

## ARCHIVE OF PHILOSOPHY GROUP PAGE

We cover the Ancient Greeks to Modern Day Philosophers.

“ The old are in an ideal position to open their minds to new ideas” Epicurus 306BC

Patti McColl will be leading our next Philosophy session on Monday 9th March at 10am in the CCC. The subject is Cosmopolitanism

Here is a definition of the concept "Cosmopolitanism"

"Cosmopolitans see themselves as citizens of the world, as members of a global community of human beings, with robust responsibilities to others in the global community.

Cosmopolitans believe that all individual human beings have equal moral worth and that the strength of our moral obligations to others is not importantly diminished by national borders"

Introduction to the session by Patti McColl

Diogenes in his barrel is reputed to have given us the term ‘citizen of the world’.

Although his use of it may have been more a rejection of the then primacy of the city state and its conventions as a source of identity, than a positive orientation towards a wider community, the idea continued to exercise minds.

A more clearly positive philosophical commitment to cosmopolitanism emerges with the Stoics and the idea of ‘two cities’ - Rome, and the community of rational beings.

The early Christians transmuted this into the ‘city of God’ and the realm of earthly things, as sources of separate obligation, so that the debate becomes one between secular and religious, rather than local or cosmos-wide.

A more secular interpretation re-emerges with the thinking of Enlightenment writers, influenced by a historical context of, among other factors, voyages of exploration, a renewed interest in Hellenistic philosophy, the idea of human rights and a focus once again on human reason.

Contemporary debates sub-divide into consideration of arguments for/against cultural, political, or moral cosmopolitanism.

Although at some point there is an inevitable overlap, particularly between the political and the moral, I have chosen to focus on the latter.

A core idea here is that norms of justice are not restricted to subsets of the global population but (should) govern relations of all human beings to each other.

Much contemporary philosophical writing on cosmopolitanism focuses on the duty we in the affluent Western world have to help foreigners who are starving or otherwise suffering.

In the strong version of cosmopolitanism, this responsibility is not outweighed by any duty to help our local community or compatriots. The moderate version, while acknowledging the duty to provide aid, accepts that we also have special duties towards compatriots. The strong version seems to deny the strength of what our everyday moral sense tells us is important, namely close personal relationships and membership of significant groups, from the level of our country to a local church or political group. Even with the moderate position, the balance to be struck is not straightforward. I will use an article by Peter Singer, an uncompromising utilitarian, as a springboard. The article is ‘Famine, Affluence and Morality’, published in the journal *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol 1, No 3 Spring 1972, although I’m not sure if it’s openly available online

There is an article by Kevin Toolis in *The Guardian* of 6th November 1999, called ‘The most dangerous man in the world’. (Just to whet your appetites.) Much of the article focuses on Singer’s highly controversial views on euthanasia but there is also some discussion of the article on famine relief.

In addition, the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* has comprehensive entries on Cosmopolitanism, and Justice and its derivatives (Distributive Justice, International Distributive Justice and Global Justice).

Other contemporary writers are Kwame Anthony Appiah who gave the Reith Lectures in 2016 – I think his angle is more on cultural aspects – and Martha Nussbaum. Nussbaum published a book last year called ‘The Cosmopolitan Tradition’. The Harvard University Press page for the book has links to an interview with her, and two extracts from her book.

## Aristotle and Virtue Ethics

At our next meeting we will focus on Aristotle and Virtue Ethics. Gill White and I will be giving the presentation.

So far we have considered Deontological and Consequentialist theories which emphasise the duties and rules governing our intended actions as well as their consequences and the rightness and wrongness of these actions

Both of these theories are action centred systems of ethics and have had a huge influence on moral thinking over the last 200 years.

However in 1958, Aristotle’s Nichomachian Ethics, which was written circa 350 BC and which dominated the western world for over 2000 years, made a comeback in a revised version of Virtue Ethics.

This theory has at its heart the moral character of the individual and challenges the supremacy of the action centred ethical theories.

The central questions of Virtue Theory are:

- What is the good life for me as a human being?
- What kind of person should I want to become ?
- How do I achieve both of these goals ?

Virtue Theory looks at the particular actions of the individual, character traits rather than duties and the flourishing of the individual over a lifetime.

“ A person is the choices they have made. That’s our identity, the qualities we have nurtured in ourselves”

Aristotle is one of the greatest intellects in history and arguably the greatest philosopher, a master of ethics, logic, physics, maths, poetry and a whole range of scientific disciplines.

He thought that everything in nature has a telos, a purpose, an aim, a direction.

He writes of a goodness in the world which he sees as happiness. This is the ultimate aim of all human activity. This quest for happiness dominates our lives.

Being virtuous means doing the right things at the right time with the right feelings in the right way and for the right reason.

Aristotle’s ideas of morality are still very much how we think about moral goodness and human happiness.

We can consider the relevance of these “character” theories in the 21st Century, if there is any? Along with the altruism and ego debate.

Again there is a lot of useful and interesting material on the Internet.

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At our Philosophy Group on the 13th January, we will be continuing with our study of various moral philosophies, focussing on the writings of Epicurus and those of Cicero.

During the Hellenistic era, two main schools of Philosophy emerged, Hedonism, which greatly influenced the development of Epicureanism, and Stoicism.

At the core of these new philosophies was personal ethics and for the first time in the history of Western Philosophy the individual became the central focus.

This signified a shift away from the Metaphysics of Plato and the Political Ethics of Aristotle. People turned away from politics and began to look inward asking questions not about me as a good virtuous citizen but me as an individual.

Carol Jackson, Pat O'Connor and Jean Garrett will be giving the presentation, the inspiration of which comes from a recently published book, Travels with Epicurus.

Daniel Klein, a 73 yr old writer goes to the Greek island of Hydra to contemplate the ideas and writings of Epicurus and other philosophers both ancient and modern with the aim of gaining a deeper insight and some guidance on the best way to live his life during the stage of old age before reaching "old, old age"

He ponders on the "forever young" culture of our modern world, a movement in which the human race is presently consumed and explores an apt Epicurean quote

" Nothing is enough for the man to whom enough is too little"

Sitting on the terrace of a Greek taverna surrounded by Philosophy books, gazing out at the blue sea and watching the old people walking slowly up the steep mountain paths, Klein finds this the perfect setting to ponder the purpose of life.

Epicurus wrote that the primary purpose of Philosophy is to think about the world and how we live in it.

He thought that Philosophy should be practical and change the way we live.

He had a materialistic view of the universe. He thought that what mattered was what we could experience with our senses. He didn't believe in an afterlife so all of our choices should be directed at achieving happiness on earth.

"We tend to fight against old age instead of enjoying it. It is important to be fully conscious and rational, using the time we have left in the best and most appropriate way. Our goal in life should be peace of mind and serenity" Epicurus

Plato, Cicero, Michel de Montaigne, Bertrand Russell and many more Philosophers have written essays on old age and the importance of friendship.

There is an abundance of reading material on the Internet. It's helpful if you could prepare a little beforehand.

Looking forward to seeing you on the 13th January

#A book recommendations from Pat Grainger:#

" I have just finished reading a book by Daniel Klein, "Travels with Epicurus ", Meditations from a Greek island on the Pleasures of Old Age, recommended by one of our Group members. It is an interesting and insightful book, a gentle and relaxing read which contemplates and aims to establish a Philosophy of Old Age whilst describing what the great Philosophers have to say about how to live a valuable and gratifying life.

Later in the year or early next year we could possibly put a couple of sessions aside to go through some of the book's ideas and reflections.

We can have a chat about it after our next Philosophy Group meeting.

I do think we can very easily fill our time with being busy and rushing from one place to the next but that may just result in us avoiding the real pleasures of old age and losing our capacity for fun. Whilst we are still rational and conscious this is the time when we can calmly reflect and appreciate where we are now, sitting with friends, sharing time unhurriedly.

Hydra does seem the perfect place to sit and gaze dreamily out to sea but I think other places can fit the bill ! "

{2019 programme}

Learn about the great ideas of the early Greek Philosophers from 2500 years ago right through to the present time and how they are so relevant to what is happening in today's world. We gain a different perspective, a fresh approach to the issues facing us on a global scale.

All you need is an open, non-judgmental and inquisitive mind and be prepared to read up on the subject areas prior to the Group sessions.

The group starts at 10am on the 2nd Monday of each month in the Community Care Centre. Join us for lively debates on topical issues

The suggested programme for the rest of 2019 focuses on Ethical Theories and Moral Philosophy.

Members may find this link to the Third Age Trust Subject Resource Materials section of interest:  
|Third Age Trust|

#June#

Liz Jenkins will be leading the next Philosophy Group on Monday 10th June.

"ASPECTS OF THE MORAL PHILOSOPHY OF NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI AND THOMAS HOBBS"

In this session we will be discussing the moral philosophy and influence of Niccolo Machiavelli (1459-1527) and Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

These are two philosophers who are widely regarded as being the founders of modern political discourse, in which the role of the State in the lives of its people and the moral and ethical repercussions of that relationship are key.

Machiavelli challenged the then current Christian moral philosophy, the principles of which Augustine had first articulated and Aquinas had systematised centuries earlier.

As ever, the historical context in which Machiavelli was writing was a key influence on his thought and we shall look briefly at how in the thousand years since Augustine had written City of God, the power, influence and wealth of the Roman Catholic Church had been consolidated throughout the Western world.

It must have seemed to the Faithful that the dominance of the Church over all aspects of their lives was unassailable.

Machiavelli was not one of those Faithful. He attacked the fundamental doctrines of Separation of the Powers and Natural Law.

We shall see how the rejection of these essential elements of Augustine's and Aquinas's teaching led logically to his rejection of the superiority of Church law over that of the State and to his promotion of the State as the primary authority, with all the consequences that has for how people ought to live their lives in the temporal world.

Machiavelli did, nevertheless, identify a role for the Church – as an organ of the State which could be instrumental in securing its ends.

Between Machiavelli's death and the birth of Thomas Hobbes, Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564) fundamentally challenged the primacy of the Church to devastating effect, as we shall see.

Hobbes was born after the Reformation had secured the dis-establishment of the Roman Catholic Church in England (and, indeed, to be a Catholic was to be an enemy of the State) and the newly-established Protestant Church of England had limited power in the secular world.

Like Machiavelli, Hobbes was writing at a time of political turbulence and in his moral philosophy he sought to explore the relationship of the State with its people, with a view to developing a model that would ensure political stability and moral purpose - an exploration that was based on his view of human nature as selfish, competitive and instrumental.

His great work, 'Leviathan', has echoes in the contemporary world, as we shall see, and its relevance for today is one of several issues we may choose to discuss "

#July#

Deontological Theories - John Harrison

Here are some suggestions for reading. They are basic introductory texts, among others which I find useful in helping me prepare for our Group meetings. These books are reasonably priced and available for purchase on the Internet. There is also lots of information on the Internet relating to the subject areas we are looking at during our sessions.

"The Great Philosophers" by Stephen Law

"A Little History of Philosophy" by Nigel Warburton

"Philosophy, the Basics" by Nigel Warburton

"The Story of Philosophy " by James Garvey and Jeremy Stangroom

As our topics for the next three months include Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham and David Hume, it is good to start a little bit of preparatory reading!  
Looking forward to seeing you on Monday 8th July

#August#

Consequentialist Theories - Geoff Smith

#September#

Our next meeting for the Philosophy Group is Monday 9th September at 10am at the CCC in Stokesley.

David Hume 1711-1776

Our next session will be presented by Peter Hadfield.

Hume is widely known as the “Greatest British Philosopher” and during his lifetime his works were often described as abstract and unintelligible.

Peter hopes to shed light on his ideas and increase our understanding of this key figure in the history of philosophy.

It would be very useful to do some reading prior to the session. There will be an opportunity to discuss Hume’s philosophy in two small groups.

“Here is some information which will give a flavour of Hume’s work.

Hume is an Empiricist

Definition of Empiricism “basis of Philosophy should be experience of impressions that come to us via our senses not our reasoning”

Argued that our ability to reason is simply a result of language abilities ( a forerunner of the Linguistic Philosophers, Chomsky et al)

And human nature could be explained by knowing more about the brain and the nervous system.

He thought that Philosophers had thought too highly of the powers of human reason.

Hume dismissed the great philosophical systems that had been built to understand humans, God and the universe.

Argued that all we can know about the world external to us is from what we observe directly through our five senses. There are no timeless, abstract ideas.

1738 Wrote “ Treatise of Human Nature”

Asked question “What are the universal principles of human nature?”

He opposed rationalism in Ethics and those rationalists who say that distinguishing between right and wrong is inherent in human reason.

Question “What is human nature?”

Answer “ it is not reason but sentiments and our feelings that make us decide whether to help someone or not. Sympathy and empathy are at the heart of morality”

As humans we can imagine the sorrow, suffering and sadness of others and we can be happy when we see it relieved.

Argues strongly that we need to deepen our feelings for the welfare of others.

We all have a capacity for compassion. This has nothing to do with reason.

Hume makes a distinction between Reason(rationality ) and reasons(justifications and motivations)

Reason does not provide us with reasons to act morally.

Do we use logic to tell us how to act or is it moral sentiment, feelings?

Hume argues that we can’t find out what we ought to do by using reason.

Moral feelings can’t be defeated by rational arguments.They can only be defeated by other moral feelings.

Is and Ought Hume’s Law

Hume says that you can't derive an ought from an is.

Logically you can't argue that a descriptive sentence can result in a normative one.

Examples

"Lots of people cheat on their taxes so I ought to cheat on my taxes too"

"Most people want to travel by air, therefore we ought to build more airports"

Hume concludes that we can't use reason as a yardstick on how we ought to act.

Kant disagreed with Hume's ideas on ethics but Kant acknowledged the profound debt he owed to Hume.

"Hume woke me up from my dogmatic slumber"

Kant's Universalizability Laws

"If you are allowed to do something, others must be allowed to do it, Reason says"

This Law seems to refute Hume's claim that an ought can never follow on from an is.

Kant also dismisses emotion. Compassion, sympathy and pity are irrelevant to morality.

According to Kant the only real motive for moral action is a sense of duty.

Kant's approach emphasises facts. Hume's approach stresses feelings and virtues.

Hume's Theory of Self states that there is no solid self, no I, no soul.

The self doesn't exist as an immaterial substance existing alongside our thoughts and experiences.

The self is just a flow of experiences, a bundle of impressions and a stream of thoughts.

We will also consider Hume's thoughts on Miracles"