



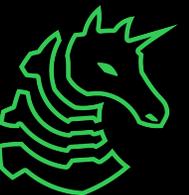
SP2026 • 2026-02-26

Ethics, Law, and Living Well

Adarsh Krishnan

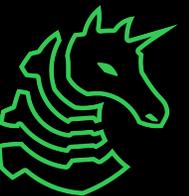
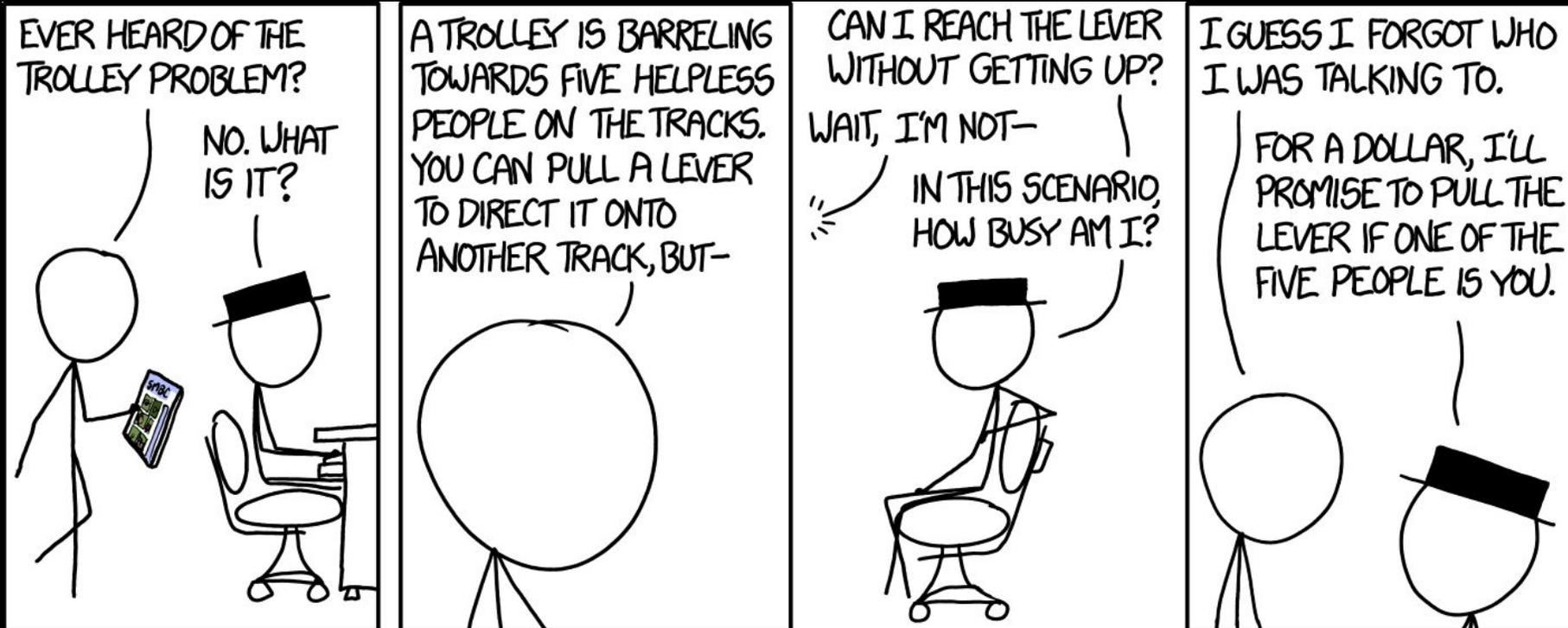
Announcements

- Cyphercon!
 - Security conference in Milwaukee, Apr 1-2
 - Fill out this interest form, especially if you can drive:
<https://forms.gle/W2bJTLLho2cB9fSv5>



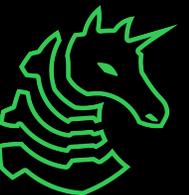
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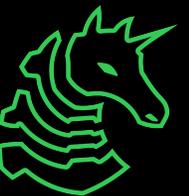
Why should we care?

- Technology, especially computers, shapes our lives in important ways
- You hold a lot of power by learning the skills we teach
- You also have a lot of influence, even at bigger companies!
- You will hopefully live a long life: it's best if that's a good one



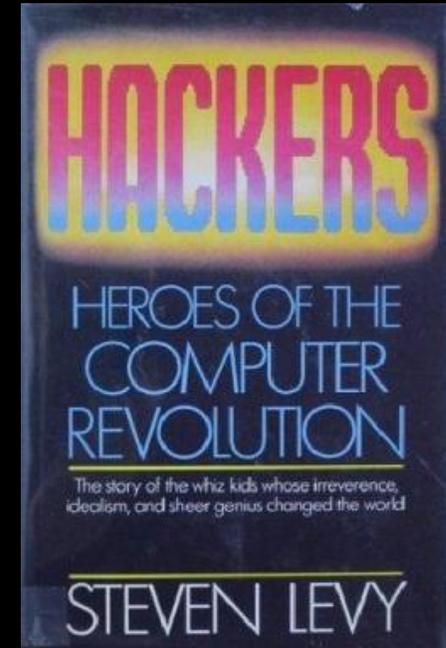
Security Ethics and Hacking

what you're here for



Security Ethics

- Mitigating Risk
 - Risk = Expectation of loss expressed as probability
- Hacker "Ethics" ([Steven Levy](#))
 1. Access to computers should be unlimited.
 2. All information should be free.
 3. Mistrust authority.
 4. Hackers should be judged by their skill.
 5. You can create art and beauty on a computer.
 6. Computers can change your life for the better.



Hacker "Hats"

White Hat

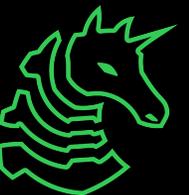
Hacks for the purpose of protecting others

Black Hat

Using cybersecurity for malicious intent: going sicko mode.

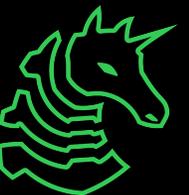
Grey Hat

A little bit of good, a little bit of bad. Maybe a little sus



Ethical Security Research

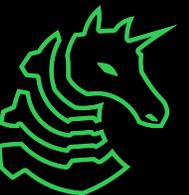
- Hack systems with
 - Explicit Permission
 - Expertise
 - Proper documentation
- Not having all three can put you in massive trouble



Ethical Vulnerability Reporting

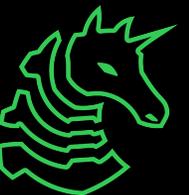
Vulnerability Disclosure

- Nondisclosure
 - Keep it secret, sell it secretly, use it for your own gain.
- Full Disclosure
 - Tell everyone, just drop it.
 - Make sure people can protect themselves from the vulnerability.
- Limited Disclosure
 - Privately disclose to the vendor only so they can develop a patch.
 - Risky because you can be attacked legally for this.



Responsible Disclosure

- Disclose vulnerability in private to the company
 - Do this ONLY IF THEY ARE NOT A SHITTY COMPANY
- Talk to vendor and agree on deadline for full disclosure
 - For example, Google's deadline is typically 90 days
- Maintain communication with both parties during patch dev
- Fully disclose vulnerability when patched / after deadline



Other Ethical Issues

Incident Response

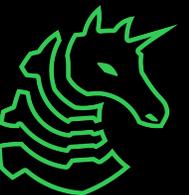
When should information about an attack be shared? Should intruders be kicked out first or should systems get back up? What information should be shared?

Attribution

Can we really be sure that it was <PERSON> who committed the attack?
Information is easily falsifiable.

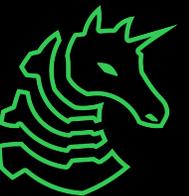
Hack-Back

If an organization is under attack (company), is it ethical for them to respond in kind?
"Active Cyber Defense Certainty Act" amends CFAA and allows for hack-back with
"high degree of certainty" ... what about that falsification thing?



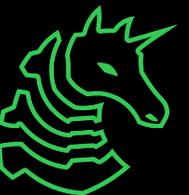
The Law

please don't go to jail



What Makes a Crime

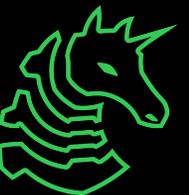
- Elements that make up a crime
 - Specified **state of mind** or **intent**
 - Performance of a prohibited act
- Intent
 - Mens Rea = "requisite guilty state of mind"
 - Intent Definitions Under the Law
 - Purposefully: you hoped for that outcome to happen, you tried to make it happen
 - Knowingly: you knew the outcome was certain/probable even if it was unwanted
 - Recklessly: you consciously ignored known risks
 - Negligently: you should have been aware of the risks, but you were not



CFAA Intro

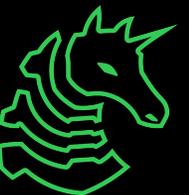
18 U.S. Code § 1030 - Computer Fraud and Abuse Act

- Enacted 1986
 - Hasn't been updated much since then
- Very arbitrary and unclear
 - Written by people who didn't know much about computers
- Protects computers used by either a financial institution, the government, or used for interstate commerce or communication
 - Referred to as "protected computers"
 - This has now come to define basically any computer



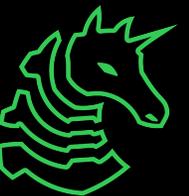
Sections of the CFAA

1. Obtaining classified information to injure US or aid foreign power
2. Accessing a computer without authorization **or exceeding authorized access** and obtaining information
3. Unauthorized access to US govt computers
4. Another federal crime combined with unauthorized access
5. Unauthorized access + damages
6. Computer password trafficking
7. Extortion + any of 1-6



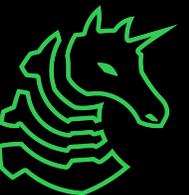
Notable CFAA exceptions

- Data-in-transit laws (MITM != CFAA?)
- Wire fraud
- Mail fraud



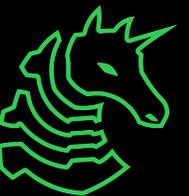
Problems with the Law

- Very outdated
- Doesn't cover ethical hacking
 - Supreme court won't make decisions (Van Buren v. US)
- Arbitrary (what defines reasonable access etc.)



Living Well

some argumentation on my part

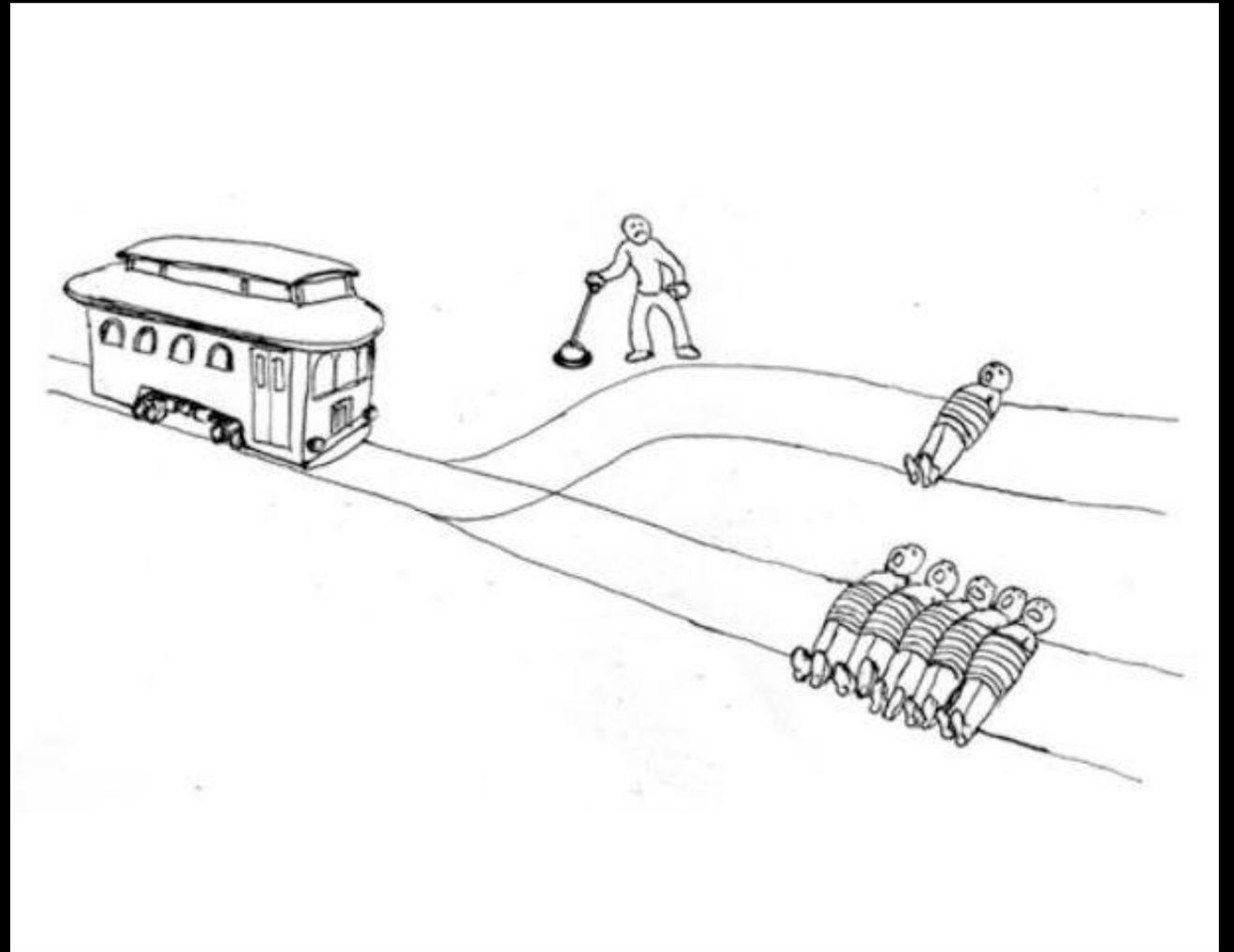


First...

Ethical Models

You are a switch operator near a trolley, the trolley is going down a track towards 5 people.

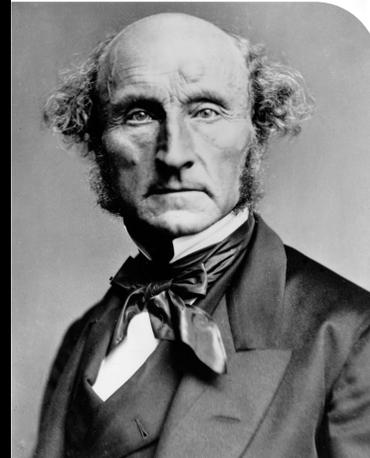
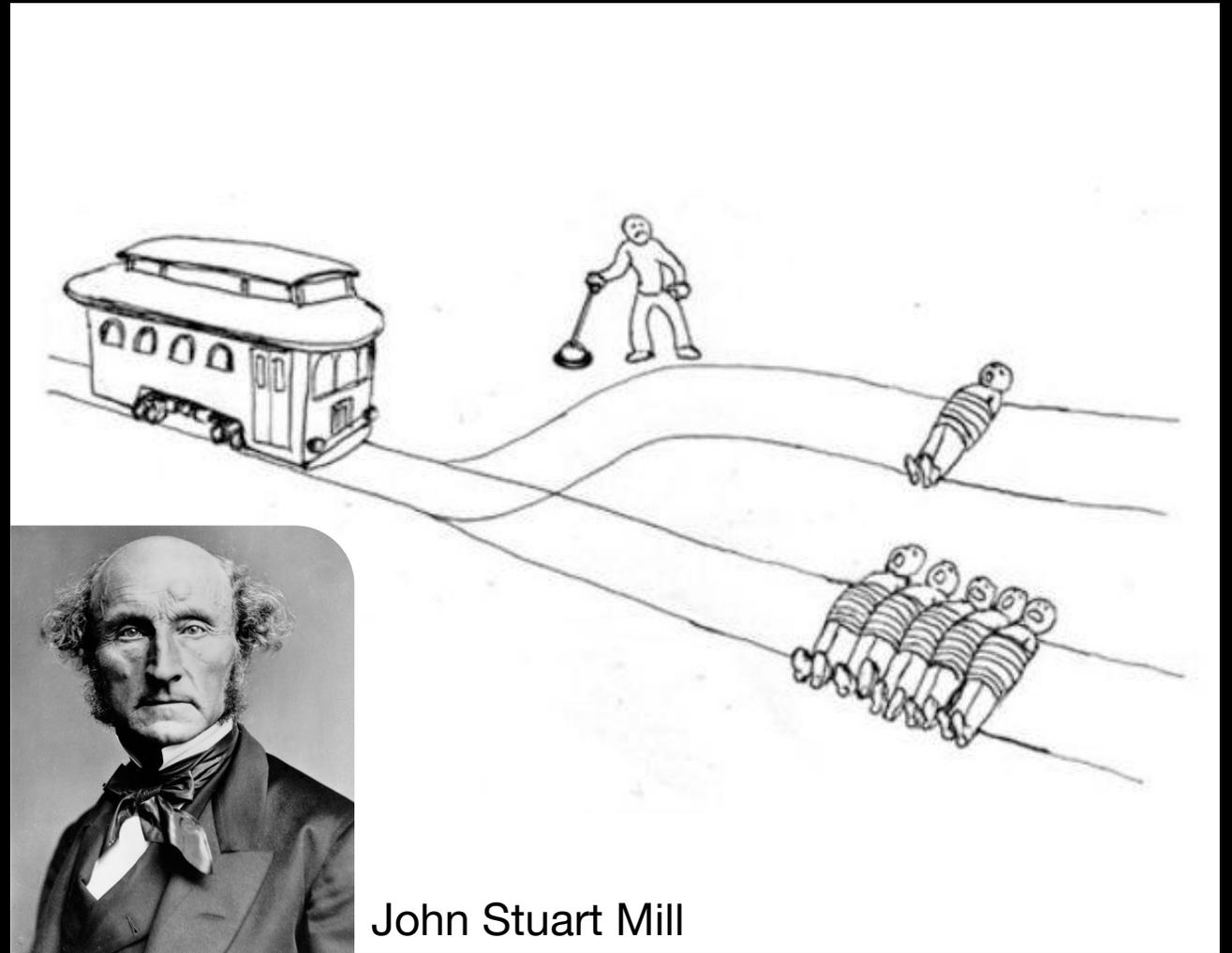
You can pull the switch and save the 5 people, but at the cost of one person.



Utilitarianism (Consequence-Based)

Whatever causes the most social good or "utility" is the action that should be taken. The **outcome** is ultimately what matters.

How would a **utilitarian** navigate this ethical scenario?

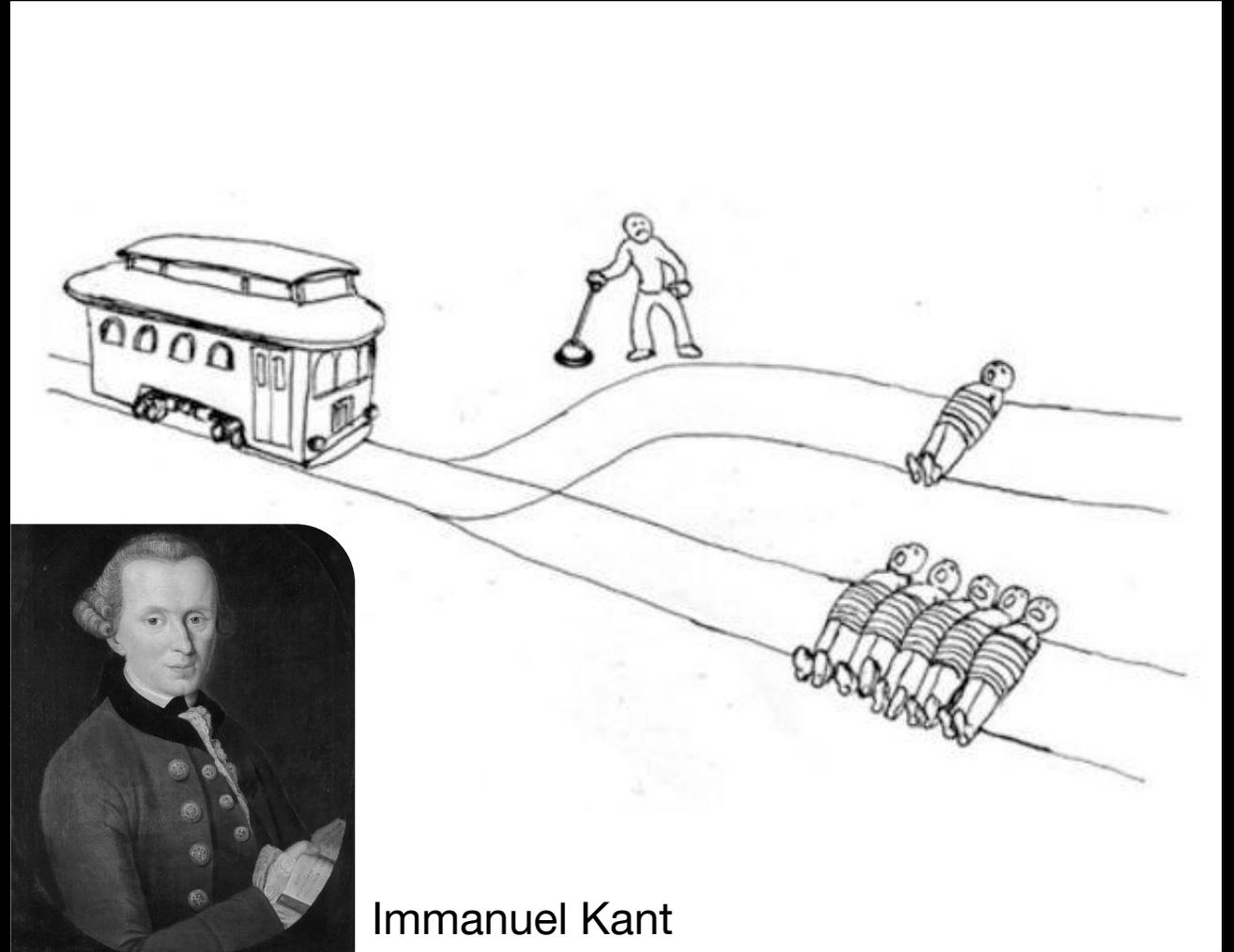


John Stuart Mill

Deontology (Duty-Based)

1. All **moral agents** have a duty to uphold a universal set of rules to each other.
2. **Intent** is what really matters in an action's morality, regardless of outcome.
3. Moral agents should not use other moral agents as a **means to an end**.

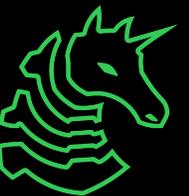
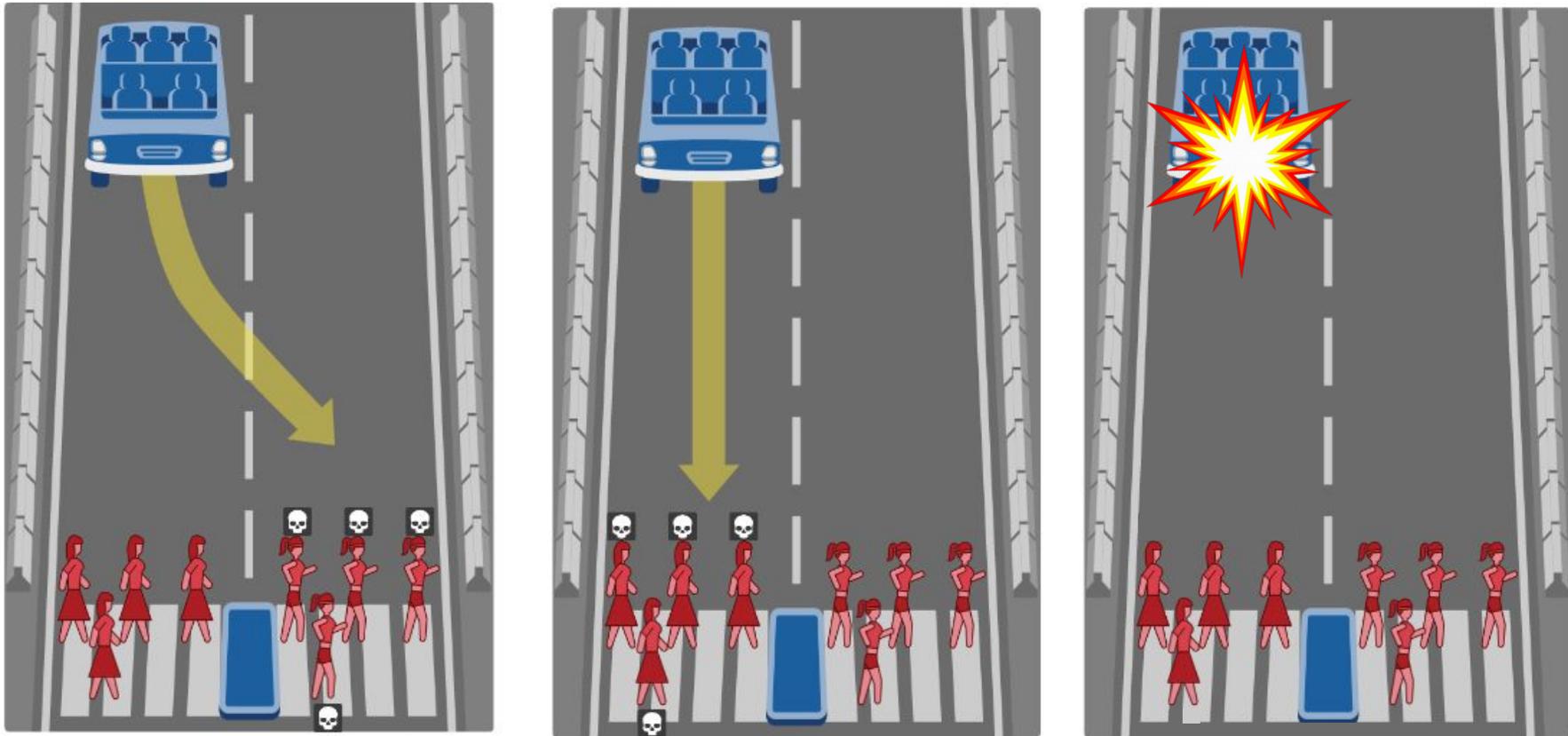
What would a **deontologist** do in this situation?



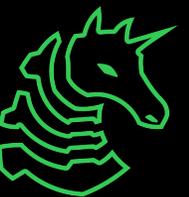
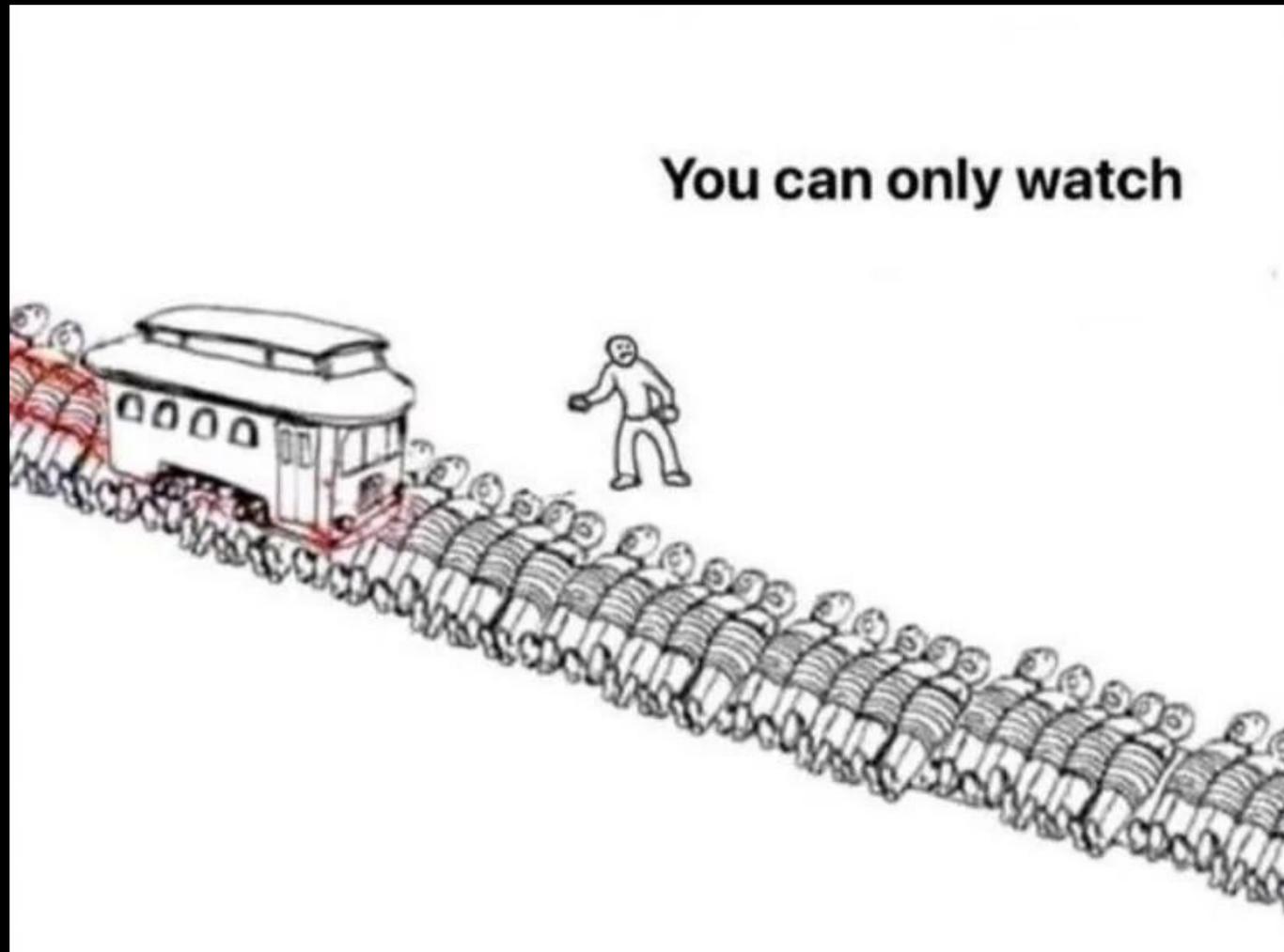
Immanuel Kant

What should the car do?

What should the self-driving car do?

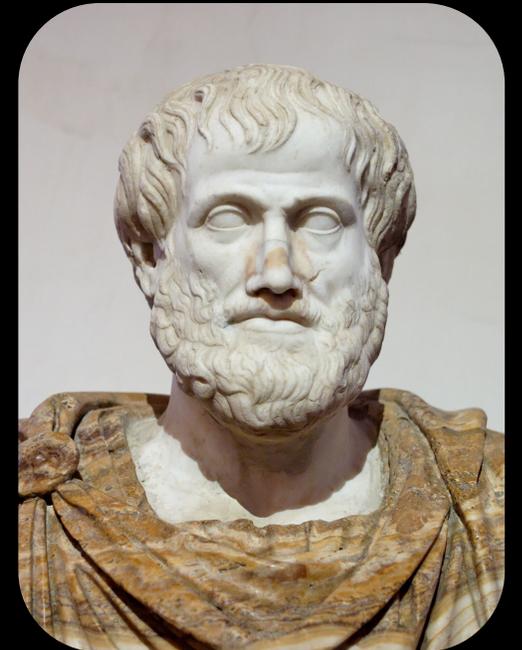


Ethics is not just this...



Eudaimonia, or Human Flourishing, or Living Well

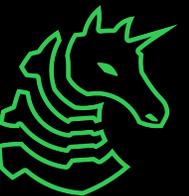
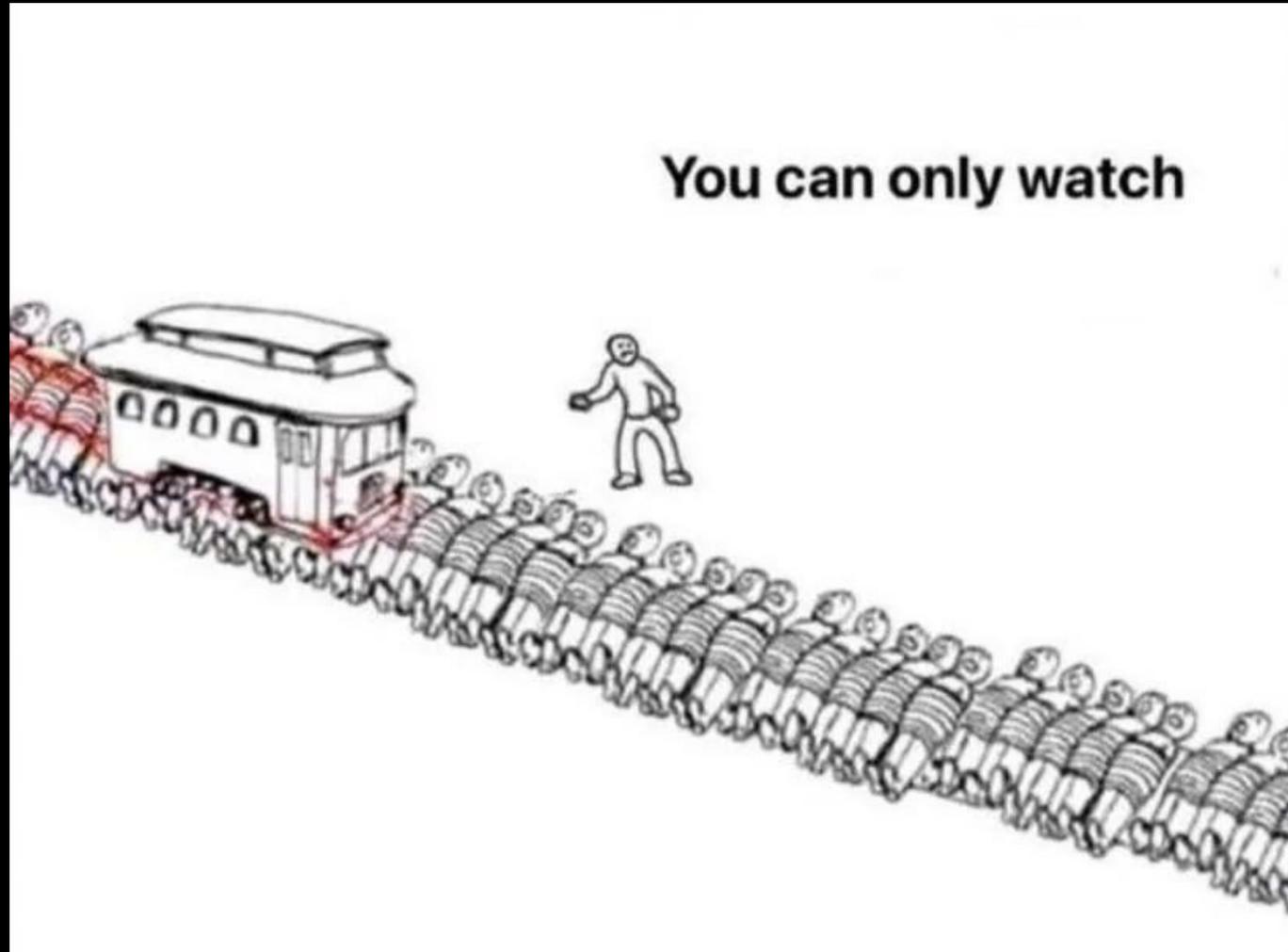
- *Eudaimonia* - “Greek word literally translating to the state or condition of good spirit”
 - Aristotle: achieve *eudaimonia* by living in accordance with virtue
- The keyword is “live”
 - Easy to see ethics as hypotheticals where you pick a framework to win (or minimize loss)
 - Life is a continuous accumulation of decisions
 - Only you can live it
 - Have role models
 - Think about your actions
 - Your choice is *your* choice



Aristotle



...but life sometimes is.





Granddad, what do you do when you can't do nothing, but there's nothing you can do?



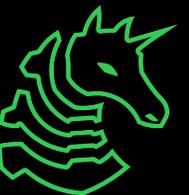
You do what you can.



Next Meetings

2026-03-01 • This Sunday

- Bash Jails with a mysterious group of helpers...
- Learn how to run arbitrary commands in a restricted shell environment!



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Meeting content can be found at
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