**Lesson Theme: Altruism**

**Lesson Audience: Educators**

**Lesson Age Group: Middle School**

**Lesson Medium: Online (Zoom)**

1. **Quick introduction then Zoom chat exercise to get things going**

“Imagine you’re part of a team of scientists teaching a lifelike robot how to be a good person. To help the robot learn what it means to be a good person, your job is to teach them examples of the kinds of things good people do for each other. Your coworkers have already taught the robot that sometimes good people will hold the door for other people, but it looks like you have a lot left to do.”

Questions you might pose to the group:

What can we learn from the example we already have to help us come up with other things to teach the robot? (Or: Do you think the holding the door example is a good example?)

What other things can you come up with?

**Then, follow up** with students who wrote answers in the Zoom chat: Why did you choose the examples that you chose to teach the robot? What is the lesson we can learn from your example? Who are the people in your life who taught you what it means to be a good person? If you have siblings, do you feel like you teach them by example what it means to be a good person? Etc.

1. **The flip side of altruism: self-gratification and selfish interests**

**2. A. Explain to the class that**:

We are training the robot to do things for other people, but the robot isn’t getting anything back in return. Then pose the question, “actually we never decided if the robot can have feelings? Should it?”

**If the answer is no,** then the robot is just doing good things for other people and not getting anything back in return.

**If yes,** then this can lead into a quick discussion of what kinds of feelings the robot (or we) receive when we do good things for other people. Ask students to discuss the types of feelings they experience when they do something nice for someone (perhaps using their own individual examples).

**2. B. Good deeds for ulterior motives**

Introduce the concept that sometimes people do good things for bad reasons. Even though this might not happen in the case of our robot, who we are training to be a good person, sometimes people do good things because they want to get something from the other person.

**Pose the question** to the students, “Can anyone think of an example of this, where someone does something nice but it was really because they wanted the other person to do something for them?”

(**If students are not keen on responding, the instructor can ask for responses in the chat or give an example, contrived or real)**

Illustrate the difference between doing something for someone because it feels good, and doing something for someone because you want to be rewarded for it. **Are you still doing a good thing in the second scenario?**

1. **Computer Simulation Scenario (Competing Conceptions of Altruism)**

Present the class with a scenario:

“Remember the robot training from the beginning of class? Well the robot has been finished, and now you have a new job working on a computer simulation. The simulation is all about counting up happiness. For example, if the robot that we were training baked you a cake for your birthday, we would be able to count up how much happiness that made you feel in points.”

“If a character named Riley holds a door for Casey, Casey gets 3 happiness points because Riley did something nice for him. But Riley feels really good about doing something nice for Casey and gets 4 happiness points.

**Ask,** Is Riley doing a good thing by opening the door for Casey, even though she gets more happiness points than Casey?

**Can wrap up at the end of this discussion with the points:**

1. **In the real world it is very unlikely that people will act like robots and do good things just because we know they are good things.**
2. **The person doing the good thing usually benefits too, even if it’s just by feeling good.**
3. **That might make you feel like the “good thing” they’re doing isn’t as good because in the Riley and Casey example Riley gets more happiness than Casey**
4. **It might also make you feel like Riley is doing a great thing, because if you add up Riley and Casey’s happiness points, it’s more than if Casey was the only one who got happiness points from it.**