



The Philosophy
Foundation
THINKING CHANGES

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

STIMULUS

There was a young man called Jerry, who lived with his mother. One day he decided it was time to move out and get a house of his own. He found a small piece of land to build his house on and ordered 500 bricks, which were delivered to that spot.

The next morning Jerry went there with the builders but all the bricks were gone. They had been moved to the garden of another house about 100m down the road. Jerry was sure they were the same bricks because he counted them - 500 - and they still had some of the plastic packaging attached. He went home and told his mum.

His mum told him to steal the bricks back. So that's what he did. With the help of the builders he carried all the bricks back to his own land and the builders got to work putting up the walls of the new house.

Just as they were finishing that job, the man who had stolen the bricks, whose name was Marcus, arrived.

'You stole my bricks,' fumed Marcus.

'You stole them from me!' replied Jerry.

'How do you know those were yours?' challenged Marcus.

'How do you know these are yours?' sneered Jerry.

Marcus couldn't think of any answer to that - except one. He bunched up his fist and punched Jerry in the face.

That evening, Jerry went back to his Mum and told her what had happened. He had a black eye.

'You need to go and find him and hit him back', was her answer. Jerry wasn't so sure.

'Listen' she warned sternly, 'We say 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'. That means whatever he does has to be returned to him. He takes your bricks, you take them right back. He gives you a black eye, you need to give him one back - the same he did to you, no more, no less.'

So Jerry waited for Marcus to come out of his house the next day and surprised him with a punch in the eye. Then he ran off. Later that day he saw that Marcus had a black eye, just like his own.

Then he went back to building his house. He watched the builders put the roof on and finish painting the walls, windows and doors. When it was done, he went back to get his Mum, so she could come and see. By the time he had walked over to his old home, and she'd got ready to go, and they'd walked together back to his new home, it was starting to get dark. And when he got there he couldn't believe his eyes.

His brand new house was in ruins. The roof and walls had all been smashed in. The ground was covered with broken bricks and tiles. Jerry howled with rage. Just then, he saw Marcus in the distance, carrying a sledgehammer.

Jerry ran after Marcus. When Marcus saw Jerry chasing, he dropped the sledgehammer and ran. Jerry stopped to pick it up. It had brick dust on it from where Marcus had been smashing up his newly built house.

'You know what you have to do,' his mother said. 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a house for a house.'

Jerry carried the sledgehammer over to Marcus's house and rang the bell. There was no answer. 'Good,' thought Marcus, 'He's too scared to come home. So I won't be disturbed.'

With a couple of big swings of the sledgehammer, the whole of Marcus's roof came crashing down. Then Jerry smashed in the walls until there was just a huge heap of rubble. He stood and looked at what he had done. It made him a bit sad to see all that destruction. But now all his anger was gone. And it was only fair that Marcus got what he deserved.



Task Questions

- ✓ Is it fair that Marcus's house was knocked down?

- ✔ Was it right of Jerry to knock Marcus's house down?
- ✔ Where should Jerry have stopped - before the bricks? After the bricks? The black eye? The house? Never?
- ✔ If you were a judge what punishment would you give Marcus and Jerry? What about Jerry's Mum?

POSSIBLE EXTENSION

- ✔ ... It turns out that Marcus wasn't out. He was hiding in the house and didn't answer the door. He was crushed by the falling roof and died.

This changes the discussion completely because it brings in the idea of unintended consequences (this is recognised in law: Jerry would be convicted of manslaughter not murder if it was clear that he didn't know Marcus was there). It doesn't prove that Jerry was wrong or right in his intentions. So someone could logically argue that it was still right for Jerry to knock Marcus's house down but that he should have made sure Marcus wasn't in it.