

## Philosophising in July 2022

Despite the heat of the previous week, which we thought may have addled our brains, we attempted our second face-to-face Philosophy session at Enterprise House. Eight people attended, all enthusiastically contributing.

The subject addressed was the topical problem of political philosophy, led by Wallace, Jen and James. We opened with a whistle-stop tour through the history of political philosophy, starting, of course, with the Athenians. They, we realised, had some sound ideas, not least being Ostracism - if a certain number of fellow Democrats disapproved, one could be sent into exile to 10 years. How useful would that be at the present time?

However, this "Direct Democracy", where everyone could vote, was not what it seemed, for "everyone" meant just adult free males; no women, no slaves, no resident aliens. This actually meant votes for about 20% of the population who had plenty of time to philosophise, since their women and their slaves rushed around doing the dishes and polishing their swords.

We whizzed through the Romans, the Scandinavian 8th century "Thing", the Italian Mediaeval Commune and the 12th to 14th century French parliament before spending a little more time on the development of English democracy, now considered one of the longest lasting systems to have existed.

Next we tried (fruitlessly) to define democracy, so started to explore four of the better known types of the system. We looked at the First Past the Post method which has the advantages of easy counting, and of clear links between voter and winner, but disadvantages including a certain unfairness in that the national winners seldom have the majority of the popular vote and that strong parties are rewarded disproportionately.

We then went on to look at the Single Transferable Vote which, although being more complex, can increase the power of minority parties whether for good or ill. We also discovered, to some surprise, that our third type of democracy, Federalism, a compound mode of government, included such disparate countries as the USA, India, Canada and even Russia. It could, however, be claimed to be more transparent and responsive to local wishes.

The lively debate meant that often the presenters could not get a word in edgeways! Next month we will re-cap progress, and then look at different types of referenda before discussing more general questions on democracy. We very much welcome new members, either contact Ruth (01325 401850) or just come along to Enterprise House on Tuesday, 23 August at 2pm (Please note the changed time). In September we meet on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> at 10am at Enterprise House. All welcome.

Jen