

Philosophy Gym

My Thought Journal



week one

01

Trolley Problem

02

Constructing
Arguments

03

Should art be
mandatory in
school?

Journal Entry #1: The Trolley Problem

Had I been in Chidi's position, I believe I would not have killed my friend. The reason I say that is simple: when it's people I do not know, it is easier for me to adopt a more utilitarian approach and simply make a moral judgment based on which situation results in the least damage. However, once a friend is involved, my utilitarian approach just does not work. See, utilitarian approach is purely based on logical reasoning and has no vagueness or grey area in it. It is just saving the most amount of people. On the other hand, the involvement of a friend also adds emotions and feelings to the equation. Now it is essential to note that although I would be causing the death of more people, but not knowing those people makes it less of a betrayal than it is in case I cause the death of my friend. Not just that, it would come with a personal cost of losing a friend as well. Having said that, I am not at all implying that it is in any way moral or ethical to make either choice; if anything, the choice I made is pretty selfish in my opinion as well, however, it is the true choice I believe I would make.



This means that a lot more emotions are involved in killing someone with your bare hands. I think that is also the case with me, when causing someone's death with your bare hands evokes so many emotions even when that person is a stranger, I can only imagine how it would make me feel to even think of causing the death of a friend because that friend is way closer to me emotionally than all those 5 strangers combined. After learning about this study, I felt a lot better about the choice I had made in the trolley problem before.





When I was taking a course on morality, I was given a reading named “The Moral Instinct” by Steven Pinker. The reading discussed many components which included moral dilemmas etc. What I wanted to point out was the study by Joshua Greene who attached fMRIs to people before asking them of the trolley problem, and the results ultimately showed that there were signs of a conflict between brain areas associated with emotion (the ones that recoil from harming someone) and areas dedicated to rational analysis (the ones that calculate lives lost and saved).

To add to this idea, I will discuss another reading named “The Singer Solution to World Poverty” by Peter Singer in which he discussed some very interesting points. He pointed out how most people are quick to make judgments on mere fictional characters while they all, ironically, engage in activities which are also in some way contributing the same way to the world. He gives the example of Dora from the movie 'Central Station,' who leaves a 9 year old boy at an address for a \$1000. He argues later that many of us make these choices every day, when we dine out instead of donating money to the less fortunate, when we get any non-essential item (like this phone on the bottom right corner). He then pointed out that however, if a relative of ours is living halfway across the world and we come to know of their poverty, we would immediately feel the need to intervene although the consequences of our intervention would remain the same in terms of utility. Similarly, despite choosing the contrary option in the strangers’ case, I would choose to save a friend as opposed to strangers. Might sound selfish, but it is true.



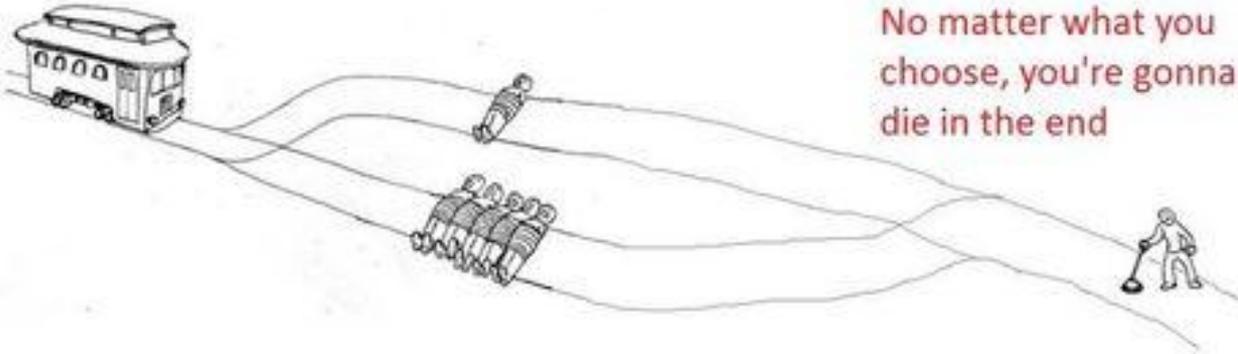
To Conclude..

As for me, to put it simply, I believe that my reasons, in addition to those discussed above, are very straight forward. When it is my friend involved in the scenario, I simply stop reasoning “for the greater good” and begin to calculate the merits and demerits in my own personal realm. In case of saving the 5 men, it is true that I’d be saving more lives but the way my own personal existence would be affected is different as I would be causing the death of a friend. This was not the case in the original trolley problem where I chose to save the 5 men and let 1 die. I would not have just the morality to consider in this situation but also myself, and for me, in addition to guilt of letting someone die, I would also have to live with the fact that I betrayed a friend and suffer the grief of losing them too. In this case, the bad just outweighs the good for me. The morality of friendship may just have preceded the universal morality here. Having said that, needless to say, the guilt of letting the 5 men die would still be a lot to carry.



THE REALITY, Y'ALL

The Existential Trolley Problem



Because, who's gonna live with the guilt, anyway?

Journal Entry #2: Constructing Arguments



Claim	Studying art in school should be made mandatory.
Data	This is because studying art brings out the creative side of students and encourages imagination and cognitive processes and also because some students never realize that they might actually love art because they are conditioned not to pursue it in our culture.
warrant	It is the job of all educational institutions to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to explore all fields before choosing one, and to enhance their critical thinking and creativity. Making it mandatory would not leave any room for students to miss out on something they might be good at.

Rebuttal

Making it mandatory won't force them to pursue it, only make sure they explore it like all other mandatory subjects, before actually choosing a permanent field.



Qualifier

Even those students who do not end up choosing it as their field will still benefit from what they have learned in terms of creativity, thinking out of the box, being cognitively stimulated and thinking critically.

Journal Entry #3: Should art be mandatory in school?

In a world where many subjects like science, English, math – and specifically in our country, where even Islamiyat and Pakistan studies are mandatory for Muslim and Non-Muslim, Pakistani and non-Pakistani kids alike, I think it is essential for art to also be mandatory.

I say this because not only are kids discouraged from art and its various forms as a career but they are actively deprived of exploring it at young ages to make sure they never discover that they actually love it – or worse, are talented in it.





week Three

01

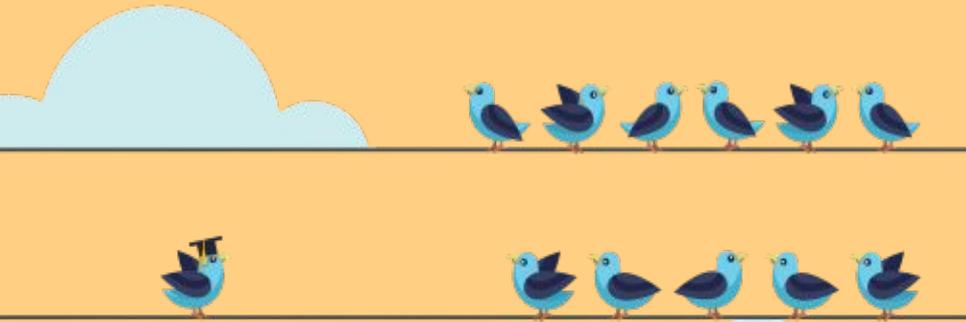
where did the
universe come from?



02

A sign from God





Journal Entry #4: where did the universe come from?

Listening to the discourse – I was very, very intrigued by 2 things a) How thinkers really interact with each other and b) about the different approaches towards the existence of the universe.

I was actually very happy reading it because it was thought provoking and thinking is like my favorite thing to do :D Other than that, it was very confusing and that was even more interesting to me because it made me feel challenged.



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I had some thoughts which SHOULD have been uncomfortable but weren't because I try to distinguish my beliefs (which give me comfort) from my critical thinking – and I put them both in different bottles to prevent any biases/limitations. This helps me understand other perspectives.



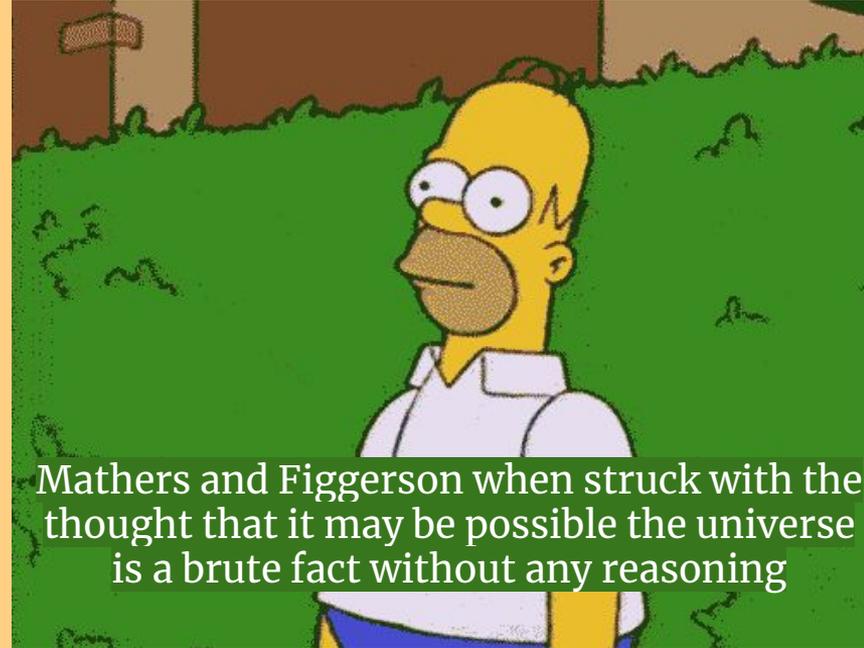
Moreover, the idea that the universe may not have any reason at all really struck me and took me aback although it made me extremely uncomfortable as well because uncertainty is not exactly easy to sit with.



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I don't agree with the argument that the idea that the universe is just a brute fact should be put aside simply because it makes us uncomfortable – that is not a logical reason to throw it away, I felt like they threw it out for no legitimate reason.

Also, I feel like the cause - effect question really made me think a lot as well. I'm still thinking about how cause must come before the effect etc. and how that did not make sense in the reading.



Mathers and Figgerson when struck with the thought that it may be possible the universe is a brute fact without any reasoning

Journal Entry #5: A Sign from God



If God explains to me the reason behind certain things which do not apparently have any good reason like atrocities or certain kinds of suffering – I think that would be a good enough sign for me. We are often told that everything God does or rather, “Wills to happen”, always has a good reason and it always has some good in it – we



just can't comprehend it with our limited brains. I just want to be able to understand what they call “hikmat” of Allah, I want to know all the ways in which such horrific things are GOOD. If God helps me understand these, that would be a sign I cannot explain otherwise nor can I attribute it to any other entity.

continued...

For example, what is the reason for a mother to have to live without her child? Or why do so many people lose lives in natural disasters? Or lose limbs and live a life of dependence and suffering? What good comes of it at all? What way is it “good” in? I want to understand the goodness, the reasonableness of it.



Week Four



01

Letter to your 15 year
old self

02

Link between
capitalism and religion



Journal Entry #6: Letter to 15 year old Dua

Dear Dua at 15,

You are meant to do so many things in life... you just do not know that yet. I know you feel stuck in time, but that is just the transitioning phase, once you get out of that place, you will see there is a whole world out there waiting for you to unravel its treasures.

The dream you have of becoming a lawyer may seem everything right now, but you will see in time that you are destined for something that will make you even happier than that – psychology. You will be thankful that you weren't able to study law one day.

The things you are enduring right now will not define who you are, they will certainly become a part of you – but you are and always will be so much more than them. Your feelings are valid. Your emotions are valid. Your anger is valid. It will be heard in due time. By those who truly matter.

But MOST importantly, spend more time with Dadi, give her more love. Do things for her when you think of doing them and forget. That one time you thought of lying down with her but got caught up with school work – do it this time. Tell her you love her and make it known to her that she's your bestest friend and always will be, do it while you can.

With love,

21 year old Dua.



Journal Entry #7: Religion and Capitalism

When it comes to religion and capitalism, I believe in two schools of thought – 1) Max Weber’s analysis of capitalism which outlines how religious institutions play a role in the development of a society (and economy) that is capitalist in its core and 2) capitalism itself is a religion too. Literally, capitalism is defined as any economic system driven by profits – profits made by private sector business owners who are motivated by one thing only: money.

Capitalism has made money their everything, like any other religion, in capitalism too, people engage in “spiritual enlightenment”; only in this case, it is achieved through money. The more the money, the better the enlightenment. Not to mention how it results in the abuse of the working class in the form of low wages, unfair working hours and what not.



Week Five



How does romantic love differ from platonic love?



Journal Entry #8: Difference between romantic and platonic love

For me, there is a huge difference between romantic and platonic love. In my experience, both kinds have been felt in different ways and have had poles apart influences on my behavior, emotions, feelings and life in general. While both kinds of love are extremely important and have their own place in my life, there are key differences between the two I have experienced. As far as I am concerned, considering that socialization is only a leisure for a limited amount of time, I have a

certain “capacity” to meet and spend time with friends – and most other people. When that social emotional battery runs out, I don’t want to be around them anymore – not because I don’t love them (I do, very much) but just because I can only spend so much time in company (be it anyone’s) before I need a recharge. This, I feel, is not the case with someone I see as a partner and instead I hope to feel more refreshed emotionally and socially after meeting.



In other words...with friends, I do
not feel this way...



week Six

01

Responding to the meme
about cultural relativism



"Your Honor, my client pleads not guilty by reason of cultural relativism."



Journal Entry #9: Cultural Relativism

While cultural differences hold immense importance and value in determining the morality of actions and behaviors in humans, I think it is imperative to note that “culture” ceases to be of relevance once an action or behavior extends to the realm of another person and their rights.

Although, I must admit the “rightness or wrongness” of certain practices is relative from culture to culture and place to place, I still do believe that it is nevertheless important to identify absolutely heinous and vile actions: to make a separate category of such transgressions which must not be excused under the blanket of cultural relativism and no excuse or context should let such actions be seen as “morally correct”. For instance, I don’t think sexual assault should ever be excused, culture or no culture, no matter where you come from.

week Seven

01

Brain Snatched



1. Think like a Skeptic
2. what does it mean to have knowledge?
3. which response is better?

Journal Entry #10: The sun will rise again tomorrow

A skeptic would respond something like this..

But will it? How do we know for sure that it will? Sure, it has risen every day for as long as we know – but what do we even really know? What if the “sun” as we know it does not even exist and is a mere figment of our imagination, like maybe an evolutionary way of perceiving day and night because it has survival value so we function the way we do...in a structure – considering the rest of the world as we know it is the “objective truth” and actually exists. What if our entire existence is merely a dream? And we wake up as an alien on Mars, dreaming of being humans living on earth. Better yet, what if this entire universe is a mere illusion? What really is the basis of our knowledge? So considering that we are humans, and we actually do live on planet earth and the process of day and night is a reality (all of which is debatable)...what if the sun does not rise tomorrow because it burns out? Or if there is a black hole we do not yet know of and the sun is sucked into it? You see, even when considering all possibilities of our reality to be true, we can still question the reality of specific things, like the knowledge we have of the universe. It is a possibility the sun may not rise tomorrow due to our lack of knowledge – knowledge which may well be inadequate or completely false.

Journal Entry #11: Medicinal drugs work towards healing

A skeptic would respond something like this..

How do we know that's true? Many would say because researches have been conducted on the efficacy of such drugs etc., but by who? The same scientists and researchers who MAKE those drugs. Are these sources even reliable? How do we know they haven't induced us with the diseases we have today? What if they make it seem like such drugs are working when in reality our internal biological systems inherently heal themselves and such drugs are mere placebos to keep the doctors and pharmaceuticals in demand? What if the "placebo" effect heals us in reality and whatever they inject us with is nothing but saline water? The fact that we THINK we are being injected with a healing drug is what truly vacates our symptoms. And with physical diseases with biological causes, it's just the normal healing process that heals us rather than the drugs?



continued...

Better yet, what if the human body as we know it is not even actually how it is and we have no bones or blood or muscles or fat and are merely flesh...or not even that? How do we know for sure the knowledge we have of the human body is not a mere illusion created to keep printing money in the name of health? Just like the illusion of beauty standards is created to keep the beauty industry relevant so we never stop buying beauty products or getting plastic surgery to meet the “beauty standards” of society. What if we don't really know the human body enough to ever question the drugs we use and everything we see on media and internet and in medical school is all part of the hoax? And all the doctors and scientists are in on this hoax because everyone gets money out of it...and those who do not comply with keeping the secret disappear into thin air.



[Meanwhile, in the skeptic's mind]

Doctors, after making a fool
of the entire world...

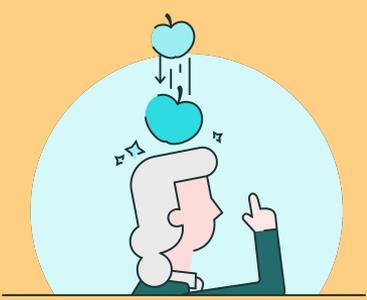


Journal Entry #12: what does it mean to have knowledge?

If I talk about knowledge in the context of this chapter, then to have knowledge is to have beliefs which can be proven through evidence. The world we live in today requires proof for beliefs to turn into reality. We can always have beliefs with no evidence, that is called faith, but for any belief to qualify as knowledge, it is essential for it to have basis in reality which can only be proven through evidence or research.



If I talk about my perception of knowledge, however, I believe there are certain kinds of knowledge that may not require evidence, like spiritual knowledge or experiential knowledge. Such knowledge can only be acquired through experiences, like knowing when your friend is upset and needs a hug or knowing that through the smile your mother passed, she is attempting to apologize for screaming at you earlier.



If we think about it, the root word for knowledge is to “know”, so essentially, to know anything is to have knowledge. This is a very optimistic way of looking at it because it expands our amount of knowledge so much, since we all know something. Knowledge does not necessarily come from books either, because in my opinion, it can also be acquired through intangible sources, like the knowledge of self. Might seem a trivial kind of knowledge but so, so important and acquired through introspection. This kind of knowledge is integral to social, emotional and moral development and aids positive things like empathy. So to have knowledge is not confined to the realm of education, facts or information but has categories, all of which are important. Self-awareness is knowledge too, acquired through a lot of effort.

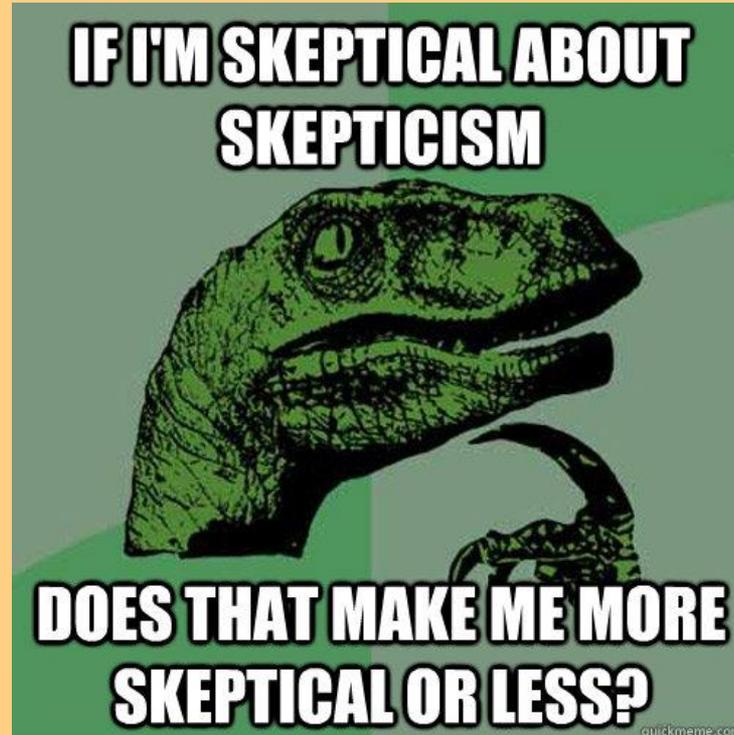


Journal Entry #13: which response is better?

The invisible pebble response is a better response to the skeptic because it is rooted in logic and gives a better explanation as to why a supposed “reality” which makes no difference essentially does not exist. The dismissive response is ignorant in nature and does not give a sufficient explanation but merely implies that anything that is obvious must also be true, when history has demonstrated time and time again that just because something is obvious does not make it true like the fact that the earth is round and not flat, although our eyes may suggest the contrary. There is more to this world than meets the eye and hence, just because we “see” something does not necessarily make it objective reality. The invisible pebble response, however, generates a more sound response whereby arguing that a reality that makes no difference to our experience of life is no reality at all; it ceases to be a reality until it affects our experiences and hence, this argument holds more substance and is more sensible because it offers more than just subjective perceptions.



My mind after reading this chapter...



Week Eight

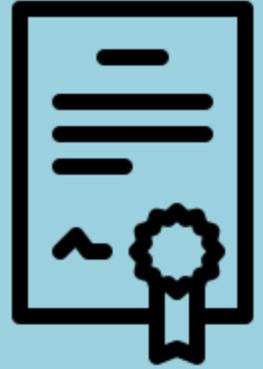
01

Should Patents be Allowed?



Journal Entry #14: Should Patents be Allowed?

I personally don't think patents should be allowed because, in my opinion, they cause more harm than good – at least in the way it is currently implemented. Patenting every new technology or development just halts innovation and further research, it discourages creativity. I believe a lot of the new gifts humanity has blessed us with including smart phones and faster soft wares etc. would not have been developed if every idea or development was patented and others could neither use these things nor learn from them. Most big innovations are results of smaller steps and processes which may also be seen as building blocks, and innovators almost always take ideas from here and there for their own creativity to breed in an environment that encourages it.



This would not be possible if all technologies are patented, however, I do think that there could be certain provisions or prerequisites introduced in the laws of patenting which may allow more flexibility in the use of patents and how they are enforced. For example, maybe if a person may buy, access, use and even take information from a certain development given the founder of that technology is fully credited for his work and contributions. So I do believe patents are also important for creators but I think some very essential changes must be brought to its implementation to leave room for creativity and innovation to breed.



Week Nine

01

How is eating meat any different from animal abuse?

02

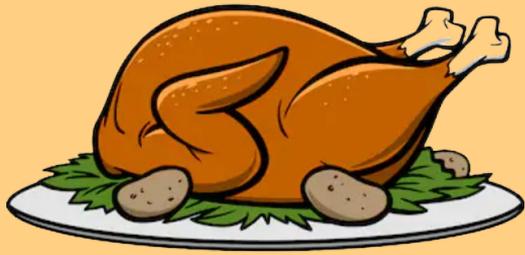
Modern "halal" meat is a mockery of Islam



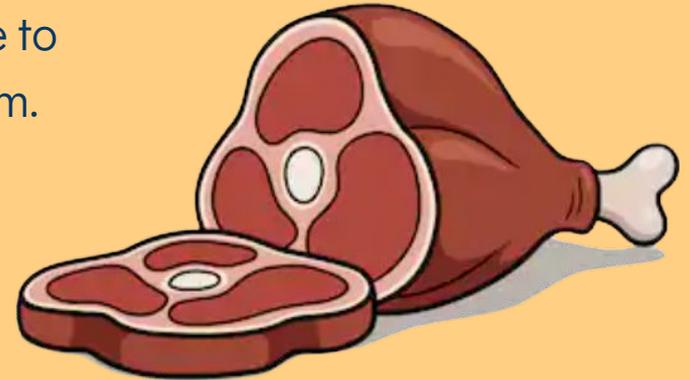
Journal Entry #15: How is it eating meat any different from the Yulin festival and abusing kittens?

I personally think it is justified to feel outraged at the Yulin festival or other animal abuse related events/occurrences even if one eats meat because I don't believe the two equate on moral grounds. As far as the Yulin festival is concerned, it allows the eating of an animal that is more a companion than an animal. Many studies have shown that dogs and cats or other domesticated animals, as compared to livestock animals, have far more understanding of emotions, suffering etc. They also have a more advanced understanding of and will to coexist with humans.

Many reports have shown that these dogs are not only eaten but also tortured before, like boiling them alive to "enhance their taste". This goes way beyond just eating them.

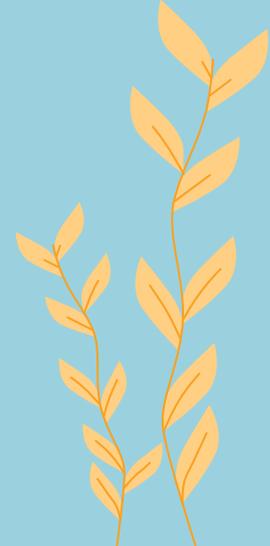


Moreover, the maltreatment of kittens in Pakistan, including the alleged sexual abuse case, it depicts the torture and abuse of an animal while a person eating chicken for instance depicts death without suffering. Although, I admit not all animals killed to be eaten are treated well and there may be suffering involved there too, however, the difference is that is not the primary intention. Moreover, I want to admit, I find it hard to even watch an animal being slaughtered even if it's in a humane way, so one could call that a double standard. However, I would like to draw an analogy here and bring back the trolley problem.



Previously, in one of my first entries in the journal, I made the argument that it is easier to push a lever to kill a person indirectly but hard to push someone directly with your bare hands to kill them because the former adds a sort of detachment in the process of killing and that detachment allows for us to feel less responsible for it. I think this phenomenon applies in eating meat too.





It evokes more emotions when someone is directly witnessing the death or causing it with little distance and that is why it is also easier to be okay with eating a chicken nugget which was the result of the killing of a chicken you did not kill yourself or witness dying, than it is to be okay with letting people torture animals. Personally, I have never eaten an animal that has been slaughtered in front of my eyes.

Journal Entry #16: Modern "halal" meat is a mockery of Islam

The first thing that came to my mind when I read this article was that although I do not disagree with the arguments presented in this article, I'm sure they're true, personally I do not lean towards presenting religious arguments for moral policing anyways. The reason being that being religious should not be the only reason one acts morally, that's why I try not to intertwine the two. For me, not abusing animals should be considered basic human decency and one should not require believing in God to abstain from causing harm or pain to other living beings. Moreover, instilling the fear of Hellfire etc. seem like unhealthy ways of to reinforce any kind of behavior let alone behaviors relating to morality and ethics. So for instance, if a person is or becomes non-religious, these arguments would completely give out and mean nothing to them.



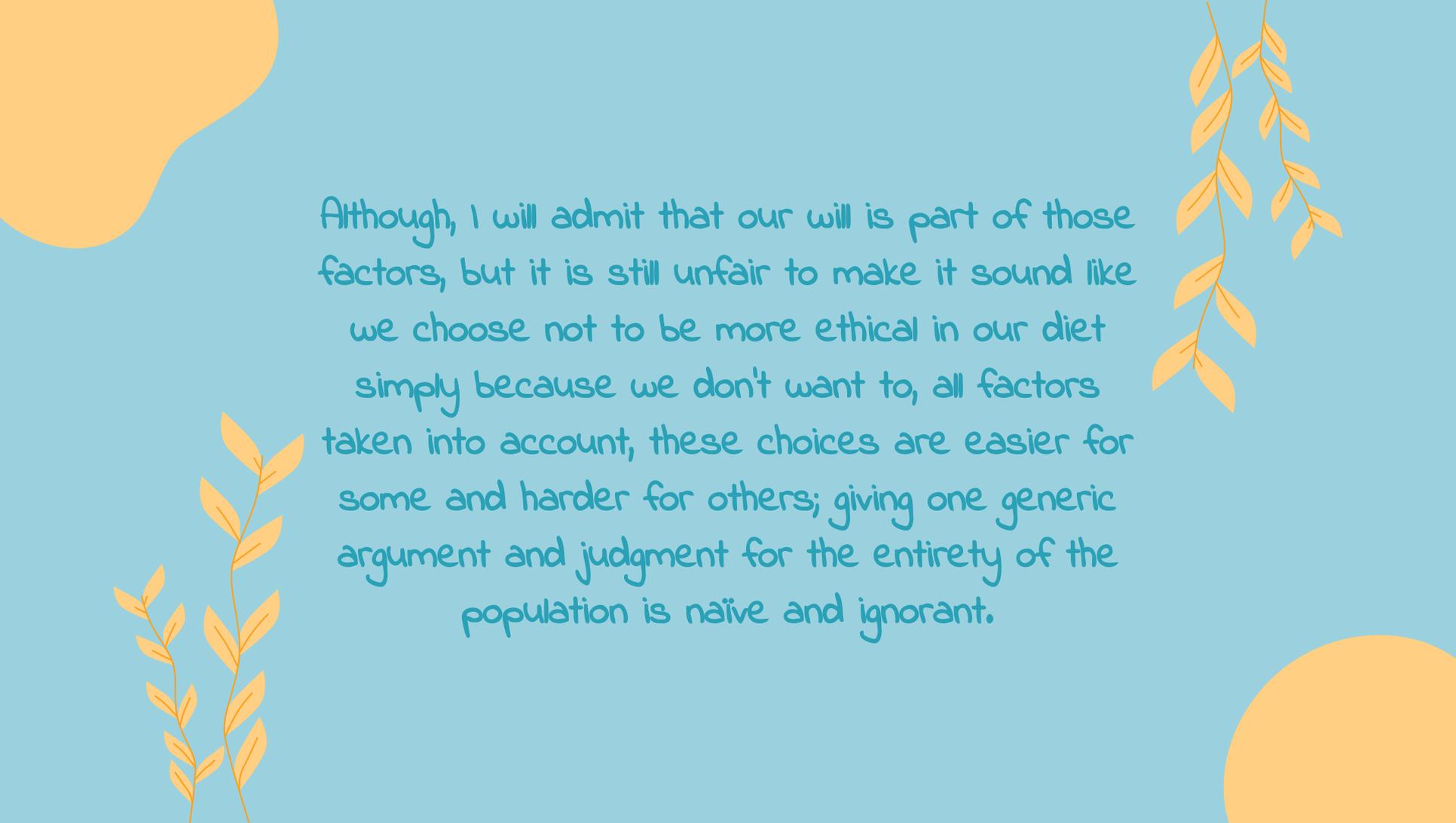
Halal



Haram

As far as the content of this article is concerned, I do not believe it is logical to make assumptions about who will be punished and who won't because according to the same religion of Islam, Allah is All-Forgiving and Merciful, so one could argue there is hope for forgiveness, so it's not really about being punished to begin with; to me, it is about kindness and humanity which is essentially the basis of Islam as well. To shed light on the argument in question, although all the facts about animal cruelty are true, I still believe it is unfair to judge a person's actions and choices in vacuum. There's a multitude of factors that go into each choice we make, from availability, ability to afford, societal norms, to lifestyle and habits. I believe the choices we make, particularly dietary choices in this case, are not just a result of our own free will in vacuum but also a universe of factors which interact with each other and us. I believe the meat-eating patterns we engage in have a lot to do with the environmental factors and their intertwined relationships.



The background is a solid light blue color. In the top-left corner, there is a large, irregular orange shape. In the bottom-right corner, there is a large orange circle. On the left side, there are two thin, brown branches with small, yellow-orange leaves. On the right side, there are two similar thin, brown branches with small, yellow-orange leaves, one positioned higher than the other.

Although, I will admit that our will is part of those factors, but it is still unfair to make it sound like we choose not to be more ethical in our diet simply because we don't want to, all factors taken into account, these choices are easier for some and harder for others; giving one generic argument and judgment for the entirety of the population is naïve and ignorant.

Last week

01

Reflection of the
Course



There are many things I feel I learnt in this course during the semester. It's impossible to capture all those in a single entry but I will mention a few I can recall. I think one very important thing I have learnt is that when thinking of a certain philosophical question, there are multitudes within each argument presented. We often mistake the face value of such debates as the whole deal, when in reality even each argument has several details and is almost always multifaceted. For example, when I was writing my thought paper, I had the face value of the "deterrence" argument in mind which was that it is actually not empirically supported that capital punishment deters potential offenders, however, while writing it, I also realized that the morality of the concept of deterrence is questionable too...is it even a morally justifiable concept to give a harsh punishment to one offender just to teach the rest a lesson? These philosophical undertones in arguments only came to my mind after having taken this course because otherwise I was always playing with practical arguments mostly.

Other than that I think I also learned to see things in more depth than before and also to be okay with being wrong sometimes...to realize that certain things I, and others, engage in are questionable even if I rationalize them, and that at this point only raising those questions should be enough, thinking about them should be enough and not having all the answers is okay.

I believe the vast perspectives people in this class brought have enlightened me in so many important ways, and they will continue to affect me for a long time to come, and for that I am so, so grateful 😊

