

Notes from the Radlett and District U3A Philosophy Group Meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016

Subject: - The Cosmological proof of the existence of God.

Using "The Philosopher's Book of Questions and Answers" by D E Wittkower page 30.

Previously we had been asked to think about the following questions:-

1. *Why is there something (i.e. the Universe) rather than nothing?*
2. *Things are happening right now, caused by things that just happened just before the things happening now. And those things must have been caused by something before them, and so on. Doesn't there have to be some kind of first cause, that isn't itself caused? Or is it possible that there is no beginning?*
3. *If there is a first cause, mustn't it have its own will and ability to choose? If not, wouldn't it have been caused by something else to start everything into motion? But is that the case, then we have not reached the first cause yet, have we?*

Whilst considering the subject we asked: - Why is the universe here? Has the universe been here for ever? What started it? Where did the matter come from? If the universe is expanding, where is it expanding to? Some said "The only sensible answer is that God did it" others asked "Did He?" We didn't have any answers to these questions and concluded that we don't understand it at the moment. We are told that time started at the big bang. The guiding force is the laws of physics. If the numbers in the laws were slightly different, things would not exist as they are. There are apparently multiverses have different numbers and are not stable and we are told that there are 28 dimensions in maths. Scientists work at the limits that machines can detect, so they need to take care when announcing results. There is a limit to our ability to comprehend what is going on around us and 98% of the universe is undetectable to us. We agreed that it is arrogant to think that evolution stopped with humans.

On a more philosophical note we considered whether the universe actually exists, as discussed by philosophers such as Descartes and Hawking. Perhaps what we perceive as life is a dream and real life starts after death. How do we know anything is true? We also realised that it is a sign of our affluence that we have time to consider these questions.

When discussing the existence of God, it was suggested that God is just an explanation for something that we don't have control over or understand? Way back in the past we needed a higher power, as a child needs a teddy. Before world travel people had local gods. There seems to be something in human nature that needs God and if there was not a God, it has been suggested that we would need to invent one. It was noted that some ancient civilisations had a philosophy rather than a religion, such as the Chinese Taoists. The question of why God would allow wars, evil etc. was raised, with some suggesting that it is because we have free will. If we had no choice we would be robots, not human beings. Others suggested that we are being tested and God will make it right in the end. It was noted that we cherry pick what we attribute to God in the way of rescues or disasters. As some high scientists are religious, it appears that science and religion are not always incompatible.

Whilst considering the nature of God, if God does exist, some thought that God is our conscience. That we have God within us... and a little bit of the devil too. Some thought that we have a soul that is separate from our body. Others suggested that the only afterlife is the memories we leave behind.

Some had had experiences that are completely inexplicable. We questioned whether God a spirit, male or myth.

It was suggested that we all turn to God in times of extreme difficulty, but one participant, who had previously said that she did not believe in God, said that she had never been in such a situation "Thank God". This seemed to sum up the way that we have all been influenced by both our cultural backgrounds and scientific thought.

Various books were suggested as ways of exploring the subject further: -

The Celestine Prophecy is a 1993 novel by James Redfield that discusses various psychological and spiritual ideas rooted in multiple ancient Eastern Traditions and New Age spirituality

Conversations with God is a sequence of books written by Neale Donald Walsch. It was written as a dialogue in which Walsch asks questions and God answers.

The Tao of Pooh is a book written by Benjamin Hoff. The book is intended as an introduction to the Eastern belief system of Taoism for Westerners. It allegorically employs the fictional characters of A. A. Milne

Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu, is the classic Taoist text (A good English translation of Tao Te Ching is by R. L. Wing)