



## The 'Blind Bat' Game – Tradition as Way Into Philosophy

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The 'Blind Bat' game belongs to the traditional social games usually played among the children in Croatia. It is one of those games that can make the process of thinking physical. It is also fun for the majority of children who tried to play it. Playing the 'Blind Bat' game, participants are encouraged to move, to use their whole bodies and also to raise awareness of the role of sensory experiences in thinking. The game also facilitates the awareness of the idea that our senses sometimes can be 'wrong' or at least lead us to wrong conclusions (e.g. a 'Blind Bat' participant tries to guess who the person X is after touching his or her hair which happens to be curly, and makes a wrong guess because there are two participants with curly hair and he picked the 'wrong one').

It is worth noticing that 'Blind Bat' game belongs to the type of social games that are nowadays almost extinct, at least in typical Western urban surroundings. In majority of larger cities across Europe children rarely play outside. The today's typical child's non-virtual social contacts that happen outside the family usually happen in 'controlled' (institutionalized) surroundings - i.e. under the supervision of child-care facilitators, schoolteachers etc. The typical traditional 'neighborhood' where children 'freely' played and socialized outside their family houses and buildings is nowadays almost extinct, due to various social changes. Parents have longer work periods. There are 'new' safety issues due to the increased traffic and crime. Children spend more hours at schools and participating in various organized activities. The emergence of the 'virtual social world' and computers brings new challenges. Children spend more time watching TV. As a result, today's child's 'free choice' of friends becomes more limited. As a side effect, child's opportunities to form and practice social skills are also becoming more limited.

In modern urban surroundings children are more and more deprived of the possibility to make 'spontaneous' social contact (e.g. making friendships in their 'free time', socializing outside the classroom or child-care group). Unfortunately, with this deprivation and limitation of child's social surroundings, children are, at very early age, also deprived of the opportunity to develop important

social skills deeply connected with the participation in philosophical activities (e.g. all the skills needed as pre-requisites for the membership in the community of enquiry). Also, children are 'forcibly' focused on visible contents and visual perception. There are cartoons, computer games, and they put emphasis on viewing artificial moving images. There is prevalence of 'finished' colorful plastic toys instead of 'unfinished ones'. This 'artificial' focusing of children on visual content and 'finished' visually attractive items often happens at the cost of neglecting various other human abilities and traits.

Having in mind these social phenomena that affect children's ability to participate in the whole process of education and in dealing with philosophy as well, re-discovery of traditional social games like the 'Blind Bat' game can serve both as the means of learning and practicing neglected or underdeveloped social skills and as an introduction to philosophy. The important terms to be noticed here are 'traditional' and 'social'.

Concerning the term 'social', the 'Blind Bat' game requires at least 3 well-intended, patient, cooperative players; it fosters the virtues of cooperation because (children/players) have to take turns and each has to wait his/her turn. Moreover, it can be argued that the 'Blind Bat' game promotes the development of certain traits often discussed in epistemology as 'epistemic virtues' and 'intellectual virtues'<sup>1</sup>. These traits are (as children grow) important and even crucial for doing philosophy and successfully participating in the 'community of philosophical enquiry'<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Conscientiousness and open-mindedness are the examples cited by 'virtue responsibilists' e.g. Lorraine Code, Christopher Hookway, James Montmarquet, Linda Zagzebski; for the description of confronting views in virtue epistemology see: Greco, John and Turri, John, "Virtue Epistemology", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL=<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/epistemology-virtue/>>.

<sup>2</sup> Community of philosophical enquiry as described by Matthew Lipman; see Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, p. 15.

Concerning the term 'traditional', I believe that 'Blind Bat' game can be used to draw attention the role of tradition and its interpretation. One of the philosophers that I use as starting point here is Hans-Georg Gadamer. According to Gadamer, tradition is the condition of individual's knowledge and an individual can never start from a completely tradition-free place. Tradition is what gives the individual a question or interest to begin with. Nevertheless, successful efforts to bring a tradition to life require changing it and making it relevant to the particular context. Each person is to make a particular tradition his or her one's own by altering it. The task of the active nature of understanding is to acknowledge a tradition and then produce something new.<sup>3</sup>

Due to the 'commercial pressure' on the lives of the majority of urban population in Croatia, children are at risk of losing many different traditions before they get the chance to discover and rethink them, and traits needed for engaging in philosophical enquiry may also be under risk of remaining 'undiscovered'.

Reviving traditional games and making them relevant to the current context thus may serve as valuable introduction into philosophy.

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<sup>3</sup> See: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 3rd ed. (London: Continuum Publishing Group, 1975; UK: Continuum Books, 2004), 303-306

## 'Blind Bat' Game Description

- Preferred number of children: 5-10.
- Age limit: 4+
- One scarf or a fold, preferably black or of any other dark color, is needed for covering the eyes of a 'Blind Bat' player.
- One or two activity facilitators (teachers)

### How to play:

One child uses a scarf to cover her/his eyes. This child is a 'Blind Bat' and stands in the middle of the circle. Other children stand around the child whose eyes are covered, forming a circle around him. A helper (workshop facilitator, teacher or one among the children in a circle) leads the blindfolded child to turn around several times, and then let him/her go.

During this time other children can change their places in the circle, but only in the manner that they move along the circumference of the circle, i.e. along the line of the circle on the 'outer side'. At the moment that 'Blind Bat' is let to find the other players, all the players except the 'Blind Bat' have to stop moving and stand silently. If the game is played outside or in a very large room, the players forming the circle can hold hands and thus make the circle 'closed', in order to prevent the 'Blind Bat' wander too far from other players.

When the 'Blind Bat' (a blindfolded player) is 'let to go', his/her task is to find and gently 'grab' ('catch') one of the players by using the other senses (e.g. hearing, palpation, smell) but not the faculty of sight. When the 'Blind Bat' finds and grabs one of the players, the 'Blind Bat' has to guess who this other player is and tell/say the name of this person.

If the Blind Bat's guess is correct, the scarf/fold is removed and the helper (teacher, or, in case of older children and adults, the player who was recognized by 'Blind Bat') asks the 'Blind Bat' how he/she knew that the player recognized is that particular person. After a short answer (one sentence), the game continues in the manner that this 'recognized' person plays the role of 'Blind Bat'.

If the guess is not correct, guessing continues until the 'Blind Bat' makes a correct guess and recognizes one of other players.

Rotation of 'Blind Bat' player and rotation of other players has the purpose of giving all the players new places inside the circle, i.e. 'Blind Bat' cannot guess who is who just by remembering the places where the players were standing before his/her eyes were covered.

The game should be played in silence, i.e. the players should not talk, whisper, rustle or make loud noises. The first reason for silence is to make the players concentrated as much as possible, and second reason is to make the task of the 'Blind Bat' more interesting, i.e. player has to give more efforts while guessing who is who.

The game ends after all the players have played the role of 'Blind Bat'. If the time is limited, it may be ended after 20 minutes. Modified versions of this game are possible and welcome. Modifications are made depending on age group and place available for session.

After the game, the players are invited to sit in a circle and the discussion follows.

## Questions for discussion:

How can you tell who is who? How did you recognize the particular person? E.g. Mary, John\_\_\_\_\_ (name)

How do you know this is \_(name)\_?

If she would look/smell/touch different, would she still be \_\_(name)\_\_\_\_? What do you think? How?

If you had a different name would you be a different person? If she/he had a different name, would she/he be a different person?

What does being the person that you are consist in?

What a name does (not) tell you about a person?

How did you felt playing this game? Why?



Depending on the age group the facilitator is conducting the workshop with, the answers can be written to the blackboard or at large pieces of paper. Also, the adult participants may be asked to draw mind maps.

Young children may be invited to draw or otherwise express their impressions of the workshop (e.g. using plasticine modeling, clay modeling, gluing paper techniques).



## Philosophical topics and philosophical questions that may be addressed through this activity:

Questions of identity: The question of knowing other people, knowing other persons. How do we know that someone is that particular person? What makes the person X (e.g. John) that person? Raising awareness of the role of senses and role of perception in forming our thoughts and influencing our reactions and patterns of behavior. How can we know something that we do not see? What can we know by touch? What we cannot know and cannot sense by seeing? By touching? Hearing? Smelling? Raising the awareness of certain stereotypes and prejudices: e.g. how can you, being blindfolded, tell is it a boy or a girl if that person has long hair? How can you tell if a person has dark or light skin? Is it important? How can you (without using sight) tell if a person is young or old? Raising awareness of same traits and different traits among people. Discussing the common traits of human beings. For adult and student participants (esp. students of philosophy, participants in introduction to Epistemology courses), the altered version of Blind Bat Play may also be used as the introduction to Molyneux's problem<sup>4</sup>, and introduction to the topics concerning role of perception in general.

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<sup>4</sup> Molyneux's problem is described in John Locke's French extract of *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*, published 1688 in the *Bibliothèque Universelle & Historique*. Locke distinguished between ideas we acquire by means of one sense and those we acquire by means of more than one sense. He maintained that someone who lacks a sense will never be able to acquire the ideas pertaining to it.

## Conclusion

The 'Blind Bat' Game - Tradition as Way Into Philosophy' workshop tries to address the question 'how do you make philosophy accessible to young people?' by using the traditional folk children game as a starting point for philosophical reflection on the issues of personal identity, perception and the role of tradition in shaping individual's beliefs, value system and, consequently, patterns of behavior.

As mentioned above, the 'Blind Bat' game itself belongs to the type of games that can make the process of thinking physical, and a part of a workshop, it aims to illustrate the nowadays often lost and forgotten connection between the between the physical, mental and emotional aspects of the human personality. It also tries to re-awaken these capacities in children and generally young people.

Encouraging active participation and promoting the value that the contribution of each individual gives to the joint pursuit of knowledge, the whole workshop also aims to draw the attention of participants to the role that 'epistemic virtues' and 'intellectual virtues' have both in creating the communities of philosophical inquiry and in developing and promoting the traits and skills that are crucial prerequisites for successful participation of the individual in the wider community and society in general.

## Laura's CV (short version)

Laura Blažetić Faller, originally Blažetić, born 1974 in Zagreb, Croatia, attended high school in Zagreb; M.A. in Philosophy and Sociology at University of Zagreb, Croatian Studies - Studia Croatica. Currently PhD student of Philosophy at University of Zagreb. Worked as high school teacher for Ethics, Psychology and Sociology at 'Gimnazija Benedikta Kotruljevića' in Zagreb, participated in Civic Education projects. Worked as teaching assistant for Epistemology and Academic Writing Project, at Croatian Studies, Department of Philosophy. From 2002 employed at Institute of Philosophy in Zagreb as a research assistant, currently on the project directed by Prof. Dr. Marie-Elise Zovko. Member of Project Stohrenscole. Member of Plato Society Zagreb, served as Secretary of Plato Society until 2010. Married, mother of two children. Areas of interest: Philosophy for Children, Ancient Greek philosophy, Plato and philosophy of Platonism, Epistemology, Philosophy of Mind, Ethics, Social Sciences, Education.