

## Philosophy Session 4 – Report.

April 12 – 2022

*Philosophy is not just a subject to be learned, it is a condition to be lived.*

**It was a pleasure to welcome Nola to our group** and her active participation added much to our discussion.

In line with having few restrictions on topics the session opened with thoughts about current affairs, including the process by which a person can come into power and then abuse his position to the detriment of others – how do we allow this to occur? How do we live with it?

One explanation, applicable to dictatorships, is that the leader, knowing his position is insecure, keeps underlings under control by fear, occasionally using force externally and ruthlessly, with its implied threat that he can and will use it against them, if he feels so inclined, in order to retain power.

**Events outside of our control** [eg - covid, world events] can have varied effects on individuals. Some use denial in order to avoid negative influences; others may involve themselves in activities which give sufficient positives to counterbalance; some are overwhelmed.

We briefly touched on personal views of life's purpose – a subject that will frequently resurface.

**The concepts of reality and illusion occupied more time.** Discussion embraced the following:-

Our various senses together cooperate to provide an impression of the world outside in a way that supports our ability (and that of our species) to survive in that world. However, the philosopher Descartes [1596-1650] said that because the senses sometimes deceive us we have reason not to trust them.

The scientific view of our perceptions supports this. Our conscious understanding of the world is, in fact, an internal construction of our brains. It paints our world with colour and sound and solidity – all characteristics that the world outside does not have. It is all an illusion.

If you accept this [but you are not obliged to] the question arises whether or not it matters if something is an illusion. There are illusions we deliberately choose to use for the benefits they provide. Placebos are used in testing the effectiveness of medicines; flight-simulators are used to train airline pilots; virtual reality devices are being used with benefit in entertainment and commercial areas; and if our conscious representation of the world is an illusion, the illusion has proven effective (so far) in saving our species from extinction.

[Convener's note: Not all modern philosophers agree with the above and argue that somehow or other we do know the real world directly. One such is William A. Sinclair, one-time lecturer in Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh. I have a copy of his book 'An Introduction to Philosophy' in which he first explains then disputes Descartes' view - this book can be purchased on the internet, or read there in its entirety by Googling 'An Introduction to Philosophy – Internet Archive']

The session closed after brief considerations of the standards by which we judge others, and the problem of control of content in social media.

**NEXT: Session 5 date is Tuesday, April 26.**

Convener: Keith Ashfold.