

Are You a Psychopath? Take the Test.

Big Think, an organization whose [mission](#) is to help people “...move above and beyond random information, toward real knowledge, ” published [a video on their Youtube channel](#) entitled “Are You a Psychopath? Take the Test.”

The video features Kevin Dutton, a British research psychologist at the University of Oxford and author of [The Wisdom of Psychopaths](#). In the video, Dutton uses a popular moral dilemma to demonstrate the trait that separates psychopaths from the rest of the population.

Dutton begins by explaining a certain strength of the psychopathic personality: “We all know about the psychopath’s enhanced killer instinct, their finely tuned vulnerability antennae. But it may surprise you to know that there are some situations in which psychopaths are actually more adept at saving lives than they are at taking them.”

Dutton then goes on to describe two different moral dilemmas. In the first scenario, you are riding a train which is uncontrollably racing down the tracks about to kill five people trapped in its path. However, if you flick a switch, the train will veer onto a different track in which only one person is trapped, resulting in four fewer casualties. In the second scenario, you see the train which is uncontrollably racing down the tracks about to kill five people. However, instead of being on the train this time, you are standing on a footbridge above the tracks in between the train and the five people. With you on the footbridge is a man of large stature – and you realize that if you were to throw him down on the tracks and kill him, his body would stop the train in its tracks and save the lives of the five people.

Dutton explains that though the two situations each have the same “score” of lives lost and lives saved, most people find

the first scenario to be unpleasant but not overly difficult. The second scenario, though, is more difficult due to its personal nature. This is where the psychopathic distinction occurs.

“Quite unlike normal members of the population, psychopaths also experience little difficulty with case two,” Dutton says.

He continues:

“... [A]t the precise moment that the nature of the dilemma switches from impersonal to personal, I would see the emotion center of your brain, your amygdala and related brain circuits, the medial orbital frontal cortex for example, light up ... I would witness the moment in other words when emotion puts its money in the slot. But in psychopaths, I would see precisely nothing. And the passage from personal to personal would slip by unnoticed. Because that emotion neighborhood of their brains, that emotional zip code has a neural curfew. And that’s why they’re perfectly happy to chuck that fat guy over the side without even batting an eye.”

What do you think? Does Dutton’s exercise teach us anything about psychopathy or morality? What is the correct way to respond to the moral dilemma he presents? Is there a correct response at all?

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[Image credit: Paramount Pictures]