

## Philo Café October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013 – Summary

### Topic for discussion:

*Which is more important - that our actions are good or that our intentions are good (even if the outcome is not)?*



Dear All,

*we began with Carmel's response which is given below (thanks Carmel):*

*The above question immediately leads to another question:*

### ***How do we evaluate our own intentions and the results of our actions?***

*As children we learn to be dishonest about our intentions simply as a matter of survival: "I didn't mean to do it", "I couldn't help it". After a while we begin to believe our own excuses and don't like to admit to ourselves when our intentions are less than noble.*

*A similar dynamic surrounds our reactions to the consequences of our actions. We start learning denial at an early age: "It wasn't my fault", "It was already broken when I lay on it" or "I was just swinging my arm when he got in the way". We then internalise the process to the point where it becomes second nature to turn a blind eye to the impact of our mistakes.*

*It is difficult to be honest with ourselves about our intentions. But how will we ever overcome our ignorance?*

*Ignorance is caused less by a lack of information than by a lack of self-awareness and self-honesty.*

*The most important and the most difficult thing is to be truthful with ourselves.*

*Examining our motives and the results of our actions requires maturity - a mature realisation that self-esteem can't be based on always being right and that there's nothing demeaning or degrading in admitting a mistake. Our human dignity lies in our ability to recognise our mistakes, to resolve not to repeat them and to stick to that resolution.*

*I look forward to hearing from you about our next topic in a few weeks' time. Thank you for your hospitality.*

*Carmel*

*From our discussion the following points came up:*

*We can control our intentions but not always the outcome of our actions  
How do we evaluate our own intentions and the results of our actions?  
We often learn dishonesty as children  
Being truthful with ourselves can be one of the greatest difficulties  
Motive and intention - are they the same thing? The general consensus was NO  
It's better to be hurt unintentionally than less hurt by someone malicious  
Genuine good intention is well being beyond our own self  
Good intentions are not pure if self promoting  
The importance of awareness of the consequences of actions - responsibility consciousness  
Is good intention enough? Does it lead to good actions?  
What is really 'good'? Should this be natural or is contrived 'goodness' ok?  
Bad outcomes can occur despite good intentions - sometimes this is beyond our control  
What goes around comes around - unknown consequences  
Despite strong intentions bad outcomes occur - external influences can corrupt/change the outcome  
Intention should be backed up by action  
Carelessness with regard to intentions - implementation not just thoughts  
Intention - is this instinctive, ingrained social behaviour, moral choice or reasoned thought?  
Relationship between intentions and actions is not always simple  
Sense of worth, convictions are connected with pure intention*

*A lot to think about there, especially on the subject of our true intentions, what is good/bad, other factors that affect the outcome*

*A final sub question I posed was 'If good actions come from a bad person is that ok?' I cited politicians and Bill Gates as possibly bad people who have done good for ulterior motives:  
Politicians - cynical, impure motives  
Do selfish motives spoil a good action?  
How do we judge motivation in others?  
Actions can reveal true intentions  
Intentions sometimes unconscious and become apparent when the body/subconscious acts  
Spontaneous, in the moment actions are more likely to be of pure intent  
Our heart's desire is our true intent - this is beyond reason*

*Overall it was agreed that good intention is very important but defining 'intention' is complicated seems to be entirely subjective.*

*I hope I've covered everything and reasonably accurately (that was my intention ha ha!).*

*Best wishes, Luke*