

## **Session 5 Report – April 26, 2022.**

**Philosophy Session 5 was characterised by free flowing discussion on Ethics** and how we may judge what is right from what is wrong. In general terms we could define unethical practices as those which, to obtain personal or other gains, are deliberately used to take advantage of people vulnerable to deception or coercion.

### **Some practices identified in discussion:**

- Lottery systems advertised as improving the purchasers' chances of winning.
- Managers using their authority to the disadvantage of those under them.
- 'Pyramid'-type 'get-rich-quick' financial schemes.
- High-fee courses for self-improvement, stockmarket trading, and similar.
- Business franchises that falsely expand by overstating potential profits.
- 'Buy-One, Get One Free', product sales-pitches.
- Planned obsolescence.

### **Not all is black & white though:**

**Games of chance** stacked against the player may be judged ethical if promoted as 'entertainment' and if they do, in fact, give fair entertainment value to the player. The same games may be judged unethical if their promotion focuses on winnings without revealing the adverse odds.

**Religions** differ in what is right and wrong for the faithful, but these may change. In ages past, for a Catholic to believe the earth was not the centre of God's universe was a heresy punishable by torture and death.

**Personal beliefs** also colour 'ethics' and can be controversial – examples:-  
Battery hens versus free-range – which eggs should we buy? Which ones should shops stock?  
Should parents force a particular religious belief on their children?  
Abortion – euthanasia – the death penalty – mandated medical treatments – segregation.  
Charities with excessive administration charges seeking donations.  
The killing of whales for scientific research.  
The use of animals in medical research and in testing beauty products.

**Ethical standards** have varied over the ages, they differ among cultures, and personal circumstances can be a factor. We generally use our own perceptions of right and wrong when judging the actions of others.

**Plato & Descartes:** These philosophers were only briefly touched on during this session and will be discussed in more detail in another.

**What do words mean?** Some words sound similar to others and can wrongly be interpreted as having much the same meaning. The term 'apologist', for example, can be confused with someone who is expressing regret. However, an apologist is not saying 'sorry' but is defending by argument a position on some subject. A Christian apologist, by this definition, is a person using argument to support a Christian belief – perhaps the biblical story of creation, or why God can permit pain and evil to exist in the world He himself created.

As with all arguments, they have weight depending upon the validity of their underlying assumptions and the logic [or lack of] used in building up to the conclusion. The conclusion's acceptance or rejection by another person will, in turn, be influenced by that person's own beliefs, his capacity to understand the argument, any countering argument he can provide, and the characteristic which people share of being resistant to changing their views.

**A book you may borrow** from the U3A collection is apologist Neil Pinter's 'Does God Exist?' Google to find more information about it. Study the book yourself. Does it live up to its claim of providing 'New, powerful, scientific, historical, and mathematical evidence, so easy that a child can understand it', and gives 'evidence so strong, so powerful' that proves the existence of God? You be the judge.

Again, to labour a point, books on specific aspects and the internet have much more in-depth information on philosophical subjects than our sessions can encompass. Make good use of them.

### **Convener's note:**

Having started this session's discussion on Ethics with selections taken from the Bible it is worthwhile here to comment on problems encountered in communicating ideas to others. My examples could have been taken in several ways, so what was I trying to convey? What was my motive? Was I making a philosophical statement, or being flippant and disrespectful of the Bible's message, or something else?

Well, that is something for you to decide, not for me to admit.

### **Some points to consider:-**

How you interpret incoming information depends both on the communication skills of the source and on your receptive capabilities. These never match perfectly and at times the gap is great.

You will experience objective and subjective responses. The emotive [subjective] content should be recognised and provides opportunity for self-examination of the reasons why.

Work to develop your skills in objective criticism. Due account should be taken of the times, the culture, and other factors relevant to incoming information. Opinion is often presented as fact and content may be selectively biased to favour that opinion.

By subjecting beliefs to objective criticism a fuller understanding is gained of their underlying assumptions, against which you may test other beliefs and, if you are so persuaded, even modify your own.

In the final analysis, whatever beliefs you adopt will be YOUR truths and reality, having no less validity than the differing beliefs others may have. It is your life – live it your way..

**Session 6 date is Tuesday, May 10. Pre-notes will be sent out later this week.**

Keith Ashfold – Convener.

