

The Trolley Problem [Edge.com]

By Daniel Rockmore

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Prof. Dan Rockmore, Director of The Neukom Institute for Computational Science - Dartmouth College and member of the CBMM External Advisory Committee (EAC), has contributed an article to Edge.com which may be of interest to the CBMM Community.

“The history of science is littered with “thought experiments,” a term dreamed up by Albert Einstein (“gedankenexperiment”) for an imagined scenario able to sharply articulate the crux of some intellectual puzzle, and in so doing excite some deep thinking on the way to a solution or related discovery. Among the most famous are Einstein’s tale of chasing a light beam that led him to a theory of special relativity and Erwin Schrödinger’s story of the poor cat, stuck in a fiendishly designed quantum

mechanical box, forever half-alive and half-dead, that highlighted the complex interactions between wave mechanics and measurement.

“The Trolley Problem” is another thought experiment, one that arose in moral philosophy. There are many versions, but here is one: A trolley is rolling down the tracks and reaches a branchpoint. To the left, one person is trapped on the tracks, and to the right, five people. You can throw a switch that diverts the trolley from the track with the five to the track with the one. Do you? The trolley can’t brake. What if we know more about the people on the tracks? Maybe the one is a child and the five are elderly? Maybe the one is a parent and the others are single? How do all these different scenarios change things? What matters? What are you valuing and why?...”

Read the full article here: <https://www.edge.org/response-detail/27051>

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