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# The Philosopher's Stone

Philosophical Discussion Group, Armstrong State University

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# The Philosopher's Stone

January 26, 2017

In A Consolidated World of Alternative Facts

Vol. 19, No. 4

## Do You Experience The Dilemma of Values?

You are invited to value valuing Thursday, February 2nd @ 4:00 pm in Gamble 107

### A Dilemma from the Cosmos

By Norton Lucas (ml9767@stu.armstrong.edu)

Many of us have had the thought, "Are we alone in the universe?" As this question is mulled over, we often continue to play with the thought of being visited by some technologically advanced alien race from the far reaches of space. We wonder, "What would happen? Would they be friendly?" Some speculate that a society so advanced



scientifically, would also be farther along philosophically. That they would perhaps act as saviors of our planet. Revealing truths that bring mankind to the next stage of the sentient experience. That they might free us from the burdens we face as flawed beings, such as war, poverty, and our ever depleting resources.

Suppose this is true. Imagine that an advanced society of enlightened beings were to find our planet floating out here in the dust, and decide to say hello. Let us speculate that they offer the human race a perfect scenario; solutions to all of human kind's problems. In this reality, these saviors offer us a world without hunger, violence, environmental concerns, pain, or even death.

Now imagine that there is a catch. In order to achieve the knowledge and resources

needed for our new perfect world, the cosmic travelers have one request. They require that one child be handed over to them for scientific research. Their methods of examination would be beyond painful and this one human life would be filled with suffering from birth to death. On top of that, their life would be extended beyond the normal span of a human life; this suffering child would be just as immortal as the rest of mankind.

In this situation, should the people of earth sacrifice one for the good of everyone else? Why? Why not?

Assuming that you have been chosen by the human race to make this decision, what would you do? Would you keep mankind in its current state of conflict with all its flaws, or would you choose to destroy one life to save the others?

Are there changes that could be made to make this more or less acceptable? For instance, what if these "saviors" asked for 1,000 people to study? Or perhaps 1,000,000? What level of pain in how many lives would be worth the salvation offered here? Is there a greater prize that would make any of this more acceptable? Perhaps if the rest of mankind would not only be freed of pain, but even given some constant joy?

In rendering your decision, you may find it important to consider what Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham, or John Rawls would have to say about this. These ethicists describe the most important rational factor for making a moral decision.

Kant believed in what one would call a **Categorical Imperative**. This means that an act is just or unjust by its own merit, and that consequences do not determine the moral value of what you've done. He believes that if an act is wrong, it is wrong because of what the act is, and not what happens after. Therefore, he would have you tell these creatures that you would not subject anyone to abuse, because that would be immoral. In fact, Kant would add that the value of a person's life is priceless, and thus cannot be measured against the lives of any other lives, regardless of how numerous they may be. To torture would be immoral, and thus must never be done, consequences be damned.

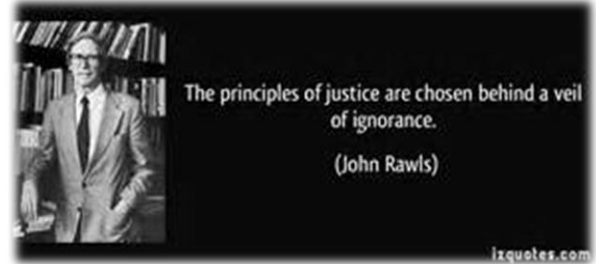


On the other hand, Bentham was a **Utilitarian**, which rationally argues that the outcome of your decision is the most important factor. He would urge you to think of what effect this would have in terms of his **Pleasure Calculus**. He used this to determine the pros and cons of a decision, based on how much pain versus pleasure your decision will bring about. Bentham would have us consider how intense the pain would be, how immediately it would come about, how long it would last, and more importantly in this scenario, how many people it would effect. He would have us act in a way that brings the greatest joy to the greatest number of people. Hence, sacrificing one for the rest would be more than justified, but likely morally required. In fact, he would be comfortable sacrificing more than just one as long as the ratio gives pleasure to the



majority and so long as the pleasure is quantitatively greater than the pain delivered.

Finally, let us turn to John Rawls, and consider his **Veil of Ignorance**. When making a decision that effects the masses, he would have us pretend that we are yet unborn, and we are deciding what world we would be born into. The catch is that we are unable to



know what our place in this world will be once born. This means that Rawls would ask that you consider how you might feel if you ended up in the place of the person sacrificed for the good of everyone else. This empathetic point of view places someone in a place that begs the world to be fair to everyone, and so it may not be best to consort with these beings from the outer reaches of space, but instead to continue striving to solve our problems on our own.

And so our hypothetical time is up. These creatures await your answer. What will it be?

Do you value the discussion of values? Is there any value that is collectively affirmed as more valuable than the value of progress and economic growth? In asking these and other questions about the value of values, are we not also raising suspicions about values? Given that one's actions embody values whether one discusses them or not, does one escape the dilemma of values by avoiding the discussion of values? The Philosophical Discussion Group (PDG) invites you into The Dilemma you cannot escape.

#### **OUR SPRING PDG MEETING SCHEDULE**

February 2 (Thurs.) @ 4pm in Gamble 107  
March 2 (Thurs.) @ 4pm in Gamble 107  
April 6 (Thurs.) @ 4pm in Gamble 118