

BANQUE DE SUJETS

ANGLAIS / PHILOSOPHIE

SECTION EUROPÉENNE

SESSION 2018

BEAUMONT

Binôme : Anglais / Philosophie

Sujet n°1

Notions : droit, justice

Question : Should animals have rights ?

Pour répondre à cette question, vous proposerez une réflexion personnelle et construite sur une lecture précise du texte suivant et sur votre culture philosophique.

The day may come when the non-human part of the animal creation will acquire the rights that never could have been withheld¹ from them except by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the whims² of a tormentor. Perhaps it will someday be recognized that the number of legs, the hairiness of the skin, or the possession of a tail, are equally insufficient reasons for abandoning to the same fate a creature that can feel? What else could be used to draw the line? Is it the faculty of reason or the possession of language? But a full-grown horse or dog is incomparably more rational and conversable than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month old. Even if that were not so, what difference would that make? The question is not “Can they reason?” or “Can they talk?” but “Can they suffer?”

Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789).

¹ To withhold = to keep

² Whim = caprice

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Binôme : Anglais / Philosophie

Sujet n°2

Notions : politique

Question : Is man the only political animal?

Pour répondre à cette question, vous proposerez une réflexion personnelle et construite sur une lecture précise du texte suivant et sur votre culture philosophique.

Harold Laswell's famous definition of politics as a social process determining "who gets what, when, and how," there can be little doubt that chimpanzees engage in it. Since in both humans and their closest relatives the process involves bluff, coalitions, and isolation tactics, a common terminology is warranted.

Frans De Waal, *Chimpanzee Politics: Power and Sex among Apes*

- 5 So, don't believe anyone who says that since nature is based on a struggle for life, we need to live like this as well. Many animals survive not by eliminating each other or keeping everything for themselves, but by cooperating and sharing. This applies most definitely to pack hunters, such as wolves or killer whales, but also to our closest relatives, the primates.

Frans de Waal, *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society*

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Binôme : Anglais / Philosophie

Sujet n°3

Notions : morale

Question : Should computers be held responsible for their deeds?

Pour répondre à cette question, vous proposerez une réflexion personnelle et construite sur une lecture précise du texte suivant et sur votre culture philosophique.

Deep Blue, like many other computers equipped with artificial intelligence (AI) programs, is what I call an intentional system: its behavior is predictable and explainable if we attribute to it beliefs and desires – “cognitive states” and “motivational states” – and the rationality required to figure out what it ought to do in the light of those beliefs and desires. Are these skeletal versions of human beliefs and desires sufficient to meet the mens rea¹ requirement of legal culpability? Not quite, but, if we restrict our gaze to the limited world of the chess board, it is hard to see what is missing. Since cheating is literally unthinkable to a computer like Deep Blue, and since there are really no other culpable actions available to an agent restricted to playing to chess, nothing it could do would be a misdeed deserving a blame, let alone a crime of which we might convict it. But we also assign responsibility to agents in order to praise or honor the appropriate agent. Who, or what, then, deserves the credit for beating Kasparov? Deep Blue is clearly the best candidate.

Daniel DENETT, “When HAL kills, who’s to blame?”,
in HAL’s Legacy, 2001’s Computer as Dream and Reality, MIT Press, 1998.

¹ Mens rea = capacity to have intentions

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Binôme : Anglais / Philosophie

Sujet n°4

Notions : matière et esprit

Question : Is it relevant to compare intelligence to information processing?

Pour répondre à cette question, vous proposerez une réflexion personnelle et construite sur une lecture précise du texte suivant et sur votre culture philosophique.

In spite of grave difficulties, workers in Cognitive Simulation and Artificial Intelligence are not discouraged. In fact, they are unqualifiedly optimistic. Underlying their optimism is the conviction that human information processing must proceed by discrete steps like those of a digital computer, and, since nature has produced
5 intelligent behavior with this form of processing, proper programming should be able to elicit such behavior from digital machines, either by imitating nature or by out-programming her.

Hubert L. Dreyfus, *What Computers can't do. Of Artificial Reason* (1972).

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Binôme : Anglais / Philosophie

Sujet n°5

Notions : droit, devoir, esprit.

Question : Do we have duties towards nature ?

Pour répondre à cette question, vous proposerez une réflexion personnelle et construite sur une lecture précise du texte suivant et sur votre culture philosophique.

[The first] alternative maintains that all entities that qualify as moral agents also qualify as moral patients and vice versa. It corresponds to a rather intuitive position, according to which the agent/inquirer plays the role of the moral protagonist, and is one of the most popular views in the history of ethics, shared for example by many
5 Christian Ethicists in general and by Kant in particular. We refer to it as the standard position. [The second] alternative holds that all entities that qualify as moral agents also qualify as moral patients but not vice versa. Many entities, most notably animals, seem to qualify as moral patients, even if they are in principle excluded from playing the role of moral agents. This post-environmentalist approach requires a change in
10 perspective, from agent orientation to patient orientation. In view of the previous label, we refer to it as non-standard.

Floridi and Sanders, "On the morality of artificial agents", *in Minds and Machines* (2004)

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Binôme : Anglais / Philosophie

Sujet n°6

Notions : culture, justice, morale

Question : Why is the domination of nature an illegitimate goal?

Pour répondre à cette question, vous proposerez une réflexion personnelle et construite sur une lecture précise du texte suivant et sur votre culture philosophique.

The fundamental error is thus domination, the denial of freedom and autonomy. Anthropocentrism, the major concern of most environmental philosophers, is only one species of the more basic attack on the preeminent value of self-realization. From the perspective of anthropocentrism, humanity believes it is justified in dominating and molding the nonhuman world to its own human purposes. But a policy of domination transcends the anthropocentric subversion of natural processes. A policy of domination subverts both nature and human existence; it denies both the cultural and natural realization of individual good, human and nonhuman. Liberation from all forms of domination is thus the chief goal of any ethical or political system.

Eric KATZ, *Nature as Subject. Human Obligation and Natural Community*,
Londres-New-York, 1997.

Binôme : Anglais / Philosophie

Sujet n°7

Notions : morale, société

Question : Is competition the main factor of evolution?

Pour répondre à cette question, vous proposerez une réflexion personnelle et construite sur une lecture précise du texte suivant et sur votre culture philosophique.

In the animal world we have seen that the vast majority of species live in societies, and that they find in association the best arms for the struggle for life: understood, of course, in its wide Darwinian sense—not as a struggle for the sheer means of existence, but as a struggle against all natural conditions unfavourable to the species. The animal species, in which individual struggle has been reduced to its narrowest limits, and the practice of mutual aid has attained the greatest development, are invariably the most numerous, the most prosperous, and the most open to further progress. The mutual protection which is obtained in this case, the possibility of attaining old age and of accumulating experience, the higher intellectual development, and the further growth of sociable habits, secure the maintenance of the species, its extension, and its further progressive evolution. The unsociable species, on the contrary, are doomed to decay.

Piotr Kropotkine, *Mutual Aid, a Factor of Evolution*

Binôme : Anglais / Philosophie

Sujet n°8

Notions : morale

Question : Is there a natural foundation for ethics ?

Pour répondre à cette question, vous proposerez une réflexion personnelle et construite sur une lecture précise du texte suivant et sur votre culture philosophique.

However, it is especially in the domain of ethics that the dominating importance of the mutual-aid principle appears in full. That mutual aid is the real foundation of our ethical conceptions seems evident enough. But whatever the opinions as to the first origin of the mutual-aid feeling or instinct may be whether a biological or a
5 supernatural cause is ascribed¹ to it—we must trace its existence as far back as to the lowest stages of the animal world; and from these stages we can follow its uninterrupted evolution, in opposition to a number of contrary agencies, through all degrees of human development, up to the present times. Even the new religions which were born from time to time—always at epochs when the mutual-aid principle
10 was falling into decay in the theocracies and despotic States of the East, or at the decline of the Roman Empire—even the new religions have only reaffirmed that same principle. They found their first supporters among the humble, in the lowest, downtrodden² layers of society, where the mutual-aid principle is the necessary foundation of every-day life; and the new forms of union which were introduced in the
15 earliest Buddhist and Christian communities, in the Moravian brotherhoods and so on, took the character of a return to the best aspects of mutual aid in early tribal life.

Piotr Kropotkine, *Mutual Aid, a Factor of Evolution*

¹ Ascribed= attributed

² Downtrodden = oppressed / despised

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Binôme : Anglais / Philosophie

Sujet n°9

Notions : esprit et matière

Question : Is it important to know whether a machine really thinks or not?

Pour répondre à cette question, vous proposerez une réflexion personnelle et construite sur une lecture précise du texte suivant et sur votre culture philosophique.

Philosophers have been around far longer than computers and have been trying to resolve some questions that relate to AI: How do minds work? Is it possible for machines to act intelligently in the way that people do, and if they did, would they have real, conscious minds? What are the ethical implications of intelligent machines?

5 First, some terminology: the assertion that machines could act as if they were intelligent is called the weak AI hypothesis by philosophers, and the assertion that machines that do so are actually thinking (not just simulating thinking) is called the strong AI hypothesis.

10 Most AI researchers take the weak AI hypothesis for granted, and don't care about the strong AI hypothesis—as long as their program works, they don't care whether you call it a simulation of intelligence or real intelligence. All AI researchers should be concerned with the ethical implications of their work.

S. Russell & P. Novig, *Artificial Intelligence. A Modern Approach* (2010)

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Binôme : Anglais / Philosophie

Sujet n°10

Notions : esprit et matière.

Question : Is it meaningless to ask whether a machine can think or not?

Pour répondre à cette question, vous proposerez une réflexion personnelle et construite sur une lecture précise du texte suivant et sur votre culture philosophique.

Philosophers are interested in the problem of comparing two architectures—human and machine. Furthermore, they have traditionally posed the question (not in terms of maximizing expected utility but rather) as, “Can machines think?”

5 The computer scientist Edsger Dijkstra (1984) said that “The question of whether *Machines Can Think* . . . is about as relevant as the question of whether *Submarines Can Swim*” The American Heritage Dictionary’s first definition of *swim* is “To move through water by means of the limbs, fins, or tail,” and most people agree that submarines, being limbless, cannot swim. The dictionary also defines *fly* as “To move
10 through the air by means of wings or winglike parts,” and most people agree that airplanes, having winglike parts, can fly. However, neither the questions nor the answers have any relevance to the design or capabilities of airplanes and submarines; rather they are about the usage of words in English. (The fact that ships *do* swim in Russian only amplifies this point.). The practical possibility of “thinking machines” has
15 been with us for only 50 years or so, not long enough for speakers of English to settle on a meaning for the word “think”— does it require “a brain” or just “brain-like parts.”

S. Russell & P. Novig, *Artificial Intelligence. A Modern Approach* (2010)

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Binôme : Anglais / Philosophie

Sujet n°11

Notions : esprit et matière, droit et devoir, morale

Question : Is it legitimate to perform painful experiments on living sentient beings?

Pour répondre à cette question, vous proposerez une réflexion personnelle et construite sur une lecture précise du texte suivant et sur votre culture philosophique.

Normal adult human beings have mental capacities which will, in certain circumstances, lead them to suffer more than animals would in the same circumstances. If, for instance, we decided to perform extremely painful or lethal scientific experiments on normal adult humans, kidnapped at random from public parks for this purpose, every adult who entered a park would become fearful that he or she would be kidnapped. The resultant
5 terror would be a form of suffering additional to the pain of the experiment.

The same experiments performed on nonhuman animals would cause less suffering since the animals would not have the anticipatory dread of being kidnapped and experimented upon. This does not mean, of course, that it would be *right* to perform the
10 experiment on animals, but only that there is a reason, which is *not* speciesist, for preferring to use animals rather than normal adult humans, if the experiment is to be done at all. It should be noted, however that this same argument gives us a reason for preferring to use human infants - orphans perhaps - or retarded human beings for
15 experiments, rather than adults, since infants and retarded human beings would also have no idea of what was going to happen to them.

Peter Singer, *The Animal Liberation Movement* (1985)

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Binôme : Anglais / Philosophie

Sujet n°12

Notions : droit, devoir, justice, morale.

Question : Is equality a fact or an ideal ?

Pour répondre à cette question, vous proposerez une réflexion personnelle et construite sur une lecture précise du texte suivant et sur votre culture philosophique.

When we say that all human beings, whatever their race, creed, or sex, are equal, what is it that we are asserting? Those who wish to defend a hierarchical, inegalitarian society have often pointed out that by whatever test we choose, it simply is not true that all humans are equal. Like it or not, we must face the fact that humans come in different
5 shapes and sizes; they come with differing moral capacities, differing intellectual abilities, differing amounts of benevolent feeling and sensitivity to the needs of others, differing abilities to communicate effectively, and differing capacities to experience pleasure and pain. In short, if the demand for equality were based on the actual equality
10 of all human beings, we would have to stop demanding equality. It would be an unjustifiable demand.

Peter SINGER, *All Animals are Equal*, In TOM REGAN & PETER SINGER (eds.),
Animal Rights and Human Obligations. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1989, pp. 148-162

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Binôme : Anglais / Philosophie

Sujet n°13

Notions : droit, devoir, morale, justice.

Question : Why should we care about animal suffering?

Pour répondre à cette question, vous proposerez une réflexion personnelle et construite sur une lecture précise du texte suivant et sur votre culture philosophique.

Bentham points to the capacity for suffering as the vital characteristic that gives a being the right to equal consideration. The capacity for suffering - or more strictly, for suffering and/or enjoyment of happiness - is not just another characteristic like the capacity for language, or for higher mathematics. Bentham is not saying that those who try to mark
5 "the insuperable¹ line" that determines whether the interests of a being should be considered happen to have selected the wrong characteristic. The capacity for suffering and enjoying things is a pre-requisite for having interests at all, a condition that must be satisfied before we can speak of interests in any meaningful way. It would be nonsense
10 to say that it was not in the interests of a stone to be kicked along the road by a child. A stone does not have interests because it cannot suffer. Nothing that we can do to it could possibly make any difference to its welfare. A mouse, on the other hand, does have an interest in not being tormented, because it will suffer if it is.

Peter Singer, The Animal Liberation Movement (1985)

¹ Insuperable = insurmountable