



THINKING BEANS

A YEAR OF CLASSROOM
PHILOSOPHY LESSONS

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**BOOK LAUNCH TUESDAY
OCTOBER 6TH 7 P.M. UK TIME.**

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PURPOSE

Topic Aristotle wrote that when an eye loses its sight it is no longer an eye. This comment invites two conflicting views. On the one hand, that objects are defined by their uses. And on the other, that they are defined by their purposes. According to the first view an object is defined by what it can do, and to the second by what it is for. That is to say, its nature is either changing and contingent or fixed and ingrained.

Props A fork, for illustrative purposes

Action 1 Tell a story of three Chinese explorers who travelled to Italy in the 15th century and encountered a new and unfamiliar object: something the Italians call una forchetta. The three explorers puzzled over what it might be. The first speculated that it was a back scratcher, the second a hairbrush (or ‘dinglehopper’ to aficionados of *The Little Mermaid*), while the third believed it was a tool for eating with.

- *Question 1* Which explorer was right?
 - When it is being used as a hairbrush, does it become a hairbrush?
 - Is it many things or just one thing?
 - Is it always a fork (a thing for eating with) no matter how it is used?
 - If it becomes the thing it is being used as, what is it when it’s not being used?
 - If one of the explorers is using one of the objects as a hairbrush while another explorer is using another one to scratch his back with, are they holding different objects?

Feel free to use different objects in the story. Anything will do. You could even present an uncommon kitchen utensil and ask the class to guess what it might be. The philosophical point you're addressing is whether a thing's nature and identity is determined by how it is used or by something else entirely; the intentions of its maker, for instance. There are implications for both views and the questions below address each. Question 2 is tailored for those who answer that all three explorers were right and that use does determine nature, while Question 3 is for those who believe that the intentions of a thing's maker, the purpose it is made to fulfil, determines its intrinsic nature.

Action 2 Ask for two volunteers to role-play. One child (x) is in the park on all-fours looking for worms (a budding entomologist). The other child is a blind person out for a walk. The blind person becomes tired and wishes to rest. Mistaking the entomologist for a bench, he sits on her.

- *Question 2* Is x a bench?
 - When being used as a bench, does x become a bench?
 - When being used as a bench, is x still a human?
 - Is x both a human and a bench?
 - Can only x tell us what she is?
 - If x consented to being used as a bench, would she then be a bench?

Action 3 Tell the story of a lazy couple who hated washing up. So contemptuous were they of the chore, they decided to have a child just so they could raise it to wash the dishes. Since their surname was Washer, they naturally named the child Dish, and from her earliest years Dish was trained to wash up. That's all she ever did. She stood at the sink scrubbing and wiping. After all, that's what she was made for.

- *Question 3* Is Dish Washer a dish washer?
 - Is Dish Washer the creation of her parents?

- Who is Dish Washer's creator?
- Does Dish Washer have a purpose?
- Do your parents determine your purpose?