

Notes from the Radlett and District U3A Philosophy Group Meeting held on 21st April 2016

Subject: - Property and Property Rights, Using “The Philosopher’s Book of Questions and Answers” by D E Wittkower page 91.

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

If profit-driven competition does not always result in the greatest good for society, is there another justification for a company taking profits? Don't we have a right to profit from our efforts? If so, why? Even if it seems obvious, try to explain it.

What are the limits to our property rights? Is it acceptable, as in eminent domain laws, to force people to sell their homes at fair prices if the land is needed for social utility, like building a new airport? What about for economic prosperity, like building a new factory or sports stadium?

If we have a right to our money and property, then taxes require moral justification. If you thought it was okay to force the sale of property for an airport, does that also justify taxes for social utilities? What about taxes that are meant to support businesses-like shifting the tax burden away from corporations and investors through incentives and lowered tax rates, and relying more on the revenue sources like income and sales taxed?

Thoughts on work, profit and wealth

People who produce goods are entitled to payment
Capitalism encourages entrepreneurs
Communism, in its purist form, doesn't work due to human nature
Kibbutz should be the perfect example but don't always work
Behind every fortune there is a dirty deed – Voltaire or Honoré de Balzac
Without wealth we couldn't own houses and other property
The very rich have power in deciding how money is spent with no mandate

Thoughts on ownership of land and food

Who owns the land and the resources it contains?
Wars are about power and land gives power
Some cultures believe that you can't own land
When land was enclosed, food was owned and others unable to choose a lifestyle
There are too many people in the world for all to have enough
Should there be an upper age limit for humans?
Before enclosure, food controlled population size
Colonists exterminated many native populations
The Gaia hypothesis - Earth has a consciousness and will make the environment suitable for life

Thoughts on tax

Property tax would be fair if used to build more homes
Mansion tax is wrong when the house was bought many years ago and has been family home
Compulsory purchase compensation isn't enough to purchase of a similar property
The top 1% of the population are extremely rich and do not pay their share of taxes

Thoughts on world problems

Many current world problems started with our desire for oil
Some third world countries spend money on rockets rather than food and water
To stop corruption we need to lead by example

Thoughts on rights

To what extent is happiness linked to acquisition?

It is everyone's right to do what they want with their money

Married women could not own land in England until the late 19th century

Everyone should have the right to choose, but the very poor just survive from day to day

Many people choose a simple life

Thoughts on inheritance

It's a part of human nature to want to pass something on to your children

We have property to further our own tribe

Christopher Langdon recommended the following organisation: -

Philosophy for All

An organisation open to everyone interested in philosophy. They provide lectures, walks and a film club. Join for £15 at <http://pfalondon.org/what.html>

Kants Cave

On the first Wednesday of every month Philosophy for All meets at Kant's Cave for a lecture, debate and social evening. This takes place in the upstairs function room of the Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, London NW1 1HB. Next lecture Wednesday 6th July Marthe Kerkwijk What makes a translation? An argument against the incommensurability thesis.

Philosophical Walks

This is the idea behind our "philosophical walks". They aren't ambulatory lectures or structured discussions, simply walks during which philosophical discussion can take place due to the common interest of the walkers. Next walks are Saturday 18th June Bentley to Farnham 8½miles and Saturday 2nd July Goring Circular 9 miles.

Film Club

Meetings are held every third Wednesday of the month at the Two Chairmen, 39 Dartmouth Street, SW1H 9BP, at 7 pm. Nearest tube stations are St James Park (3 mins) and Westminster (8 mins) There is no charge, as the landlady of the Two Chairman kindly allows us to have the room for free, but we would ask that you buy at least one drink. Next films Wednesday 15th June "The Seventh Seal" Ingmar Bergman, 1957. Wednesday 20th July "Her" Spike Jonze, 2013