such as the place where a bystander or the driver is located in the original, simple trolley cases, and the place where Stimson and Truman were located in the case of Stimson’s interpretation of the dropping of atomic bombs. The second kind of safety zone is the place where people discuss the trolley problem such as classes in universities and venues of academic conferences, the place where a participant in questionnaire research is located, and the places the readers of this paper are located. I do not know where you are now, but that place must be a safety zone in this sense. We easily forget these two kinds of safety zones when discussing the trolley problem. This is the most important part of the third aspect of the problem of the trolley problem.

The Fourth Aspect: “Possibility of Becoming a Victim”

I discussed the problem of a safety zone in the previous section. You may say

¹⁷ Huebner and Hauser (2011), p.82.

the situation would be the same as in the case of the author of this paper, because the author is also in a safety zone, hence the author would never be immune from the above problems of the trolley problem. I think this might be correct in a sense, but the situation is not so simple.

My father was on the Japanese main island when an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. At that time he was a college student living in a small city facing the Sea of Japan, to the northeast of Hiroshima city. If he had traveled to Hiroshima city, which was not unimaginable, or if the warplane carrying an atomic bomb had not been able to drop it on Hiroshima for some reason and continued flying to the northeast and dropped it on that small city, which was highly unlikely but not unimaginable, my father might have been killed, and as a result, I might not have been born.¹⁸ This shows, against our first guess, that the author of this paper might have been a person who was indirectly bound to a track, deprived of any freedom of choice, and placed under the threat of annihilation. The author might not have been inside a safety zone.

If we enlarge this line of thought, it becomes clear that everyone who participates in the discussion of the trolley problem, including the reader of this paper, might have been a person who was at least indirectly bound to a track of some sort, deprived of any freedom of choice, and placed under the threat of annihilation, at some point in the past. And each of us might become such a person bound to a track at some point in the future.

Although all of us might have been and might become the powerless victims of the event that contains the logic of the trolley problem, we are naturally and tactfully guided to discuss the problem solely from the perspective of a person who is on the side of choosing whether or not to turn the lever. This is the fourth aspect of the problem.

The Fifth Aspect: “Lack of Perspective of the Dead Victims Who Were Deprived of Freedom of Choice”

The trolley problem lacks the perspective of the people who are bound to the track, under threat to be killed, and deprived of any means to reach the lever. In the discussion of the trolley problem, we have many arguments and analyses made from the perspective of the driver or a bystander who is capable of deciding whether or not to turn the lever, but we can never hear the voices of people who

¹⁸ My mother was on the Korean peninsula at that time.

are ruthlessly bound to the track and deprived of their choices. Of course, in the trolley problem people on the track are surely taken into account, but they are incorporated into the discussion only as formal human lives to be saved or let die, not as flesh-and-blood people who are capable of thinking, having emotions, and having huge expectations about the choice that the person on the lever will make. I believe that this is a most essential problem of the trolley problem. I want to discuss this point more in detail.

Let us see the discussion of the “Bystander’s Three Options” case and the “Driver’s Three Options” case in Thomson (2008) again. In these two cases, a bystander or the driver is under threat to be killed, because if she turns the lever to the left, the trolley is going to kill her, hence a flesh-and-blood person who is under threat on the driver’s seat or by the lever on the ground is incorporated into the discussion. However, there is a great difference between the situations of “the bystander or the driver” and “the people bound on to the track;” that is to say, of course both parties are under threat of being killed, but while the former has the freedom of choice about whether or not to turn the lever, the latter is completely deprived of such freedom. All the latter can do is continue to be bound to the track and just wait to see the result of the decision made by the former. We must say that in Thomson’s 2008 paper, although the perspective of the person who is going to be killed by her own decision-making is discussed in detail, the perspective of the people who are bound to the track and deprived of any freedom of choice is completely ignored.

Let us take another example from Frances M. Kamm’s book, *The Trolley Problem Mysteries*. She discusses whether the relation between five people on the track and one person on the branch track might affect the distinction of the morality of killing and that of letting die, and calls this, “InterVictim Killing/Letting-Die Distinction.”¹⁹ The end-and-means relation is one example of what she has in mind when discussing this matter. If one person is killed on the branch track as a consequence of removing a threat to five, this killing is considered to be done as a side effect of the removal of the threat to other five, but if one person is killed as a result of toppling him to stop the trolley, this killing is considered to be done as “a mere means”²⁰ to remove the threat to other five.²¹

¹⁹ Kamm (2015), p.73.

²⁰ Kamm (2015), p.75.

²¹ This is not her original discussion in her book. She actually discusses three alternatives, in pages 74-75, namely, killing five, killing two other people to save five, and killing a fat man to save five.

In these two cases, their inter-victim relations are utterly different. She tries to figure out whether this difference would make any effect on the permissibility of the acts done by the driver or a bystander.

We should keep in mind that throughout her intricate and complicated discussion, what she tries to make clear is the morality of decision-making or the morality of action that the driver or a bystander would perform in front of the victims bound to the tracks, and how inter-victim relations would affect the morality of their decision-makings and their acts. The end point of her discussion lies on the driver/bystander side that enjoys the freedom of choice, not on the victim side that is deprived of that freedom. In this sense, we must say that although the perspective of victims is incorporated into her discussion as the relation between two victim parties, this perspective is used as a mere means to clarify the moral status of actions done by the driver or the bystander. She is standing on the driver/bystander side, not on the victim side, even when she discusses inter-victim relations. Here appears a typical characteristic of the discussion of the trolley problem.

We should also pay attention to the hypothesis that victims are “bound to the tracks.” There are commentators saying that such settings are highly unusual and unrealistic; however, if we look at people’s lives in our society with unclouded eyes, we can see that there are many people who are actually bound to unwanted situations in their workplaces, homes, and living places, in terms of gender inequalities, economic disadvantages, and racial discrimination. Furthermore, many of those people cannot immediately rush away from their places for a number of reasons when they are suddenly faced with a huge threat, for example, a natural disaster, an economic crisis, mass violence or war. People are bound to an unwanted track for many reasons, and those who enjoy the freedom of choice often fail to see the situations that those who do not have such freedom are bound to. What binds people to the tracks is rarely talked about in the discussion of the trolley problem. The trolley problem is the problem for those who have freedom of choice by those who have such freedom.

4. The Trolley Problem and Spirituality

I have discussed five aspects of the problem of the trolley problem. These five aspects can be further simplified and rearranged, in terms of their key features, into a set of three groups:

Feature 1: The trolley problem often misguides us to believe that the events that contain the logic of the trolley problem in their decision-making processes rarely exist, and believe that even if such events should occur, the trolley's brakes are broken, hence, it is inevitable for the trolley to rush into the victims.

Feature 2: In the discussion of the trolley problem, it is very hard for us to be conscious of the privileges we enjoy at present—that is, the privileges that the freedom of choice is given to us and we are protected in a safety zone. It is very hard for us to imagine the possibility that we might have been deprived of such privileges in the past if the condition surrounding us had been different, and that we might lose them in the future if the condition surrounding us becomes different.

Feature 3: In the discussion of the trolley problem, the perspective of the people who are bound to the track, deprived of freedom of choice, and under threat to be killed, is excluded and ignored.

Then, how should we respond to these three features?

In the first and the second features, the important aspects that we have to take into account when we discuss the trolley problem are placed out of our perspective and have disappeared from our sight.

Concerning the first feature, what we have to do is to try to escape from such misbeliefs and to correct them every time we find them. This is our professional duty as researchers.

Concerning the second feature, we have moral duty to enlarge our imagination to become aware of the privileges that we have at present and become aware of the possibilities that we might have been deprived of such privileges in the past and that we might lose them in the future, because it should be our moral duty, as human beings, to keep remembering the privileges we enjoy when we discuss the trolley problem. This is our inner duty. If we forget it, our thoughtlessness might become evident to the people surrounding us and disrupt their emotions. We have to take responsibility if we are accused of our thoughtlessness by someone, especially by those who once were the potential victims of the trolley problem, or by those who were the family or friends of the dead victims of the trolley problem. We have to take this point very seriously. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we have a moral duty to explicitly refer to these privileges and possibilities when

discussing the trolley problem. We have freedom to discuss the trolley problem without explicitly referring to the problem of the trolley problem no matter how ugly we may look to the surrounding audience, unless our words deeply hurt those who were potential victims or the loved ones of the dead victims. Moreover, if they come to us and say that they have gotten hurt, then we should stop our discussion and hear their voices carefully. This is our moral responsibility to them.

Then, what about the third feature? Is there anything we can do to respond to it? As we have already pointed out, the trolley problem is established as a problem by excluding the perspective of the people who are bound to the track and under threat to be killed. Once we incorporate that perspective, the trolley problem will inevitably change into something that is completely different from the trolley problem. Inside the paradigm of the trolley problem, we can never see the situation from the perspective of the people being bound to the tracks and deprived of freedom of choice, because the trolley problem is a problem about who we kill, not about what those who are under threat to be killed would think.

Does this mean we cannot do anything to respond to the third feature when discussing the trolley problem? I do not think so. I would like to propose to move away from the level of ethics and proceed on the level of spirituality.

I have friends whose parents or relatives were exposed to radiation in Hiroshima or Nagasaki. Some of them have survived but others died soon after the blast. Every time I hear the discussion of the trolley problem I cannot help imagining what the dead victims of atomic bombs would feel if they also listened to the discussion in our seminar room. I think they would feel very sad and irritated to know the fact that the perspectives of the dead victims are excluded and the victim's voices are never reflected in their discussion.

I used the term 'spirituality' above. The reason for this is that the third feature is closely connected to our spiritual relationships with dead people who fell victim to the events that contained the logic of the trolley problem and died in grief and chagrin. Everywhere in the world, when someone is killed ruthlessly on the street, people get together and lay flowers on the ground. This is because they still continue to have spiritual relationships with the dead person even after the person disappeared from this world. They lay flowers to show that the living does not forget the grief and chagrin of the dead, to pray that such a tragedy will never happen again, and to send their words of condolence to the dead, imagining as if the dead person were still alive and listened to their words. Not only religious people but also non-religious people share this attitude. This way of reacting is

truly transcultural. Spirituality here does not mean that of a specific religion. By the word “spirituality” I mean the dimension on which the living perform a kind of dialogue with the memory of the dead, or with the traces of the dead, or with the voices we hear from the dead. When we lay flowers on the ground or on the cemetery we sometimes murmur a word to the non-existing other. This is the dimension of spirituality I am talking about here in this context.

I believe that those who talk about the trolley problem are automatically placed in the sphere of the “expectation of response on the spiritual level,” and in this sphere, they are expected to respond something spiritual to our memory of the dead victims who were killed in the events that contained the logic of the trolley problem in their decision-making processes.

What kind of response we are to make is completely up to us. Putting our hands together and praying before a discussion might be one way of responding to the expectation. Laying flowers on a place associated with the event before going to the venue of discussion might be another way of responding. Just adding words of commemoration in one’s presentation, or simply imagining the suffering of the victims in one’s head before presentation might work as an act of responding. The way of responding does not necessarily need to become public to an audience. The important thing is that those who talk have an intention to respond to the memory of the dead victims in some way or another. If they have such intentions, their inner emotions are naturally conveyed to the audience through their unconscious words and attitudes. In this sense, we can say that their spiritual responses are being carefully watched by the people who are listening to the speakers’ presentations.

Let us take a closer look at the central point. When a speaker in front of an audience conducts a thought experiment in which the death of a person or persons inevitably happens, the speaker is encouraged to examine her thought experiment from the following perspectives.

- 1) Whether or not the actual events that contained the logic of her thought experiment occurred in the past.
- 2) Whether or not the voices of dead victims in the past actual events are ignored or sanitized in her thought experiment.
- 3) Whether or not the speaker believes that it is necessary to perform her thought experiment in such a sanitized way.

If all the answers to the above three questions are yes, then the speaker is automatically placed in the sphere of the “expectation of response on the spiritual level,” and whether and how to respond to this expectation is all left to the speaker. Her response is to be silently watched by an audience. This logic is applied not only to the trolley problem, but also other thought experiments that contain the inevitable killing of someone. The “expectation of response on the spiritual level” is not the topic peculiar to the trolley problem, and I think that even if the speaker does not know, because of her ignorance, the fact that the events that contained the logic of the thought experiment existed in the past, even then, she is to be automatically placed in the sphere of the expectation all the same. This way of reasoning might sound very harsh to us, but this is one of the important points I want to emphasize in this paper.

It should be noted that ignoring this expectation and performing no responses to the memory of the dead victims may cause a grave problem on the spiritual level. Honestly speaking, I felt a sense of disgust when I first heard the discussion of the trolley problem at a philosophy conference. The main reason was probably that I could not find any (verbal or nonverbal) responses on the spiritual level in the lively discussion on the trolley problem. At that time I was not able to put that feeling into words, but now I can verbalize it in this way.

I want to once again stress that we do not have any “moral duty” to respond to the expectation, because this is the matter of “spirituality,” not the matter of “morality.” However, the important thing to remember is that our reaction is always being watched by our others, both inside and outside the community, and perhaps, by our memory of the dead people who reside in the heart of every one of us.

It might still be hard to understand the concept of the response on the spiritual level. Let me show one impressive example. After World War II, a monument that commemorates the victims of the atomic bomb was built at ground zero of Hiroshima city. On the monument, the following text was inscribed: “Let all the souls here rest in peace; for we shall not repeat the evil.”²² This is an oath not to repeat such a tragic war again in the future. The word “we” means not only people in Hiroshima city, but also all human beings on earth, including the entire Japanese and US citizenry. The creators of this message intended to convey these words to the memory of the dead victims of the atomic bomb, in other words, to

²² Hiroshima city’s webpage: <http://www.city.hiroshima.lg.jp/shimin/heiwa/q7e.html> (Visited May 3, 2016).

the people who would have lived there if the atomic bomb had not been dropped on that summer day. This was a message arising from the relationship between the Hiroshima citizens who survived the atrocity and their dead residents. This is one example of the response on the spiritual level performed seven years after the dropping of the atomic bomb.

It was impressive that when the then US president Barak Obama first visited Hiroshima on May 27, 2016, the atomic bomb survivors attending the ceremony did not ask him to apologize. Instead, they were sitting silently, listening to every translated word, carefully watching every movement of his countenance, and trying to read the president's inner intentions and emotions. I believe that what they were expecting first of all was not a response on the level of morality, but a response on the level of spirituality, that is, a spiritual response to the memory of the dead victims who were killed by the US atomic bombs 70 years ago.

Of course, in the course of human history, there has been innumerable grief and chagrin associated with man-made killings or allowing death on both a large scale and a small scale. Hiroshima and Nagasaki are no more than just two examples of them. What we have to do is to enlarge our imagination when talking about thought experiments like the trolley problem, and to think about the possibility of our spiritual responses to the dead victims who were killed by past events similar to those thought experiments.

Seeing my argument from a different angle, we could also say the following. If you had been a person who participated in the construction of the atomic bombs, you would have felt a sense of condolence toward the bombing victims after seeing the pictures of ground zero. Or if you learned the stories of victims who died soon after the blast in unbearable pain, you would have the same feeling towards them. These are natural responses to the dead victims on a spiritual level when we know the reality of such a tragedy. My argument is that not only such people, but also those who perform a sanitized thought experiment, in which the voices of the people under threat to be killed are ignored and dismissed, are automatically placed in the sphere of the "expectation of response on the spiritual level." This is one of the most important claims I have made in this paper.

I have said that we do not have moral duty to respond to the dead victims on the spiritual level, but this does not mean that we are free from the discussion of the morality of dropping atomic bombs. There are philosophers, although not majority, who doubt Truman-Stimson's type of justification. For example, Elizabeth Anscombe argues that the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and

Nagasaki were considered to be murders because a very large number of innocent people were killed “all at once, without warning, without the interstices or the chance to take shelter, which existed even in the ‘area bombings’ of the German cities.”²³ John Rawls argues that “both Hiroshima and the fire-bombing of Japanese cities were great evils.... An invasion was unnecessary at that date, as the war was effectively over.”²⁴ Japanese philosopher Toshiro Terada, while basically agreeing with their criticisms on the dropping, points out that some of their arguments are based on the wrong assumptions; hence, such mistakes have to be corrected.²⁵ I believe that the mass killing of small children and babies by the dropping of atomic bombs should not be justified. Ronald Takaki quotes Truman’s words: “My object is to save as many American lives as possible but I also have a humane feeling for the women and children in Japan.”²⁶ The philosophical discussion of the morality of the dropping of atomic bombs has not been settled, and hence, should be continued more vigorously than ever in the future.

Finally, I will summarize the main points of this paper here. First, I showed that the dropping of atomic bombs was a typical example of the events that contained the *logic* of the trolley problems in their *decision-making* processes and *justifications*; second, I discussed five aspects of the problem of the trolley problem in detail; and third, I argued that those who talk about the trolley problem are automatically placed in the sphere of the expectation of response on the spiritual level.

I hope that my contribution will shed light on the trolley problem from a very different angle that has not been made by our fellow philosophers.

* I would like to offer sincere condolences to the victims of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and to other victims around the world who died or were killed in events that contained the logic of the trolley problem in their decision-making processes, and hereby strongly hope that such atrocities will never be repeated in the future.

²³ Anscombe (1957), p.64.

²⁴ Rawls (1995), p.326.

²⁵ Terada (2010).

²⁶ Takaki (1995), p.329.

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