

20 September 2013

"Logic & Language":- from Warburton: Pierce & James, Russell, Ayer, Wittgenstein, Popper

I was a little concerned the group might find this section a bit dry and impenetrable, and was therefore pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm, both of those present and expressed in the apologies of other members. In fact there is enthusiasm and enough left to consider taking the subject further in due course.

As ever looking for the question the philosopher was addressing, we started with "What is "Truth"? to discuss Pierce & James. There was some discussion of James' view that truth is what is useful, perhaps later mollified by limiting its application to those metaphysical propositions that Ayer and the early Wittgenstein said were "meaningless". Hunters circling squirrels led us to logic and definitions and how language works.

The Oxford Companion to Philosophy entry on Wittgenstein says that his views changed between his two major works. The *Tractatus* is along the lines of Ayer's Logical Positivism, limiting philosophical discussion to propositions that could be demonstrated or shown by deduction. Then his *Philosophical Investigations* refuted all this and found that language was much more complex. We noted the arguments demolishing "private language" and discussed the influence of culture on language with interest and at some length. Discussions on meanings followed. Jo brought us quite a few thoughts from French philosophers, and we could explore a lot more material here that has had such an influence on at least the literature of the later 20th century. [If you have any awareness of Structuralism and Deconstruction, do have a look for Malcolm Bradbury's "My Strange Quest for Mensonge, Structuralism's Hidden Hero" - a hilarious demolition of the theory, and incidentally a simpler to follow explanation & history than many more serious tracts.

Looking at inductive logic led us to Popper and then to Kuhn and Feyerabend's "paradigm shift". For a simple presentation of this concept, see Bill Bryson's "A Short History of Nearly Everything". This part of the discussion provided a healthy scepticism of the fashionable perception that science captures the truth about reality. On deductive logic, I went through a slide show on Aristotle's Logic as an introduction. Again, this is just skimming the surface, and Sharon has watched and commends Marianne Talbot's series on [Critical Reasoning for Beginners](#). We looked briefly at Russell's contribution - he is described by Roger Scruton as contributing "perhaps the most famous paper in the whole of modern philosophy.....Its primary subject matter is the word "is"

Anyway, we now understand the "present King of France is bald" paradox and why Anselm's Ontological Proof might be flawed.