



‘What is my responsibility in relation to climate change?’

A Socratic Dialogue facilitated by Sarah Banks

Saturday 29 June, 10.30 – 16.00

St Chad’s College, 18 North Bailey, Durham. DH1 3RH

This one-day Socratic Dialogue involved a small group of people working together to consider the question: ‘What is my responsibility in relation to climate change?’ Together they explored this challenging and timely question, seeking philosophical insights and practical inspiration. An example was chosen about a young woman unsuccessfully attempting to challenge her father and a family friend who were advancing arguments that were sceptical about the reality of human-caused climate change. A dynamic and informative dialogue took place, which particularly explored citizen’s responsibilities to challenge and educate others.

Rational for the dialogue. Most people are aware that the climate is changing, with profound implications for our lives, those of our children, and the delicate eco-system that supports us all. We may disagree about the extent of the crisis, its causes and what can and should be done about it. How am I implicated? Do I have a responsibility to learn more, change my behaviour, lobby governments and join protest movements?

This dialogue was part of a series organised by the Society for the Furtherance of Critical Philosophy (SFCP) on Saturdays in different parts of England during 2024. These dialogues are aimed at people interested in pursuing a philosophical question in some depth in a small group. They are suitable for people who have not experienced a Socratic Dialogue before, as well as those who have participated previously.

What is Socratic Dialogue? Socratic Dialogue is a means of exploring complex philosophical concepts or questions with a group of people. SFCP promotes and supports what is often called ‘neo-Socratic Dialogue’ in the tradition of German philosophers Leonard Nelson (1882-1927) and Gustav Heckman (1898-1996) (see <http://sfcg.org.uk/socratic-dialogue/>). It is a method by which a group works together with a facilitator to find an answer to a well-formed philosophical question (such as: ‘What is justice?’, ‘On what occasions is it right to lie’ or ‘What is my responsibility for the future?’). The process involves collecting concrete examples relevant to the question from participants, choosing one example to work on, analysing and exploring the chosen example, articulating its core statement and then moving to consider more general principles in answer to the question. It can be very hard to answer an abstract question easily, which is why we start by examining a concrete example, before moving on to consider general principles. Participants usually find the process of exploring ideas and lines of reasoning together in a group is challenging and exciting, encouraging skills in listening, patience and collaborative working.

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