

Philosophy Session 15 Report – October 11, 2022.

Before turning to Peter Singer's contribution to contemporary ethical issues we discussed two items currently in the news ... i) the airport incident where a person avoided the normal check-route to re-enter the secure area, and ii) persons gluing themselves to an artwork in the National Gallery of Victoria.

The one caused severe disruption, inconvenience and delays at the airport, the other more than just embarrassment to the gallery's management and security personnel. Questions for us re the second incident were 'should the persons be criticised or praised?' & 'what are the potential consequences from the act?' – both questions having relevance to the philosophical concept of 'Consequentialism'.

The media and radio talk-back response to the art incident was generally a negative view of the perpetrators but our discussion disclosed positive effects. There was no intent to damage the artwork, nor was any done, and the ease of approach to the artwork was such as to expose serious shortcomings in the gallery's security system. The downstream outcome can only be a shakeup and appropriate tightening of security which will have positive repercussions, too, in other galleries around the world.

Discussion then broadened into areas where authoritative interest and control needs review as to effectiveness: vandalism, graffiti, street gangs, disrespect, grubbiness, apparent lenience in sentencing, etc.. Differing beliefs, stress, social mores, and perceived inequalities were recognised as contributory factors in anti-social and criminal behaviour.

Another question, one which has implications for our 'happiness', is whether modern man, by embracing both his dependence on technological aids and on an ever-expanding economy for well-being, is heading in the right direction? Are we abandoning co-operative co-existence with nature in favour of the perhaps dubious, certainly unpredictable, benefits of defeating it? I suggested Googling 'Bongo, bongo, bongo' as relevant to this discussion.

Peter Singer's views on animal welfare, euthanasia, and abortion opened up some awareness of the complexity of the issues involved. As with the views of other philosophers (and our own) the conclusions drawn depend on the assumptions underlying them. The 'right-to-life' movement assumes that there is a stage reached in the development of a fetus where an inviolate 'right-to-life' status kicks-in – though where this stage actually is and comes into effect, and the arguments supporting it, vary greatly.

The session ended with thoughts on other subjects of contemporary action and interest, such as 'anti-natalism' – this and more = grist for coming sessions.

Keith Ashfold -- Convenor.

