

## World Philosophy Day Session 2019 (Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> November)

There are three main parts to this session, which explores the different kinds of reasons we might have for balancing our interests against those of animals. It starts with a Thinkers' Game exploring different senses of "bad", and then proceeds via an "aliens versus us" scenario back to reality to consider "us versus animals".

### STAGE 1 - Bad FOR, Bad OF, BOTH or NEITHER

When you ask, "Is this bad?" both children and adults will often give a mix of two very different types of reason without realising they are doing so.

The first type are reasons why something is bad **FOR** you – it's foolish, it will damage your health, or you will get punished for it, or it is a waste of your money, for example. These can be called "prudential reasons" because they are about your own welfare. They are about being kind to your self – either right now, or to your future self.

The second type are reasons about why something is bad **OF** you – it's wrong, it will hurt others (human or animal?), or destroy or damage something of value, or break an important rule, or cause others to be unhappy. These are moral reasons because they involve thinking beyond your own interests. They are about being kind to others – either right now, or to their future.

In the activity, cut up the scenario slips on the next page so that each child has one. For a class of thirty, you'll need three sets which gives the opportunity for children with the same slip to disagree.

Explain the concepts as above, and then split the space into "bad FOR" and "bad OF" halves. Straddling the line means both, and a space in the corner means neither. They go and stand where they think their example belongs. Have them tell their reason to the nearest person. Then you could share some reasons with the whole group. For example, those with slip number 8 put up their hands – maybe they will be standing in different zones, signalling a disagreement to explore.

After, ask people to move randomly about in the space, including sitting down (but not staying there). At some point, call "freeze" and everyone has to create an example they think belongs where they are.

#### Same Conclusion, Different Reasons

Several people might decide something is both bad FOR you and bad OF you, but for different reasons. Your reputation might suffer if you lie, or you might feel the discomfort of guilt. You might agree with Socrates that virtue is the highest form of human good, or that God is watching and will judge you, so that everything that is bad OF you is also necessarily bad FOR you. Or the other way around, Ayn Rand might have argued that every choice bad FOR someone is bad OF him, because "*The pursuit of his own rational self-interest and of his own happiness is the highest moral purpose of his life.*"

- 1 Someone not cleaning their teeth.
- 2 Eating a whole chocolate cake before the rest of their family get a slice.
- 3 Watching TV
- 4 Calling someone a name they don't like
- 5 Changing the team they support from Manchester United to Manchester City
- 6 Stealing from the till at the shop where they work
- 7 Not revising for an important exam
- 8 Pretending they have taken the dog for its walk, but really just sitting on a bench
- 9 Secretly telling yourself you are stupid
- 10 Secretly making someone else feel stupid

## STAGE 2 – The Alien Invasion

*“Yet across the gulf of space, minds that are to our minds as ours are to those of the beasts that perish, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded this earth with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew their plans against us.” H. G. Wells, War of the Worlds*

Reports start to come in from across the world of large metallic cone-shaped objects appearing in large numbers near major cities. It soon becomes obvious that this is an invasion of aliens, who turn out to be superior to us in both technology and intelligence. So much so, that any attempts by our puny military forces to resist them taking over our planet are useless.

There are three types of alien. They are all the same species but just have different attitudes towards us.

SETTLERS are not particularly interested in us. They just want space to live. Unfortunately, that means clearing many of the villages, towns and cities we live in to make way for their own settlements, and to provide space for them to grow their crops. There isn't enough room on their planet.

HUNTERS rather like us. They think we look beautiful, and that we can be surprisingly clever for non-aliens. That's what makes us such fun to hunt. We can run fast, find good places to hide, and sometimes when we are cornered we will turn on our hunters and try to attack them. It doesn't normally work, but it gives a bit of a feeling of danger to the whole thing which makes it exciting. Hunters want to preserve as much as possible of our man-made habitat, and to make sure that there are always plenty of us to hunt. So they will only hunt us during a brief season each year, from the 21<sup>st</sup> of November to the 24<sup>th</sup> December. They have researched our customs and think that will make us look forward to Christmas even more.

FARMERS think we are delicious. Some of them want to farm us intensively, and to select from us the juiciest and tastiest humans for breeding so that over time, they can produce humans that are bigger, meatier, and also more tame and less difficult to farm. Their scientists have calculated that over the course of 60 years, through a mixture of selective breeding and genetic modification, they will be able to double the size of us. Other farmers want us to be free range, continuing to live in modified cities, and there are some "humanic" farmers who want our lives to be as man-made as possible. Free range and humanic sapiens gets a higher price in the shops.

Split the class into three groups, with one group for each type of alien. Have them create reasons for the aliens not to do what they are doing, and to see what type of reasons they are – bad OF, bad FOR, or both? Encourage them to create five reasons of each type (otherwise you'll often end up with stuff about us being poisonous etc. but not much on the moral side).

Share the reasoning and see what emerges from comparing the reasons directed to the different groups of aliens. Are some of the aliens intentions worse than others, or all equally bad?

### STAGE 3 – Back to reality (almost)

The good news is that aliens haven't landed – at least not from our point of view. But **what if we are the aliens and the animals are us?** If, instead of speaking on behalf of humans to aliens, they were making arguments to people on behalf of animals, would their previous arguments still stand up?

Notice that we are not pretending that the animals can speak, as, *pace* Jeremy Bentham, that might change things.

As with any analogy, you can ask if the two situations are similar enough for arguments from one to transfer to the other. What superiorities do we have over animals might justify a different conclusion? Intelligence, family, souls, culture, technology, memory are all candidate answers, but lots are vulnerable to counterexamples – or to the argument that if the aliens were as far superior to us, as those in the War of the Worlds, we would be arguing ourselves into the frying pan.

"The question is not, Can they *reason?*  
nor, Can they *talk?* but, Can they *suffer?*"  
*Jeremy Bentham*

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."  
*Genesis 1:26, KJV*

Relatively few humans, at least in Croydon, are now hunters, but many are customers for farmers of, for example, broiler chickens that have been bred to double in size over the last sixty years. All of us benefit from land that has been settled by humans at the expense of natural habitat (unless you're reading this in the small area of Botswana that is the current best estimate of where humanity started out).

It might also reveal some surprising inconsistencies in our thinking about animals. They might have decided that the hunters are better for the humans than the farmers, since at least we get to live naturally and choose our own mates, for example. Mere consumers of supermarket meat are often aghast at the idea of hunting, shooting and even fishing. But would a vegetarian fox-hunter be a better friend to the animal kingdom than a meat-eater who eschewed fur and thought fishing for sport was cruel?

Of course, the ultimate question is what we should do as a result of the conclusions drawn. Even if we decide we have been unjust in taking over so most of the earth's surface for the narrow purposes of our species, we can't all just disappear and leave the animals to reclaim the earth. Is there some new balance to be struck? Are any of the compromises they proposed to the aliens suitable for us to adopt?

One interesting difference between the two scenarios is that we can speak for ourselves, whereas animals can't (though they may have complex communications with one another). Does that reduce, or increase, the moral burden on us to consider their interests?