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Trolley Dilemma: Ambivalence of Egoism and Altruism

Trolley Dilemma—two exotic words struck me, like a tram, during my social science class. This dilemma is a thought experiment in ethics in which one has the choice to either let five people die (leave the advancing trolley on its path) or kill just one person (divert the trolley). In response to this ethical dilemma, one that provokes a moral conflict within peoples' minds, my classmates each presented distinct but intriguing answers with various opinions. Before I even came close to a satisfactory answer, I began to wonder on whether I was a virtuous person; I was faced with an internal conflict that encapsulated a series of self-skepticism and reflections about my life.

My initial impulse when I faced the Trolley Conflict, slanted towards leaving five people to die. If I chose to save five people by diverting the trolley, I would have to carry the responsibility of killing one person. Realizing that I would be imbued with regrets and sorrow for my decision to murder, my choice was directly decided by *egoism*, my disposition to disregard others' welfare in favor of my own interest. Responsibility, gratefulness, and thoughtfulness, words that previously defined myself were now obscured; they were challenged by the prominence of my *egoism* that already usurped my moral code. Did this mean that I was a faux virtuous person? Naturally, I even started to question whether my virtuous deeds were born of my altruism or my *egoism*. I questioned if even simple deeds, such as opening the door for someone, were out of the correct intentions. My headstrong belief that I was a kindhearted person was challenged with this question of intention; I faced an inner conflict.

Nevertheless, I still had tenacity to trust in my benevolence. By being thoughtful, responsible, and appreciative of others, each of my dispositions positively impacted the community I lived in. My inner ethical turmoil, forced open my cherished memory repository, recalling back a priceless memory I had on the bus:

As the amiable young light of dusk transfixed through the window and blanketed half of my friend's seat, the bus kindly ceased at the bus station, two stops before mine. The entrancing evenfall failed to captivate my glazed attention and my eyes slowly turned to an old grandmother accompanied with a heavy bag in both hands, trying to hobble down the steep bus stairs. Contrary to the young evening, her old wrinkled face lacked liveliness and each single step down seemed to rack her trembling delicate knees. Even so, no one spared a speck of attention to the old grandmother, as though they had lost their thoughts in the dusk. Instinctually, I left my seat and helped her safely walk down from the bus while I carried her white heavy hamper. When she disembarked, her paleness was gone; as the young dusk quietly shone her silhouette, beaming the most beautiful smile in the whole world, she thanked me. As I sat back down on my seat, a plethora of happinesses swayed upon me and I felt proud of my kindness. In remembering this charming moment, I was able to calm myself down, and thinking deeply about the justification of my altruistic action and egoistic reaction, I finally resolved my inner conflict.

My virtue emerges from the ambivalence of both altruism and *egoism*. Both qualities weren't contradicting with each other, rather correlating and fervently galvanizing me to help

others and practice good deeds. For instance, I might hold the door for others to satisfy my own *egoism* but on occasions like the one in the bus, my actions were derived from my altruistic intuition to help the grandmother and care for her well-being. My kindness and good deeds always arose from either altruism or *egoism*.

This acknowledgement subsequently taught me a lesson: no matter where my kindness is evoked from, the truth is that my good deeds make me a virtuous and benevolent person. I would still choose to not murder one person for my egoism even at the cost of five lives, but from reflecting upon the imaginary choice of the Trolley Dilemma, I experienced self-reflection on my deeds, and learned a lesson that evoked acknowledgment of who I really am.