

Academese



Trolleyology

1. A philosophical study of moral choices as demonstrated by the “trolley problem”: An out-of-control trolley hurtling down its track will kill the five people in its path. A switch, however, will redirect the trolley to another track where only one person would be hit. Is it permissible to hit the switch? Now imagine five people are in the path of the trolley and there is no switch. A heavy man is walking along a bridge above the track. Pushing the heavy man onto the track would stop the trolley, saving the five lives but killing the man. Is it permissible to push him? When posed similar questions in an online moral-sense test, 89 percent of respondents deemed it acceptable to hit the switch in the first case. In the second case, only 11 percent agreed it was permissible to push the man—though in the end, the result is the same: one life lost and five lives saved.

2. The study of what the items in a shopping cart (“trolley” in British English) reveals about the shopper’s behavior or personality.



Head in the Clouds

The promise of cloud computing might actually be *understated*.

FOR SEVERAL YEARS, *cloud computing* has been “the next big thing” rumbling around the IT world. Yet experts can’t even agree on how to define it. In a recent paper, computer scientist Armando Fox and his colleagues at Berkeley cleared the air about cloud computing, laying out its challenges and its promises. “Computer science is one of these fields that are plagued by having too much hype,” he said. “But we spent several months thinking about it as we were putting together that report, and we don’t think this is hype.”

In general terms, cloud computing is a way of accessing computers remotely >>



Spyning Yarns

A HAND-KNIT SWEATER isn’t merely a thing of beauty, it is a tangible reminder that someone invested time and effort to provide the wearer with a beautiful gift. Now a scarf can do more than just evoke memories—it can hold them, along with images, videos, and sounds, thanks to Sbyn, a system developed by School of Information graduate student Daniela Rosner and Professor Kimiko Ryokai.

A cell phone, loaded with the correct software, keeps track of the size of a knitted work in progress such as the scarf pictured here. The knitter can then

mark their geographic location with the phone’s GPS device, snap photos, make videos, or record sounds at any point in the project. The software associates these logged activities with a particular spot on the fabric by using the number of rows and stitches as a kind of graph. The phone’s touchscreen, turned into a video feed, displays these activities as icons that can be touched to replay the video or display the photo.

—A.P.

Twitter followers (as of August 21, 2009) Ashten Kutcher: 3,295,192 / Oprah: 2,066,478 / The Real Shaq 2,019,670 / Sockington (the cat): 1,050,286 /Anderson Cooper: 319,749 / Bill O’Reilly: 9,039

