Philosophy cafe

KAREN FOLEY: It's great to see everybody here. Alex, this philosophy cafe has been doing really well. I still don't really understand it. What's been going on?

ALEX: It's been going incredibly fast, is one thing.

KAREN FOLEY: You must remember to pen at the chat if you do. Because it does go very fast.

ALEX: Well there was some lack of clarity in the question, I think. But it was resolved by Simon. So the question was about what you're entitled to believe. And that is clearly an ambiguous thing. Simon brought that out. Clearly the question, what am I entitled to believe, invites the response, I'm entitled to believe what I want. I can believe anything. Who are you, the thought police?

KAREN FOLEY: And I thought it was complicated.

ALEX: And so, but in a university context, entitlement-- the standards of belief are a little bit higher. The threshold at which you're entitled to believe requires evidence, and Simon brought that out quite nicely. So the question was about the different sources of evidence, really, or entitlement to believe, as I put it.

We have, I suggested, testimony, memory, and perception. Somebody whose name I didn't catch because it was going so fast, added deduction or inference-- different kinds of inference, including deduction. The one that was missing is reason.

KAREN FOLEY: Right. I thought you guys didn't like--

ALEX: Didn't like reason? No, reason's fine. We like reason. Because if you don't have reason, and you only have these other ones, how do you gain mathematical knowledge? How do you gain moral or ethical knowledge? They're missing. You need something called reason to get to those. Perception isn't enough. There was a suggestion-- and Gareth, towards the end suggested, well, ethics or morality is just a social construct. And that's one response, but that's a form of scepticism. If you want something a bit more, you've got to delve into the nature of reason.

And similarly with mathematics. You don't learn that 2 plus 2 equals 4 by getting two tomatoes and two more tomatoes and then counting how many you've got. You know that there's four because 2 plus 2 is 4. And you've got two, and you've got two, and 2 plus 2 is 4. So again, that's a contentious claim in the philosophy of mathematics, but it seems that perception is not enough to give you mathematical truth.

So we're getting into very large questions very quickly, which is--

KAREN FOLEY: Well yes, and I'm very impressed with everyone's contribution. Well thank you, Alex, for posing that very interesting question. And I know that you're going to take all of this to your next meeting, aren't you?

ALEX: Yes.

KAREN FOLEY: So well done, everybody at home. Well I'm going to stay on the social media desk. And you can go off to your meeting. And I'm going to look at what everyone's been sending and liaise with HJ. Because we have a wonderful session next. We have Klaus-Dieter and his colleagues talking about modern languages. And I know that this is one that's going to be really, really interesting for everyone. So I'm going to stay here and chat with you all. We're first going to show a little video clip before we go into that session. So enjoy that, and we'll see you in a minute.