

Philosophy report for October by Ray Lee

At the October meeting of the Philosophy group, we welcomed several new members.

The aspect of philosophy under scrutiny was a consideration of the role of Natural Philosophy in the development of thinking.

We considered

1. A definition
2. Historical development
3. The relevance of Natural Philosophy today
4. The links between natural philosophy, mainstream philosophy and the philosophy of science.

The talk and subsequent discussion stressed that Natural Philosophy is the philosophical study of nature and the physical universe -why nature works the way it does rather than just how.

Before the rise of modern science (17th century), it was the main way humans investigated the natural world. The discipline Then and now involves both basic Aristotelian Scientific Method and Philosophical Method. Emphasis was placed on the importance of maths as an essential ingredient of the thinking.

The term "Natural Philosophy" began with the ancient Greeks who made the first systematic attempts to explain nature without gods.

Anaximander of Miletus (c. 610–546 BCE) was a trailblazer in early Greek thought. By observation and thought he suggested that the cosmos is governed not by gods but by an impersonal, infinite force.

In the field of cosmology & the structure of the universe he developed one of the earliest models of the universe based on natural laws rather than mythology.

A little unexpectedly we discovered that women were strongly represented among the early Natural Philosophers, for instance Theano from the 6th century BCE, who worked on the Golden Ratio.

We went on to consider the work of Plato and Aristotle in the development of the thinking. Considerations were given to the contributions of Galileo, Descartes and Newton. Einstein's thought experiments eventually led him to his theory of special relativity, which he proved mathematically; but which led eventually to, among other things, the nuclear bomb.

The final discussion debated whether the role of maths has become too powerful in the development of the thinking. The unfettered development of Natural Philosophy, most of it now in a language we cannot fathom, raises vast philosophical issues.

Apparently to continue research into subatomic particles we need an even bigger piece of equipment than the CERN accelerator. The mathematics is proven. In a poverty-stricken world, do we justify the expense?



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Come and join us at our next Philosophy group meeting on **Wisdom on Tuesday 25th November at 10am at Enterprise House**. We will not be meeting in December, but will follow further philosophical subjects on the 4th Tuesday of the month throughout 2026, starting on 27th January when we look at Friedrich Nietzsche.