

It's Just a Myth!

How do you see the world? Even more important how do you understand it? For as long as we have been around we have been telling stories - Yuval Harari in his book "Sapiens" asserts that what makes us so different from other species is our imagination, which is where story telling begins. Stories contain and create memories, and from this leads to an expectation of the future. Myths are sometimes confused with truth. The so-called "Fall of Man" in the Book of Genesis is an allegory. One of the most famous of story tellers John Bunyan collected a large number of myths and allegories in "Pilgrims Progress." One of his most famous locations is "Vanity Fair", for me at least instantly recognisable in our own century.

People who seek power, or our votes need to present themselves in a way which encourages people to follow them, and indeed believe in their message. We are now witnessing the emergence of "Populist" leaders, and just a couple of weeks ago witnessed the re-election of President Erdogan of Turkey after 20 years in power. Out of a population of 85 million half the people adore him and the other half hate him. Populist leaders call up deep emotions in people, and project an image which accords with the "Hero Myth" which goes back to the Greeks and probably has always been around. Their ideal is excellence and victory in a competitive world - they tend to be combative and dismissive of opposition. Look at the scenes in front of the Presidential Palace in Ankara on the night of Monday 29th May.

If this is true, where is the room for Philosophy, for reason and logical argument. Many authors, including Martin Wolf of the Financial Times are warning that this trend towards Populist Leaders and sound - byte slogans are a threat to Democratic Government and the institutions that underpin it. What do you think?

Whilst I am away, Robert East has kindly offered to lead the group with an introduction to Human Rights. The idea of rights being conferred on us simply because we are human has kept philosophers thinking for many years. The focus in my own lifetime came at the close of the Second World War and the discovery of what we now know as the Holocaust in Europe, and war crimes committed by the Japanese in Burma, Korea, and many other locations. This weekend, 30th April 2023 saw debates around the fate of civilians in Sudan, and the continued persecution of women in Iran who refuse to comply with the dress codes of their Government. Russia and China are both accused of human rights violations and we remember the many issues that arose out of the conflict in the Balkans consequent on the collapse of Yugoslavia.

Whilst working in the Police Service in the 1990s, the subject of Human Rights came to the fore as it was absorbed into British Legislation. The fascination for me is that it concerns the relationship of the individual citizen with the state, and begs the question of the balance of rights and responsibilities. I don't think we talk enough about responsibilities, particularly to future generations. But what do you think?