

Session 12 – Report – August 23, 2022.

Rather than review and build on the ideas of the ancients covered in prior sessions we used today's time to look at philosophical aspects which have relevance to our concerns in today's world.

The need for critical judgement:

Information comes to us in many ways – through our interpretation of what we experience and observe; through what we read and hear; from religious and educational instruction; from advertisements and news presentations; from those with whom we have dealings; and so on. But how do we judge the quality and validity of such information so we are best able to use it to personal advantage, or to avoid being disadvantaged?

In philosophy, as in life, many views are encountered, often contradictory in varying degrees, and supported perhaps by arguments which at first can seem plausible and convincing but may be flawed. A way of dealing with this situation is to apply the filters of objective and subjective criticism.

Objective criticisms seek to determine whether supportive arguments for a viewpoint are based on firm foundations and whether conclusions therefrom are logically sound. Many product advertisements contain a degree of deception or trickery – such as the ‘buy one get one free’ types where you are really being channelled into buying two items [jolly good for the seller] when otherwise you would have been content with buying the one only that you need at just half the monetary outlay.

Subjective criticisms are based on your own views and objectives – a car advertisement, for example, may be accepted or rejected by you on how well the vehicle fits your personal needs and pocket.

Our session delved into just how critical we ourselves were of incoming information, and into its quality. Among the responses were:-

To completely ignore news and current-affairs programs, and other information sources which were a threat to one's comfort zone.

To be wary of information content to the extent of analysing all the facts involved.

To avoid undue reliance on the authoritative standing of the information source.

To be ‘very critical, of everything.

Behind all of our criticisms though are our own beliefs and prejudices and because these initially come from outside sources [parents, teachers, culture, laws] there is obviously a need to self-criticise first so the objectivity and subjectivity of our criticisms are understood and duly allowed for.

Right & Wrong:

The question of where the concept of right and wrong originates is a fruitful area for philosophical discussion. The Old Testament of the Bible leaves no doubt – the Ten Commandments say it all – but where have all the rest of the do's and don'ts come from? And why are the do's in some cultures the don'ts in others?

We will return to this topic in a later session – for the moment though we looked at rights and wrongs in parenting – where it is not uncommon for lies to be told when confronted by embarrassing questions or a need to change or moderate unacceptable behaviour.

Right and Wrong and Parenting Responsibility:

Rightness and wrongness are very rubbery concepts and depend upon a balance between numerous active forces, the which often vary as circumstances change.

The responsibility of parents to their children was discussed with focus on the early years of childhood when ideas are freely and uncritically accepted, a danger seen being that some ideas that should later be questioned will survive unchallenged and become set in adulthood.

It was agreed that parents' first responsibilities included the physical and mental wellbeing of offspring, their education, and their integration into the laws and culture of the community. But there is also a need to foster at appropriate stages of development in the growing child the ability to think clearly and to question all they have been asked to accept. Unfortunately this aspect is often neglected, and in regard to religious beliefs often deliberately so.

Keith Ashfold – Convenor

