

Philo Café July 2nd, 2013 – Summary of the first meeting

Topic for discussion:

“What do we know and how do we know that what we know is true.”



Dear All,

We have experienced (participated) our first Philo-Café on the first Tuesday of July (2nd). It was an unexpected success... most certainly from the point of view of the amount of people that showed up. What was great about the night was that a bunch (group) of people who did not know each other beforehand could talk freely about philosophical ideas and take the opportunity to discuss life's questions.

There were 11 of us and we were all able to make a contribution. Our topic for the night was a rather broad epistemological question. “What do we know and how do we know that what we know is true.” Marlene functioned as facilitator; her job was to make sure the participants got to speak and were listened to. It was understood that the facilitator does not contribute to the discussion as such. Next session there might be a different facilitator proposed.

It became immediately clear that the question of knowledge and truth and its relation is not a straightforward question with a straight forward answer. The search for knowledge and truth is both a social activity and a personal quest of which it may not be possible to identify all its functions in each person's life. Each of us engaged with the question of how knowledge and truth functioned in our individual life. We investigated if we could isolate a common function. We discovered that words have a meaning but that they do not necessarily mean the same thing to different people.

I have collected some of the questions around which our exchange circled without having attempted to reproduce the contributions of the participants.

What are the hypotheses/judgements by which we allow our behaviour/actions be governed by. Is there a relation between what we believe to be true and our decisions?

What does it mean when we say that something is true? True for whom and under what conditions?

Is it possible to 'know' something that isn't true?

Can there be degrees of truth? Is all knowledge and truth subjective?

Does knowing involve knowing that one knows?

Is there such a thing as instinctual knowledge?

Does knowing include to be able to tell.

How do I communicate a truth if I know it?

Are there ways of communicating truth that are not dependable on language?

For most of us, knowing somehow involved truth. To know that something is the truth is obviously different from believing that it is true. When one believes something is the case we have either accepted the proposition on somebody's authority because we trust them or we feel we are justified to believe it even though we have no conclusive proof. Truth is different from judgement.

Is it possible to discover truths that go beyond experience?

What is the relationship between truth and fact?

Is there a difference between knowing something and the state of knowledge? Can knowledge and truth be subjective or is there such a thing as absolute knowledge/ absolute truth.

Finally, we discerned that there are different types of knowing:

- Logically – the things we know by logical deduction*
- Tacit*
- Fact*
- Being told by people we trust*

I look forward to our next Philo Café,

Marlene