

Goals:

- Introduce the lifeboat problem
- Encourage students to think about their obligations and the obligations of institutions/governments to others, particularly in life-or-death scenarios

Lifeboat problem

- Description of thought experiment
 - There are (say) 10 of us sitting in a circle right now. Imagine that we are all on a lifeboat, and that there are 5 extra seats. There are 25 people swimming around us that want to get on the boat, and will drown if we do not let them on.
- Discussion questions:
 - What do y'all think we should do?
 - Are we obligated to let anyone on the boat? If so, how many?
 - Our odds of survival decrease the more people we let on the boat, should we take on the risk to help?
 - How much of a risk is too big? 1%? 51%? 99%?
 - If we decide to just fill the 5 extra seats, who do we let on the boat? How do we decide?
 - Nobel Prize winners, pregnant women, bad people/terrorists, young vs. old,
 - Should you give up your spot on the boat? Should we all jump off the boat and start from scratch (seems like the fairest thing to do)?
- We have to make a decision, so let's put it to a vote:
 - Who thinks we should let no one on the boat?
 - 5 people on the boat?
 - Everyone on the boat?
 - Is the decision that we vote on always the most ethical because it satisfies the majority? Or is there something deeper?
 - Why should the people on the boat be the ones to make this decision? Would your vote change depending on whether you are on or off the boat?

Concluding discussion

- Is this thought experiment applicable to real life? In what ways?
 - (See if they bring up international relations applications)
- Can we use our answers to the lifeboat dilemma to provide an ethical solution to getting people out of Ukraine?
- How about other countries, especially wealthier nations like the United States? Are there obligations in this case?
- If we decide to not help people knowing that the odds of death are high, are we to blame for their deaths?

- If we don't help and they die, would we be "killing" them? If you believe in karma, would this be bad karma?
 - Tie in Lesson 1: Does this discredit the existence of an absolute rule not to kill
- Are there any assumptions present in this thought experiment?
 - Do odds of survival *have* to go down when helping people? Does there have to be a cost?
 - Does this ignore why people are on the boat or in the water in the first place? Would anything change if the causes were taken into consideration?
 - *Use this as an example of the necessity of examining assumptions in philosophy