



01

[1] In 1947, when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, archaeologists set a finder's fee for each new document.

[2] Instead of lots of extra scrolls being found, they were simply torn apart to increase the reward.

[3] Similarly, in China in the nineteenth century, an incentive was offered for finding dinosaur bones.

[4] Farmers located a few on their land, broke them into pieces, and made a lot of money.

[5] Modern incentives are no better:

[6] Company boards promise bonuses for achieved targets.

[7] And what happens?

[8] Managers invest more energy in trying to lower the targets than in growing the business.

[9] People respond to incentives by doing what is in their best interests.

[10] What is noteworthy is, first, how quickly and radically people's behavior changes when incentives come into play, and second, the fact that people respond to the incentives themselves, and not the higher intentions behind them.



02

[1] One of the most curious paintings of the Renaissance is a careful depiction of a weedy patch of ground by Albrecht Durer.

[2] Durer extracts design and harmony from an apparently random collection of weeds and grasses that we would normally not think twice to look at.

[3] By taking such an ordinary thing, he is able to convey his artistry in a pure form.

[4] In a similar way, scientists often choose to study humble subjects when trying to understand the essence of a problem.

[5] Studying relatively simple systems avoids unnecessary complications, and can allow deeper insights to be obtained.

[6] This is particularly true when we are trying to understand something as problematic as our ability to learn.

[7] Human reactions are so complex that they can be difficult to interpret objectively.

[8] It sometimes helps to step back and consider how more modest creatures, like bacteria or weeds, deal with the challenges they face.



03

[1] Favorite websites sometimes greet users like old friends.

[2] Online bookstores welcome their customers by name and suggest new books they might like to read.

[3] Real estate sites tell their visitors about new properties that have come on the market.

[4] These tricks are made possible by cookies, small files that an Internet server stores inside individuals' web browsers so it can remember them.

[5] Therefore, cookies can greatly benefit individuals.

[6] For example, cookies save users the chore of having to enter names and addresses into e-commerce websites every time they make a purchase.

[7] However, concerns have been raised that cookies, which can track what people do online, may be violating privacy by helping companies or government agencies accumulate personal information.

[8] Security is another concern: Cookies make shared computers far less secure and offer hackers many ways to break into systems.



04

[1] Dworkin suggests a classic argument for a certain kind of equality of opportunity.

[2] From Dworkin's view, justice requires that a person's fate be determined by things that are within that person's control, not by luck.

[3] If differences in well-being are determined by circumstances lying outside of an individual's control, they are unjust.

[4] According to this argument, inequality of well-being that is driven by differences in individual choices or tastes is acceptable.

[5] But we should seek to eliminate inequality of well-being that is driven by factors that are not an individual's responsibility and which prevent an individual from achieving what he or she values.

[6] We do so by ensuring equality of opportunity or equality of access to fundamental resources.



05-06

[1] A new study published in Science reveals that people generally approve of driverless, or autonomous, cars programmed to sacrifice their passengers in order to save pedestrians, but these same people are not enthusiastic about riding in such autonomous vehicles (AVs) themselves.

[2] In six online surveys of U.S. residents conducted in 2015, researchers asked participants how they would want their AVs to behave.

[3] The scenarios involved in the surveys varied in the number of pedestrian and passenger lives that could be saved, among other factors.

[4] For example, participants were asked whether it would be more moral for AVs to sacrifice one passenger rather than kill 10 pedestrians.

[5] Survey participants said that AVs should be programmed to be utilitarian and to minimize harm to pedestrians, a position that would put the safety of those outside the vehicle ahead of the driver and passengers' safety.

[6] The same respondents, however, said they prefer to buy cars that protect them and their passengers, especially if family members are involved.



[7] This suggests that if both self-protective and utilitarian AVs were allowed on the market, few people would be willing to ride in the latter – even though they would prefer others to do so.

[8] The inconsistency, which illustrates an ethical tension between the good of the individual and that of the public, persisted across a wide range of survey scenarios analyzed.