

Second Philosophy

Led by	Oswy Gothly / Keith Parker
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INTRODUCTION

The idea behind the scenario is to confront and probe our ideas about morality. By claiming Ridley's film as a documentary drama the Aliens are given an immediate sense of reality.

They confront our morality. The issue is, how do we cope with a creature that is in many ways superior to us and has its own morality. Up till now our morality has adjudicated between members of our own species and recently some other earthly species as well. In the new scenario the Alien is enforcing a morality on us. Is it superior to ours or is it just our human morality in a superior pure form?

The questions are sequenced so I think we should try and stick to each in turn. There is a connecting theme and it is the concept of moral realism. So question 1 who has the superior morality us or them? Dragons or Humans? The issue here is that Aliens is a horror film. We are shocked by the behaviour of the Alien but should we be? Is it pitiless and cruel or just behaving in very moral way?

Ok I'll give you a chance to absorb that tell me when you are ready.

DISCUSSION:

Squish: Interestingly, I didn't find them shockingly immoral. Scary, for sure, but I didn't think to pass any value-judgements. They do what they do - it's their way of life, and they're not intending to be cruel. If tofu had mental states, it would prob. see me the same way

Marya: I didn't find them immoral either - I thought they were rather without a sense of morality - they are closer to the natural order of things than we as humans are

Squish: I think that humans are much more prone to deliberate cruelty

Marya: yep

Oswy: OK I will respond to that as the spokesperson for the dragons

Sojourna: I would say that humans (moral humans that is) would consider human morality superior as they do when comparing themselves to any non-human species. Sort of patronizing.

Marya: yes indeed

Marya: I think what we see as morality is purely a human concept (that we know of for now)

Sojourna: Yes.

Oswy: The question is who is superior? I think the dragons are showing a morality. They care about reproduction and they show courage in defending themselves. They identify with their group.

Squish: if we could attach a value-judgment to arrogance and egocentrism, then wouldn't it be somewhat immoral to condemn other species as morally inferior?

Marya: aye, but then humans do that too don't they?

Marya: sorry that was in response to Os

Oswy: I was just making the point that the Aliens have a morality and it could be seen as different to ours. Now evil says well its their own morality but is it superior to ours?

Marya: but I don't see it as a kind of morality - I see it as a group dynamic

Second Philosophy

Sojourna: What would make it superior?

Marya: there seems to be no question of good or bad, or wrong or right with the aliens - they simply have their way

Oswy: I don't see how you differentiate a group dynamic from morality. This just sounds like human speciesism to me as a dragon

Squish: how can we deem whether another moral system is superior/inferior to ours without asserting that our value-system is superior to begin with, thus allowing us to pass judgements on others?

Marya: what we perceive to be morality does not work in the same way as what you perceive the alien's 'morality'

Marya: is what I mean

Squish: should we clarify what we mean by "superior" here?

Sojourna: yes, I think we need to

Marya: aye, do you mean more efficient?

Oswy: Yes I think we have now agreed the Aliens are moral. It seems to me they are superior because they don't interfere with others. Humans are inferior because they enslave other species on their own planet. Their morality's just for their self interest in trivial ways.

Marya: See, I don't agree with that - because they are not consciously deciding to not enslave other species

Squish: I am curious to know how we make judgments about others being superior/inferior, morally speaking, without tacitly assuming that we are morally superior. We would need to accept that we are somehow capable of knowing what is good/bad first, in order to decide whether others have a good or bad moral system

Marya: if it was something they 'chose' to do on moral grounds then yes, I would agree, but they are not choosing anything - they are simply doing what it is in their nature to do

Squish: if we are morally inferior, then technically we wouldn't have the right to judge a morally superior system...since our criteria may be invalid

Oswy: Marya that is an assumption on your part. You are assuming that they have the intelligence of a tiger or a chicken but these creatures build spaceships and survive in space intellectually they are superior to us

Squish: Wait

Marya: mmm, we don't know that they have built spaceships

Squish: the predators are the intellectual superiors

Oswy: Evil, surely you are assuming moral relativism in your argument.

Sojourna: Oswy, are you saying that because aliens have a superior civilisation then their morality would have to be superior?

Marya: we only know what they do, we don't know where they came from originally or anything along those lines - and as far as we know, they have not built any spaceships

Squish: conversely, we must assume moral absolutism in order to judge the aliens' moral code; didn't the predators create the aliens as the perfect prey?

Marya: we don't know that they created the aliens as such, we only know that they 'use' them as prey :]

Oswy: Sojourna no I am trying to get you to see that the Alien is not like a chicken or a tiger a purely instinctive creature. Instinctive things don't go in for space travel. They don't put out beacons warning off other creatures they don't show the skill and cunning of the Alien

Sojourna: Aha, ok Oswy

Squish: ah, well then I'm still sure it was the predators who are intelligent

Marya: but Oswy, we don't know that they have travelled at all - as far as we can tell, they have been encountered by other species and interacted with them, and travelled along with them - but not by choice

Squish: and the predators show this overtly - at least, in the first AVP movie

Marya: they have no apparent technology of their own; so yes, I am saying that they are rather like a tiger in that sense - there doesn't seem to be a morality there in any sense

Second Philosophy

Squish: Yes - surely we are talking about the predators when we think about all their fancy technology

Marya: Oswy, the warning beacon was not put there by the aliens - it was put there by the creature that died on that large ship in Alien 1

Marya: the big guy using the telescope that had become sort of skeletal

Oswy: Well it's a moot point about how they got here. But they are caring for their young they are altruistic. What is there in human morality that is superior to them?

Sojourna: Animals care for their young.

Squish: is caring for one's young truly an example of altruism?

Marya: mmm, I don't know that I would say they were inferior morally - rather I would say that their species did not evolve the concept of morality as we have done - and it is not necessary to their survival

Marya: I guess I think it is instinctive as opposed to a moral choice

Oswy: Altruism in that they are willing to sacrifice for the sake of others

Squish: It's one thing to sacrifice for one's kin; another for other creatures in general; humans feel sympathy and they are motivated to help other people in general

Oswy: So you seem to be saying that humans have a superior morality because they have moral choice ie the choice to enslave everything and everyone in some cases for trivial self interest. How can that be superior?

Squish: I think that's an oversimplification; plus I didn't make any assertions about human superiority; I was elucidating the concept of altruism

Marya: Oswy, this is what I said: "mmm, I don't know that I would say they were inferior morally - rather I would say that their species did not evolve the concept of morality as we have done - and it is not necessary to their survival"

Oswy: Marya made the point about choice I think

Marya: so we cannot be morally superior really - there can only be superiority if the species in question 'knows' about morality ... morality only seems to apply to humans - that we know of

Squish: agreed - I don't think anyone here has suggested that humans are morally superior

Marya: we cannot say that any other species is immoral because they have no concept of morality - is what I'm trying to say

Marya: being moral or having a moral standing does not make humanity superior :)

Squish: it gives us ruddy migraines instead

Marya: lol

Oswy: I still don't see how you know that the Alien does not have moral self awareness. It seems to me it has and it is concerned with things of vital interest to it unlike us who use morality to treat other species badly

Squish: I think it's fair to say that humans are more morally complex

Marya: that's fair enough Oswy - I am making an assumption based on what we know about them - we don't know what goes on in their minds at all - we only know what we know via observation - in the same way we observe animals in nature

Squish: oh I don't think we use morality to treat other species badly. Our cruelty to others is a sign that we have a faulty moral code

Oswy: Evil that's one way of putting it. Killing other species because you like the taste of their flesh is another thing altogether

Squish: that's a sign that we don't extend moral charity to other species... I don't see how that's another way of putting it

Oswy: Squish until recently other species didn't even come into our moral radar.

Marya: See I don't see them as evil because as I said, there is no moral choice going on; if you are 'morally conscious' and make a conscious choice to do something 'bad' then you can be judged morally, but if you have no concept of what 'moral' then I think you cannot be judged in the same manner

Second Philosophy

Oswy: You are assuming there is no moral choice. I am saying they are making moral choices about important things like reproduction

Squish: ...who is assuming there is no moral choice?

Marya: I see Oswy - but we have not observed that sort of behaviour, which is why I am looking at it in the same way one would look at the behaviour of an animal

Elfed: are we saying that animals can't make moral choices, because they can

Marya: I am saying that yes Elfed

Marya: lol okay - can you explain why you think that?

Sojourna: Humans with different moral codes - or no obvious morality - are deemed inferior by other humans who believe they have a superior moral code.

Elfed: because chimps have been shown to make moral choices

Marya: like what Elfed?

Elfed: ah, Soj, so this is relativism in another guise

Marya: I'm curious, since I don't know about this

Sojourna: Yes, I'm curious about our cousin's moral choices, too! Do tell, Elfed.

Elfed: ok I can't quote the study but new scientist has reported studies of that kind

Oswy: Some would claim that chimps engage in warfare and make a choice about it

Elfed: I remember they have but can't remember the details :-)

Marya: no need for a detailed explanation but just an idea of what they did

Squish: ...I'll make a quick query

Elfed: I think it was to do with choosing to help another chimp, choosing to show compassion

Oswy: They have also been said to have committed murder of other chimps.

Marya: mmm, interesting

Elfed: chimps are as speciesist as we are; we are very speciesist

Oswy: Remember in this debate I am claiming because I am also a dragon that the Alien is intellectually equal and probably superior to humans.

Marya: lol Oswy, yes :)

Oswy: Its that what worries us that an intelligent other can have a different morality that they impose on us when we get in their way?

Elfed: intellectual equality is a Pandora's Box Oswy

Marya: but then there are different sorts of dragons - and we have not observed altruistic behaviour in aliens so far

Sojourna: Unless they are simply lucky to be so advanced because of environmental factors, etc. Does intellect have anything to do with morality?

Oswy: We haven't met many yet

Marya: mmm, I don't know that it is about imposing their moral standing - rather that they respond instinctively

Elfed: For example, a young chimp is brighter than a baby, and you could argue is worth more than a baby that is disabled and blind and deaf

Oswy: I am going to go on to the next question if that's ok.

Marya: ooh, sticky one Elfed

Oswy: I think we have a difference of opinion about the drama doc Ridley made. ie whether the Aliens built the ship or not. If we assume they did and the Aliens in Independence day did so yes then the issue remains what do we do when faced with another who has a morality that differs from our own. Marya seems to be saying the Aliens are instinctive like big tigers so you can't pass judgement. Evil seems to be saying all morality is relative so you can't make a judgement that a question I would like to come back to. Add something while I set up the next question. Hope your enjoying this, got quite heated then almost started me fire breathing!

Squish: I didn't say morality is relative

Second Philosophy

Marya: Well, as far as we know the Aliens from Aliens did not build anything - the aliens from Independence Day did - so that would be two different species there. I understood us to be talking about the ones from the Alien movies and not the ID ones. Incidentally, I don't think morality is relative or objective ... but perhaps that is best saved for another time

Squish: ID ones?

Marya: Independence Day aliens :)

Oswy: Question 2: We have a complex morality involving deontology, utilitarianism and virtue ethics but aren't these just earth bound theories designed to protect our self interest. Do they extend to aliens? My initial answer is that they are too earth bound and we may need to extend our morality when we meet aliens eg a strict law of non interference to other species. A law that says we may have to sacrifice resources to Aliens etc.

Oswy: Sorry Squish if I misrepresented you but I think the question of moral realism is important

Squish: well no one has claimed that humans are morally superior, nor have I claimed that morality is relative

Sojourna: I'm not even sure how you recognise a moral code unless you spend time with the aliens, as an anthropologist would

Elfed: Oswy, they don't extend to aliens any more than they do to other earth species

Squish: I was simply making the point that if we are to pass value judgments, then we tacitly assume we are morally superior

Marya: yes Soj, and I do agree with Oswy here - our concepts of morality are based on human understanding - we cannot say that we are or are not morally superior to another species in that sense

Oswy: Elfed I know and isn't that their weakness?

Squish: agreed with Marya - we don't pass moral judgments on mice, who habitually eat their first-born babies

Elfed: whose weakness Oswy

Oswy: Hang on folks humans? Surely we all agree that we have moral codes whether they are superior or not. All I am saying is that the codes we have serve the interest of humans too exclusively?

Squish: even though we find infanticide immoral among humans

Marya: ... I think we're sort of all agreeing here :)

Elfed: yup we are Maria

Squish: human moral codes serve the interest of humans...is that what you're asking?

Elfed: of course they do - we have evolved so that they do

Marya: yes indeed

Squish: oh I meant to pose that question to Oswy

Sojourna: But Oswy human moral codes would have to serve humans exclusively

Elfed: But they can be extended to animals Soj

Marya: yes, which is why we cannot really apply it to other species and indeed, why we cannot make moral judgements upon them

Elfed: We could include some animals

Oswy: But my question is if the Aliens arrive and they lets assume are our intellectual equals like the aliens they don't we have o extend the codes to meet their interests and shouldn't we have already done this for other species on earth.

Elfed: Chimps for example

Sojourna: Oh, ok, but only those chimps educated by humans.

Sojourna: Which still makes the moral code human-centred

Squish: Elfed - we can include other animals in our moral system in as far as we have choice in how we treat those animals. But that doesn't entail anything about animal moral systems

Oswy: Some of my best friends are chimps

Sojourna: Dragons and chimps are friends?

Sojourna: I agree Squish

Elfed: true Squish

Second Philosophy

Marya: we probably need to keep in mind that the process of evolution is always in play, and a chimp may be closer to us in how they are developing than say closer to a very different sort of species - but we should still be careful in applying our moral understandings to them and indeed, other species

Oswy: We need to focus on the Aliens they are coming they may be intellectually superior to us they may have their own codes. We can't dominate everyone can we?

Marya: certainly not

Squish: erm...intellectual superior is related to dominance in what sense?

Elfed: Marya - I bet some dinophilosophaur was saying exactly that just a few short million years ago

Oswy: They might have bigger and better guns for a start and we may need to accommodate their interests?

Squish: ironically, I'd think that intellectual superiority might lead the way to moral enhancement

Oswy: He's gone to negotiate with the Aliens ... come back Elfed

Squish: and diminished desire to dominate

Marya: Elfed, if you left click on the alien picture you will be given a note card with the details of this discussion (if you do not have it already)

Elfed: they let me come back

Marya: hehe, most accommodating of them

Squish: Elfed, you didn't get a face-grapper while hanging with the aliens?

Elfed: Thank you Maria

Elfed: No Evi...er I mean Squishy

Squish: lol thank-you

Elfed: They are very accommodating. Maybe they are waiting for their moment to arrive...

Oswy: Let me put the point again we may have to extend our moral code to say we never interfere with other species eg we never hunt them or use them for food or do medical experiments on them or let them have part of the planet to live in peace? These would all be morally good

Marya: indeed, learning our weaknesses n all

Elfed: what about plants?

Marya: what about plants?

Elfed: plants are species too, so to speak

Squish: so are bacteria

Elfed: we are not talking about all life on earth then

Elfed: so where do we draw the line?

Oswy: On line drawing remember our discussion is about aliens and if they arrive they have got to be pretty clever or tenacious. I would say we give respect to all creatures with nervous systems. As for plants we do have a vital interest in food so we have to eat some of them. This is not a recipe for extinction!

Elfed: This is fun. But what about the grapes, and the insects that were on the grapes, and the yeast (is that involved?)

Squish: Hey, hey, plants have nervous systems too!

Elfed: And wind farms - we should protect the birds and bats from hitting against them

Marya: I should think we should respect any newcomers but that would depend on their intentions towards us no doubt - we also have an inclination to survive - I know this is a given

Oswy: We shouldn't kill and eat things unless we have to. So our code might say that we must be vegans?

Squish: Oswy, I think you raised a good point - we need to be respectful of life, but we also need to bear in mind our survival requirements

Elfed: I guess so

Marya: I could not be a vegan - I eat animals - this is part of my physiology and I do not feel immoral about doing it

Second Philosophy

Elfed: What about cannibalism Maria - how do you feel about that?

Marya: I could have something to say about the way animals are treated, but I am an omnivore

Squish: would we condemn bears for eating other animals?

Oswy: But our moral attitudes don't respect others and the arrival of the aliens might force us to do something.

Squish: I think not - why condemn ourselves?

Marya: I think cannibalism would have the same issue as animal flesh; the moral question for me would not lie in the act of eating flesh but rather in how the flesh came to be on ones plate

Oswy: Squish, when you say why condemn ourselves what do you mean?

Elfed: But it is OK to eat animals so why not humans

Sojourna: I think we would condemn bears for eating other animals only if they tortured them without cause prior to eating them

Elfed: The answer Maria is that we are speciesist

Marya: I don't think it is not okay to eat humans - I don't (just as a matter of interest) but I do not see it as immoral

Squish: And I mean that to ask why we should necessarily turn to veganism when we don't think other animals are immoral for eating each other

Elfed: Good point Squish

Marya: indeed Elfed, humans generally are speciesist but this is usually because they have not taken the time to think about things :)

Oswy: But you have admitted that the other animals on this planet are more instinctive than us. You can't teach a wild bear not to eat meat as it would eat you as you attempted it?

Elfed: Well Marya, just ask a farmer what he thinks about wildlife

Squish: Oswy, are you speaking to me? I actually didn't say anything about other animals being "more instinctive". I'm not even sure what that means

Marya: sure - but you need to understand the mindset of the farmer

Elfed: so that's moral relativism Marya

Oswy: You all seem to be admitting that there is little in human morality but self interest? Isn't that a pretty poor show from the humans?

Squish: may be humans are pretty immoral creatures

Marya: no, I am not condoning moral relativism - I am just saying that the mindset of the person involved needs to be taken into consideration

Squish: is that a seriously unacceptable thought?

Elfed: Farmers shoot everything and everyone accepts it, so why do some humans look after injured animals - it's a mystery

Squish: whoa, whoa, farmers shoot things?

Marya: as I said before - I see morality as a purely human concept at this point - one that will adapt as we evolve

Elfed: It just makes no sense at all, for example, to have pets; except for our own amusement

Squish: I'd gladly be a pet if I had a good master who could provide for me, lol

Marya: and not all people will evolve cognitively as quickly as the next :]

Marya: lol Squish

Sojourna: I think humans keep pets for self-interest

Elfed: Very true Marya

Elfed: and Soj

Oswy: The Aliens might decide to keep us as pets there are plenty of sci-fi stories about that. How would you feel about that?

Elfed: <pause for thought> It would be up to them; we could do nothing about it

Marya: I'd be inclined to fight

Elfed: like cats and dogs Marya

Second Philosophy

Sojourna: Yes, were I a pet I wouldn't have much of a choice. But I'd make the most of it.

Elfed: I'd run away

Marya: despite my general dislike of my own species, I would fight for our survival

Marya: or hide yes LOL

Squish: how I feel about being kept as a pet doesn't shed much light on its moral value

Elfed: Fight or fright

Sojourna: Good point, Squish.

Elfed: That's squishily true Squishy

Squish: I would suck up and try to be the favourite, haha

Elfed: So is it right to keep a cat

Marya: Fight, or hide and prepare to fight - if they're smart enough to take over humanity in one fell swoop then perhaps doing some thinking about it would be a good idea :)

Elfed: the cat kills garden birds and mice

Oswy: You would all survive as pets in cages if our present morality allows condones this why not accept it from the aliens? No question of survival involved?

Sojourna: I don't think it is right to keep a cat, unless it is a domesticated cat in which case it would be wrong to throw it out on the streets.

Elfed: but a question of freedom Soj

Marya: this is interesting Elfed

Squish: again, whether or not I like something (e.g. living in a cage) doesn't entail whether it's good or bad

Marya: I keep a cat - she is precious to me, rather like a family member

Sojourna: Elfed, - freedom for the cat you mean?

Elfed: Yes, even pets should have political freedom

Squish: I don't like olives, or people who misuse apostrophes, but that doesn't make these things good or bad

Marya: lol

Squish: lol, "political freedom" - now there's a loaded topic

Elfed: Negative freedom as Berlin called it

Sojourna: even just plain old freedom is a loaded topic

Oswy: Surely the issue of pets involves issue of good and bad. Elfed is right there is an issue of freedom here.

Marya: I think the thing with cats though is slightly different, I mean cats don't tend to hang around if they are not happy

Squish: yes Soj, especially if we're trying to label freedom as good or bad

Marya: Incidentally, my cat found me and stayed - I did not get her from anyone :)

Squish: Oswy, you asked how we would feel about being kept as pets

Squish: that's a separate issue from whether pet-keeping is moral or immoral

Elfed: I suppose we would take the view that a cat that roamed away should be restrained for its own good - so it would have positive freedom

Elfed: we know what is best for it, just like aliens might claim to know what is best for us

Elfed: But they don't any more than we do, in reality

Oswy: Its not if as we are here to debate the Aliens say we will be pets. The serious point I am trying to get at is that when we face the Alien Other we are forced to reconsider our morality.

Squish: lol Elfed - I don't think the aliens care about what is good for us

Elfed: So, release the cats!

Elfed: How do you know Squishy?

Squish: I can't know for sure, Elfed, but why would they need to justify their actions towards us?

Elfed: I have to depart at 20:30...

Squish: and, indeed, why would they bother to care?

Elfed: Well I'm not saying they would

Second Philosophy

Oswy: Yes all of this is about the issue of whether our present morality is too human centred would the arrival of powerful intelligent Aliens make a difference especially if they tried to impose morality on us.

Elfed: I'm saying that if they would, they would be just like us

Marya: shall we go on to the final question Oswy, just before Elfed has to leave?

Oswy: OK but I think we have begun to answer it already not that that matters.

Squish: I don't think aliens could persuade us to adopt their particular moral system. Human morality will probably always be human-centric. I don't see how attack/enslavement would change that

Marya: yep, but just for the sake of clarity :)

Elfed: True - they are a mirror

Elfed: Thank you Soj

Oswy: Question 3 We look at the Aliens of Independence day. Is their behaviour a mirror to our own. My answer is yes. The Id Aliens are rapacious consumers the looters of the galaxy who don't give a damn about anyone. The aliens in Ridley's film are morally much superior to the ID Aliens and to us.

Elfed: We are plundering this planet and as a result we will all die

Marya: I wouldn't say they are an exact mirror but they are perhaps what we might become - potentially

Squish: I would venture that the ID aliens are more intelligent than the Aliens aliens...and much more cognitively advanced

Marya: agreed Squish

Oswy: What about their morality Evil?

Squish: so perhaps we might find their cognitive bases of morality more comparable to our own

Squish: I think they see us as cockroaches and parasites which I might disagree with, but I wouldn't call them immoral for it

Elfed: I agree with Squishy

Marya: I think at some point humanity has to make a conscious decision not to become that way - I think in a small way that is happening now, the response to global warming for example

Oswy: Let me introduce something that has been lurking behind a lot of the debate. There are many philosophers who are moral realists. They say that there are objective moral facts in the universe that we can find and ought to obey. Doesn't this provide us with a yardstick to judge all moralities?

Marya: I would say no, it does not

Squish: only if we have the right knowledge of morality. Moral realism doesn't entail that we know what is right from wrong - only that there is right/wrong, objectively

Elfed: The only objective moral facts surely are those that have evolved to enable us to survive without harming each other so that our chances of survival are good

Marya: yes Elfed - I think this way too. Our sense of what is and is not moral, as someone else said earlier, is only truly applicable to us as humans - this goes not give us any right to judge other moralities outside of the human species

Elfed: Marya is right

Oswy: Well I think some would say it does allow us to distinguish right and wrong. For instance they might say it is a moral absolute never to kill anything without justification. Never to torture a living thing for pleasure. Never to eat anything just for reasons of taste.

Oswy: If you are a moral realist then you reject relativism and emotivism and the rest.

Squish: even if you are a moral realist, you can't be sure that you are aware of true moral values; realism in epistemology works the same way too - you can believe there is a real world, but you can't be sure that you know what it is like

Second Philosophy

Oswy: Well if there is a consensus that's a place to start eg we have codes of moral values and rights in such institutions as the UN when the Aliens arrive we may have to extend these? Surely we all believe that its not all just relative and to do with self interest but that there is some higher moral law (Nothing to do with Religion by the way). Well its past 8-30 and my brain hurts again. I am going to call a halt and then have a think about a summary.

Marya: see Oswy, what I mean when I say I don't think morality is relative, I mean I don't think it is relative as it would apply to us as the human race

Summary

Oswy: Right a summary. I think I need to go away and really think this out. I think everyone felt that your morality could do with some sort of revision. I don't think many were convinced by moral realism as a practical alternative. Actually the issue of moral realism and moral relativism might make a good debate. I don't think I convinced anyone that we needed to radically change our morality to accommodate the Alien Other but then I'm just one small dragon!

