

Ethics for the Anthropocene – Response to comments: Dr. Dale Jamieson

This video was recorded at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History on April 26, 2015

Dale Jamieson 00:25 So, first of all, I want to thank everyone for really a fascinating set of comments. And it's ... and I have very little, really, to add in this kind of context, anything to what people said, so let me just say three things that are about equally dogmatic, and evasive, and short. (00:46) So the first is, is that humans are teleological thinkers among other things, and so ... and we actually like to find in our past what we need to do in our future. The extent to which this is a story we tell ourselves because we're teleological thinkers or the extent to which this really looks like we're climbing a ladder. At the end of the day, it doesn't really matter. What I do think is true, and that we have to be careful of, is that we are now failing with respect to some very, very important problems. And whether that means we're failing because we aren't listening to the voices of wisdom in our past, or whether we're failing because we need new voices of wisdom, to some extent, is a little immaterial. So, that's the first thing. (01:42) The second thing is ... and now is the dogmatic thing. Is essentially what Elliot, if I may, was describing was what sometimes gets called the stewardship tradition. The stewardship tradition, I think, is just not enough for the kind of world in which we are now living. In part because it does separate humans from the rest of the world, and it views non-human nature as something distinct that we ought to care for, sort of in the way that a good shepherd takes care of his sheep. Our relationship to the world in the Anthropocene, I think, is qualitatively different from that, but that's a long discussion to have. (02:21) And then the third thing is to bring up something ... is to go back to something that Rick said at the beginning. One of the things that's very recent in human history, that we tend not to appreciate, is actually dealing with anonymous strangers. That through most of human history we did deal with people inside of our community or make deals with where our communities ran up against each other, but one

of the characteristics of the modern world, and even more strongly at the Anthropocene, is somehow we have to cooperate not just with people in our community, or not just across communities, but we have to cooperate with anonymous creatures on the other side of the world about whom we know very little, with respect to shared values and so on. (03:09) And I really do think that that is a challenge that only started to come into the human horizon in the 17th century or so, and it becomes even more challenging for the future. And so I'll just close with a little anecdote because it is in a way hopeful, and in a way not. I'm enough of a historian in a tendency to always think it's amazing that you can actually get on an airplane and you can be there for hours with people you've never met before, often from all parts of the world. And you can be stuck in a little tube under fairly hostage like conditions and then somehow come out at the other end with everyone having their digits intact. (03:50) There is no other hominid species for which that would be the case. Those are grounds for some optimism.

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