

**11 October 2013**

**"Scepticism & Epistemology":- from Warburton: Pyrrho, Descartes, Locke & Berkeley, Kant**

We agreed that Pyrrho took radical scepticism beyond the bounds of sanity.

Descartes was not advocating such a lifestyle, but going through the thought process to address the question "Do I have any grounds for believing anything?" We followed the Method of Cartesian Doubt and tracked how he applied the principle of not accepting anything as true if there is the slightest possibility it isn't to the unreliability of the senses, dreams, and the fiendish demon who deliberately sets out to deceive him. He concludes that "Je pense donc je suis," (apparently he really did say that!) - whatever is being done to him, he must be a thinking mind. His argument for reconstructing a real world about him through the ontological argument for God (plus God leaving his "trademark" in us), and that God is good, so He would not deceive us we found less convincing. We acknowledged that the Mind-Matter dualism he propounded has been and remains entrenched in our thought processes and culture.

Berkeley we found problematic. Locke as a realist had acknowledged that we cannot know the reality of matter, but matter did exist and carried various properties we could sense. Primary properties include shape and extension, secondary qualities like colour interact with our senses. Berkeley's response has been admired by many "professional" philosophers because of its logic: Locke, he says, postulates this "matter" you can't know - and he already said you can only get knowledge through the senses. So, given God created everything, "matter" is a superfluous concept - we just get sensations straight from the mind of God.

Kant set out to counter such arguments. The "rose coloured spectacles" refers to his theory that those properties Locke attached to matter are actually a priori innate in us: Whatever we sense is in the parameters of extension; we deduce causation, etc.

We finished up with concepts from Roger Scruton's "Modern Philosophy". First, a problem with Descartes' conclusion that he exists is shown by Wittgenstein's "Beetle in a Box" concept we discussed last session. The first person's "Mind" is the beetle: Ok I know I exist now, but who can verify that "I" am who I was ten minutes ago?. Also, a counter to scepticism is found in the anthropic argument: it is only an entity that thinks and is aware of its own thoughts that is able to doubt the validity of knowledge.