

## **The flowchart solution to the all-or-nothing problem**

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*Abstract.* This paper presents what I call “the flowchart solution” to Joe Horton’s all-or-nothing problem. Rather than three options – don’t save any child, save one, or save two – there is a flowchart with a choice of don’t save or save, and then within save, save one or save two.

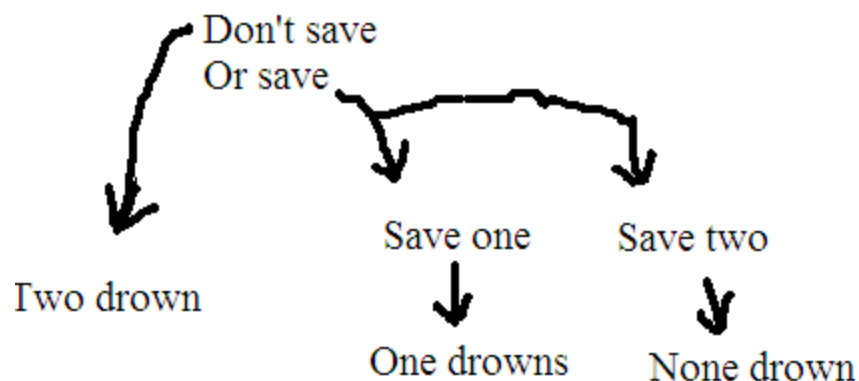
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*What of she who laughs at my graph,*

*And turns the flowchart into an almost extinct art?*

Two children are drowning, let us imagine. You are on the beach alone. It is dangerous to take the boat and try to rescue them, so it is morally acceptable to leave them to drown, as bad as that sounds. But if you sail out there it is easy enough to pull two on board. Saving two is not significantly more difficult than saving one. In that case, it seems morally unacceptable to save only one. But then saving one is somehow more morally unacceptable than saving none. That is a counterintuitive conclusion. Starting with a different example from Derek Parfit, Joe Horton devised this problem – the problem of what has gone wrong with this reasoning to an all-or-nothing conclusion?

In this paper, I wish to present a solution which I call “the flowchart solution.” I am not sure if it can work but I present it for those interested. Here is a flowchart of options and also eventual consequences if everything goes to plan.



In this flowchart, there is no comparison of three choices: don't save versus save one versus save two, enabling the conclusion that the first choice is better than the second. The initial choice is between don't save and save, and then within save there are two options: save one and save two. The initial choice does not generate any puzzle, because it is not that don't save is morally acceptable and save is not. And then within save, given the two options and their consequences, it is clear from a moral perspective that you should take the option of saving two. So the puzzle does not arise within this framework. The flowchart solution says that this is the proper framework for mapping out the choices available. (Another way of thinking about the solution is that this piece of life is strangely like a game and in the game you are asked, "Don't save or save?" and only then you get asked, "Save one or save two?")

## Reference

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