

THE ALEPH COURSE : Notes for talking.

10 : IMPLICATIONS.

Or summary. Or sermon. Or review.

Whatever it is, it's my attempt to make some sense of what I've been saying in nine pieces and to put it together into one piece.

What are we trying to do ? I think we're looking for a

PHILOSOPHY OF LIVING.

That sounds rather pretentious. But it sounds a bit less trite than the traditional questions –

What are we here for ?
What's the meaning of life ?
What is it all about ?

Trite or not, though, they're real questions, and if you have no answers you haven't much reason to do anything – or not to do anything.

So you end up doing anything, and some people at least come to grief through that aimless existence.

If you're happy with that, I'm not sure that I have much to say to you, except that you're welcome to stay around, and – for the longer term – if you find you're getting less happy, or if the questions start nagging at you, I think we have something that can help.

So I'll assume that you would like some sort of answer, and offer some for your inspection.

So we ask : WHAT DO WE WANT OF OUR PHILOSOPHY FOR LIVING ?

I suggest that we want

SOMETHING THAT MAKES SENSE OF OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE WORLD.

Our experience comes in many varieties.

- Our SENSES tell us about the world around us. The traditional set is sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell.
- Our BODILY SENSATIONS give us reactions of pleasure or pain.
- Our EMOTIONS give us experience of happiness and sadness, joy and grief, love and hate.
- Our INTELLECT gives us the means of interpreting other sensations, perhaps most significantly in our ability to communicate with each other in language.
- Our CONSCIENCE (for want of a better word) leads us to distinguish between good and bad.

That isn't a systematic or even particularly careful classification, and you might be able to do it better. The point is, though, that OUR experience covers an enormous range, and WE'd like OUR philosophy to help US to deal with all of it.

- with emphasis, reasonably enough, on US and how we manage OUR perceptions of things in general.

SORTS OF THING PERCEIVED.

Continuing the vein of unsystematic, though not necessarily careless, classification, here's another view. My intention this time is to identify rough categories of things, and suggest what sorts of tool we use to deal with them.

EXTERNAL THINGS AND PHENOMENA.

We do reasonably well at managing this group with SCIENCE. It doesn't have to be particularly formal science, but we commonly have some sort of rules or a model in mind when we work things out.

FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS.

(Not a thing I manage particularly well – suggestions welcome !)

We try to express and communicate this group by means related to HUMANITIES and ARTS. Again, it doesn't have to be academically respectable, and usually isn't, but words, music, pictures can convey things which we can't measure. If we have a model, it's ourselves – "put yourself in his place".

Or we react physically – weeping, temper, rage, despair. These are natural enough, and can give relief of the symptoms, but are rarely constructive.

PRINCIPLES, VALUES.

In these areas we use PHILOSOPHY and RELIGION. We try to construct ways of organising ourselves and our societies which will satisfy our requirements.

Once more, it doesn't have to be formal, and anyone can do it. The ruler constructs a system which he hopes will lead to orderly, peaceful, and reasonably congenial coexistence of the ruled – or, according to preference, to wealth and privilege for a few while keeping the masses powerless; the criminal constructs a set of rules which will give him satisfaction at the expense of others.

WHICH OF THESE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT TO US ?

NOT the first. Science and its relations are regarded as an acceptable means for providing for the other two, but (except perhaps for addicts) of no particular importance in itself.

NOTE FOR ADDICTS : Are you sure you think it's
important ? It's interesting, fascinating, helpful, useful, even
beautiful – but is it really *important* ?

And, if it is, let's go back to the first talk.

For most people, the second seems to be paramount. This is strongly encouraged by commerce (where they make money because they can con you into buying things you like but don't need), and politicians (who can swing enough votes to stay in power by a short-lived period of optimism).

For some people, the third is important. It is to me. I find it hard to say why; I think it's something to do with concern for the long term (not of interest to commerce or politicians), and a conviction that the second group isn't sufficient to produce persistent benefits.

SO WHY DO WE LEAN SO HEAVILY ON SCIENCE ?

WHY DO WE SEEM TO THINK IT WOULD HELP IF WE
COULD REDUCE EVERYTHING TO PHYSICS ?

WHAT ARE THE OTHER POSSIBILITIES ?

I'm not equipped to list them. But the position I've advocated in these talks is one of them.

Presumably whatever we do, we would want to start from something that is more important to us than our perceptions of the physical universe.

I have not started from FEELINGS and EMOTIONS because I think they are too easily manipulated.

Instead, I started from PRINCIPLES and VALUES, with initially a strong weight on values. That gives me scope for reasoning, which in practice seems to work. I used much the same sort of reasoning as one uses in science, because it seems to work there. I find (not surprisingly, perhaps) that it doesn't interfere with science at all.

I CAN'T PROVE CHRISTIANITY, but experiments performed by millions of people suggest that IT WORKS.

That puts it on precisely the same basis as science.

If you think that Christianity might do something that you need, why not ENQUIRE FURTHER ?