

Notes from the Philosophy Group Meeting 15th January 2015

Topic – What is Justice?

Thoughts on Justice

Justice should mean fairness

Justice is about morals, fairness and balance

Morality comes from beliefs and values

Justice is in the eye of the beholder

It is easier to define injustice than justice

There is no such thing as justice. Someone just makes a decision about right and wrong.

We instinctively know what is right, but how do we know, how do we come to decide?

The dictionary defines justice as behaviour that is morally right.

There is such a thing as natural justice.

Justice and the Law

Justice and the law are not the same thing - Man makes laws

Law is about showmanship

Old concept was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (Ghandi - end up blind and unable to eat)

The 10 commandments formed the basis for some civilisations

Lao Tzu wrote ideas similar to the 10 commandments in Tao de Ching 4th century BCE

Treat others as you would be treated

If judges were heavy handed with penalties, it might act as a deterrent - That would not be Justice.

The punishment should fit the crime.

In family court, who is justice for, the child, the parent, others?

The original purpose of laws was justice, but we are too selfish or weak.

The law is meant to be unambiguous.

Many say the decisions made in the law are not justice.

The original law may be just; it is the way it is enacted that may be unjust.

We are reminded of the need for balance by the scales on the statue of Justice over the courts.

Justice and Society

Humans have been living in society for about 400,000 years

Civilised man realised co-operation is better than fighting, but there are throwbacks.

Rawls' ideas about justice were for the whole of society - That is called Utopia

Margaret Thatcher was influenced by Rawls

An unstable society leads to revolution

Injustice causes problems in the workplace

Administrators waste money, because it is not their money

The rich have power and power will always corrupt.

Widows of miners killed in mining accidents were evicted from their tied homes. That was not just.

The recent terrorist attacks in France remind us that French Society is not necessarily fair.

If we go back to the basis of democracy we see that the West's capitalism has socialist undertones.

In capitalism things, such as the NHS are not always equal

In Russian communism there was not equality - the elite had their own shops etc.

People condemn Stalin but he took Russia to modern times through an industrial revolution

Can a dictator provide justice?

Rawls said discontent comes out of unequal opportunities

There should be equal opportunity – We are born differently, so it won't be achieved

Women are still paid less than men for equal work – this started in war time

Local councils employed disabled people until unions demanded equality, then there was no point

Creating a Just Society

The only mechanism for change is education

Jesuits said "Give me the child for his first seven years, and I'll give you the man"

If you teach a man to read, he may get a job. If you teach a woman, the whole family benefits

The Israeli kibbutz seemed to offer a fair society, but there are still rich and poor.

Sweden uses taxes as a social leveller and has freedom of information, but has highest suicide rate

Communities can agree to work together despite different beliefs and value systems

Switzerland used to be warring factions now, by majority agreement, things have changed

Britain is a reasonably fair society

English law is based on the principal that it is better to let the guilty go free than hang the innocent

Ghandi said "You must be the change you want to see in the world"

Philosophers thoughts on Justice

Thrasymachus defines justice as "the interest of the stronger".

Socrates thought Justice implies superior character and intelligence while injustice means deficiency in both respects.

Plato contends that justice is the right condition of the human soul by the very nature of man.

Rawls (American philosopher 1921 – 2002) – He analyzed justice in terms of maximum equal liberty regarding basic rights and duties for all members of society, with socio-economic inequalities requiring moral justification in terms of equal opportunity and beneficial results for all.

Conclusions

As usual we found no answers, only more questions. We found that justice can be considered as a process of law in society, or as a natural fairness that is inbuilt in humans. Both are flawed however by human weakness, greed and selfishness. It takes the "wisdom of Solomon" to find a justice that is fair to all. Education may be the part of the answer, but if society is to change, we must also change as individuals. Justice, like beauty will always remain in the eye of the beholder.