Principles of Economics
Moral Philosophy
Gift-Exchange

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Moral Philosophy

• The ur-discipline behind economics
  • Adam Smith called himself not an economist but a “moral philosopher”

• Moral philosophy as distinct from natural philosophy
Moral Philosophy II

• The ur-discipline behind economics
  • Adam Smith called himself not an economist but a “moral philosopher”
• Moral philosophy as distinct from natural philosophy
• The external perspective
  • Intelligences vast, cool and unsympathetic/sympathetic
  • “A stranger to human nature…”
Moral Philosophy III

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- Moral philosophy as distinct from natural philosophy
- The external perspective
  - Intelligences vast, cool and unsympathetic/sympathetic
  - “A stranger to human nature…”
  - …who saw the indifference of men about the misery of their inferiors, and the regret and indignation which they feel for the misfortunes and sufferings of those above them, would be apt to imagine, that pain must be more agonizing, and the convulsions of death more terrible to persons of higher rank, than to those of meaner stations.”
What Is Remarkable About the East African Plains Ape?

• Basic:
  – Mammals
  – Upright posture
  – A lot of us: 7.2 billion now
What Is Remarkable About the East African Plains Ape? II

- Populations:
  - 130,000 kg Blue Whale--10,000
  - 5000 kg African Elephant--500,000
  - 3750 kg Hippopotamus--150,000
  - 1000 kg Walrus--200,000
  - 600 kg Bison--500,000
  - 400 kg Cattle--1,500,000,000
  - 300 kg Grizzly Bear--230,000
  - 180 kg Wild Boar--1,000,000
  - 175 kg Lion--25,000
  - 140 kg Gorilla--800
  - 120 kg Seal--1,800,000
  - 100 kg Warthog--250,000
  - 70 kg Human--7,200,000,000
  - 60 kg Cougar--60,000
  - 60 kg Hyena--200,000
  - 60 kg Aardvark--300,000
  - 50 kg Deer--7,300,000,000
  - 50 kg Kangaroo--24,000,000
  - 45 kg Gazelle--6,000,000
  - 45 kg Chimpanzee--250,000
What Is Remarkable About the East African Plains Ape? III

• Basic:
  – Mammals
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• Form:
  – Hands and opposable thumbs
  – Big brains
  – Talk
What Is Remarkable About the East African Plains Ape? IV

• Basic:
  – Mammals
  – Upright posture
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  – Hands and opposable thumbs
  – Big brains
  – Talk

• Behavior:
  – Gossip (about food, threats, mating)
What Is Remarkable About the East African Plains Ape? V

• Basic:
  – Mammals
  – Upright posture
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  – Hands and opposable thumbs
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• Behavior:
  – Gossip (about food, threats, mating)
  – Alter our environment
What Is Remarkable About the East African Plains Ape? VI

- **Basic:**
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What Is Remarkable About the East African Plains Ape? VII

• Basic:
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  – Upright posture
  – A lot of us: 7.2 billion now

• Form:
  – Hands and opposable thumbs
  – Big brains
  – Talk

• Behavior:
  – Gossip (about food, threats, mating)
  – Alter our environment
  – Gift exchange
  – Large-scale social division of labor greater than seen in the social insects
What Can’t We Turn into a Reciprocal Gift-Exchange Relationship?

• The *Iliad*: High King Agamemnon takes Akhilleus’s slave-concubine Briseis…
• Akhilleus sulks in his tent rather than fight in the Trojan War…
• Trojan Prince Hektor kills Akhilleus’s best friend Patroklos…
• And then Akhilleus kills Hektor…
• And then…
What Can’t We Turn into a Reciprocal Gift-Exchange Relationship? II

- The *Iliad*: High King Agamemnon takes Akhilleus’s slave-concubine Briseis, Akhilleus sulks in his tent rather than fight in the Trojan War, Trojan Prince Hektor kills Akhilleus’s best friend Patroklos, and then Akhilleus kills Hektor, and then…
- And then Hektor’s father King Priam comes out of Troy bringing gifts to Akhilleus to ransom Hektor’s body.
- They cry.
- They feast.
- They hug.
- They compliment each other. Priam gives Akhilleus the treasure.
- Akhilleus gives Priam his son’s body and a twelve-day truce…
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- And then Hektor’s father King Priam comes out of Troy bringing gifts to Akhilleus to ransom Hektor’s body. They cry. They feast. They hug. They compliment each other. Priam gives Akhilleus the treasure. Akhilleus gives Priam his son’s body and a twelve-day truce...
- If even your relationship with your son’s killer gets turned into a reciprocal gift-exchange relationship...
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• “Natural propensity to truck, barter, and exchange” indeed!
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• It is on top of this that we build our market economy, our social division of labor, our transformation of our environment to suit our purposes…
That Is One of the Principal Conclusions of Moral Philosophy

• We are not just…
  • Animals…
  • Talking and communicating animals…
  • Talking and communicating animals who alter our environment
• We are also animals that exchange things…